



A
Ministry
of:

**CORNERSTONE
BAPTIST
CHURCH**

54 Brighton Street
P.O. Box 438
Belmont, MA 02478
Tel: 617-489-2498

Pastor
ROLLAND C. STARR
Editor

DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE.

Challenge Special - January 2009

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF DISPENSATIONAL TRUTH. It would be impossible to over-emphasize the importance of understanding dispensational interpretation of the Word of God. God Himself has given us this key. It is the key that will unlock every portion of the Word of God. II Timothy 2:15 says, “**Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.**” Many divide the Bible but not rightly! Only through dispensational understanding of the Scriptures can one rightly divide it. Certain things are for specific times and others are for a particular people. Forty or fifty years ago, dispensationalism was quite common among Fundamentalists. However, it has fallen on hard times in recent years as many Fundamentalists have not been “**valiant for the truth.**” In fact, it has been bitterly attacked by many who call themselves Bible believers. It has been misrepresented by many. They say that such a method throws out large sections of the Bible. Nothing could be further from the truth! We believe all of the Word of God, but understand that not everything is for all people or all times. Others say it teaches different ways of salvation at different times. Such talk only shows their ignorance. While some do teach that, it is not the basic teaching of dispensationalism. Then, it is said that it is all relatively new and was not taught until the early days of the Plymouth Brethren in the early eighteen hundreds. They too are wrong, for it is clearly seen in the Scriptures themselves. A large part of the early Church fathers taught it. Like many other truths, it was buried under the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church for many centuries. While Luther, and others, rediscovered the doctrine of justification by faith, there were many other facets of Bible truth they did not see. Luther did not “invent” justification by faith; he merely rediscovered it. It was there all the time. So, with dispensations.

II. WHAT IS A DISPENSATION? It is a period of time in which God reveals Himself to man and deals with him in a specific way. The purposes of God are ever constant, but God’s methods or revelation of Himself, and His will varies according to certain rules and times which the Lord has ordained. The Greek word which is translated dispensation literally means “*house rules.*” God does not change, Malachi 3:6: “**I am the Lord, I change not...**” He has one overall plan which is being worked out one stage at a time. The plan was all set from the beginning. In that plan, God has changed the “*house rules*” from time to time. For example, a father may change the house rules for his family from time to time without he himself actually changing. Dispensational teaching simply recognizes that the unchanging God has changed the “*house rules*” for His creatures from time to time. Note, this was all laid out from the beginning and is part of a Master plan! He has ordained different things for different times. It is clear that the church is not under the Law (ten commandments, etc.) - it says so plainly in Romans 6:14. The Law was given to Israel - Exodus 19. Those who tried to put the church under the Law at Galatia were severely rebuked (that is what the Book of Galatians is all about). While the Bible has suffered misinterpretation at the hands of many, there is one other basic method of interpretation, and that is Covenant or Reformed theology. This approach sees one unchanging program from Adam to eternity. In order to understand some portions, they resort to allegorical interpretation. That is, they do not always interpret the Bible literally, but in order to make sense out of certain portions, they say that

those parts are allegories - not literal truth. For example, by this method they make the church *spiritual* Israel. They teach that many of the literal prophecies concerning Israel have been transferred *spiritually* to the church. For example: They take the prophecies of a literal Kingdom on earth headed up by Israel and teach that the church is the Kingdom of God and the promised blessings are not literal but spiritual. This does violence to the Scriptures! The Bible clearly recognizes different dispensations. If you turn to Ephesians 3, you will see this mentioned in vs. 2,5,9. God says that this present dispensation of grace was not made known in other ages (or dispensations). A dispensation is for a particular time period or age. As mentioned above in Romans 6:14 we are told that the church is not under Law but under grace! You will not understand God's Word if you indiscriminately apply Bible truths. If there are not different things for different peoples or times, how can one explain David's calling down a curse upon his enemies and Jesus saying that we are to love our enemies. Because some were trying to make the early Church a continuation of Israel, the very first Church Council (See Acts 15) decided that they were two separate entities (two dispensations) and said that after God completes the Church He will rebuild Israel.

III. THE HERMENEUTICS OF DISPENSATIONALISM. The word hermeneutics means the method of interpretation. I am sometimes asked why there are so many different denominations and brands of Christianity; different interpretations of the Bible. It is because people interpret the Bible to suit themselves. In fact, a popular belief is that however one interprets the Bible, he is right. This seems ludicrous to me, but it is the product of humanistic reasoning. Things that differ cannot be the same. The first principle of proper interpretation is the **LITERAL INTERPRETATION**. There is no other way to get the right understanding. While some portions contain allegories, each allegory has a definite, literal truth. Often the allegory is clearly explained as to the truth it conveys. In other cases, the meaning is clear. There is no warrant for taking a literal statement and turning it into an allegory or some mystical concept. Those who do this only create confusion and make themselves the authority for what the Bible teaches. Another important principle is that the Scriptures themselves declare that there is **ONLY ONE CORRECT INTERPRETATION**, and that is from the Author - the Holy Spirit of God. **“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”** ~II Peter 1:20,21. Every passage has one interpretation though there may be many applications. For example, if a promise is given to the nation of Israel, then it must be interpreted for Israel. Since the principles of God are the same, we may make an application for the Church, but that Scripture relates primarily to Israel. Suppose someone writes a letter to another giving some advice for his particular situation. Then, the person shows you the letter; you may apply some of its truths to yourself, but the letter was not written to you.

Another very important truth relative to a proper interpretation of the Bible is that **SALVATION ALWAYS HAS BEEN AND ALWAYS WILL BE BY GRACE**. The basis for everyone's salvation is the blood of Christ. We are clearly told that **“...it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins”** ~Hebrews 10:4. In Hebrews 11 speaks of those from many different dispensations who were saved by faith - not works. That means all have been (and will be) saved by grace. Under the dispensation of Law (Dispensation #5) Israel was given many laws, regulations, commandments. But they were not saved by keeping laws. God has made it very clear. **“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of (in) Christ; and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”** ~Galatians 2:16. It could not be more apparent - no flesh can be justified by the Law! They were saved by faith on the basis of God's grace! Now in this dispensation, God's people are not under Law but under the principle of grace. Romans 6:14 says, **“...Ye are not under the law, but under grace.”** We are saved by grace (as are all who are saved) and our rule of life is grace. There are seven dispensations which can be seen by **“rightly dividing the word of truth,”** and in each one man is saved by grace! I like to think of the seven dispensations as one stairway with seven distinct steps. The stairway is one, but has seven stages. The whole stairway (God's plan for mankind) was designed by God before the world began.

One thing many do not like about dispensational truth is that it reveals man to be a failure in every age or dispensation. Please note: God is not a failure! However, how one can study the history of man without seeing that man has failed every test God has given him is beyond me. From the very beginning, man has failed. He was placed in a beautiful garden with every advantage. But Adam sinned - he failed and plunged his posterity into sin. Has there been any age since when even a majority of mankind believed and obeyed God? No, in reality, few in any age have believed God. It has been failure after failure due to man's sinful nature. **“The heart is deceitful above all things**

and desperately wicked; who can know it?" ~Jeremiah 17:9. We are told in Revelation 20, that even after the glorious thousand year reign of Christ a multitude as the sand by the sea will rebel against God. Yet in His grace, God in every age has saved some.

IV. WHAT DOES THE FUTURE REALLY HOLD? When it comes to the future, there are many interpretations - most of them wrong. Many *Bible believers* see the Church as spiritual Israel and all the earthly promises to that nation will not be fulfilled literally. They apply those Scriptures to spiritual blessings of the Church. How anyone can see the nation of Israel in their own land (to be sure only a portion of it) after not being a nation for 2500 years, I do not know. Furthermore, if the promises to them are not fulfilled literally, as God originally gave them, God has broken His word. This cannot be! Man may fail but God will not fail to keep His Word. Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 where God says He will yet save them. In the verses which follow, God goes says if the sun, moon and stars depart, if you can measure heaven or search out the foundation of the earth, then He will utterly cast off Israel. Obviously these things cannot be done therefore God will fulfill all His promises to Israel! Then, concerning the future, some *Bible scholars* teach amillennialism. They simply say there is not going to be any glorious kingdom with Christ reigning - i.e. no thousand years (of Christ's reign). Others teach that He is reigning now in Heaven. While in a sense He is, the thousand year reign of Christ is manifestly on earth. Another view is known as Post-Millennialism, which means Christ is coming back after the Church converts the world and sets up the kingdom. While popular a hundred years ago, this belief sort of faded away. However, lately it has been revived by some and is now known as Reconstructionism. While these people may be sincere, they are sincerely wrong. Only Christ can bring in the Kingdom! The Roman Catholic Church (and others) have been trying to bring in the kingdom (their brand of the kingdom) for 2,500 years. Without a dispensational understanding of the Word of God, it is impossible to really know what God is doing.

We believe a correct interpretation of the Bible reveals that Israel and the Church are two separate entities in the program of God. Scriptures reveal that the next prophetic event will be the Rapture of the Church, that is, those who are truly saved in this age (I Thessalonians 4:13-18, I Corinthians 15:50-58, etc.). The saints of this age will receive glorified bodies and meet the Lord in the air. The Reformed or Covenant people see this as the same as Matthew 24 and 25 when Jesus comes to the earth. How the two separate events can be one I do not know. Following the Rapture of the true Church, there will be seven years of Great Tribulation as foretold by Jesus, Matthew 24,25; etc. (and the prophets). Then, after those seven years of judgment (See Revelation 6-18) Jesus will come to the earth to set up His Kingdom with Israel as the head of the nations. He will rule in peace and righteousness from Jerusalem for 1,000 years. Most of those who are not dispensationalists believe that Revelation 6-18 are already past being an account of the struggles of the early Church (this is the allegorical interpretation). Again, it takes a great deal of imagination and twisting of the Scriptures to believe that. Dispensationalism is the only method of interpretation that brings the whole Bible and God's purposes with man into proper focus. We don't need some fanciful, allegorical explanation - we just take the Word of God for what it says. Nothing else make sense!

V. ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT EVENT? As we mentioned earlier, the next prophetic event will be the coming of Christ to the air where true, born again, believers in Him will rise to meet the Lord in the air. I Thessalonians 4:16,17. Of this time, no one on earth knows; it says in I Thessalonians 5:1,2: **"But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."** The most important question in all the world is, "Are you ready?" When He comes there will be no time to get ready for God says it will be **"In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye."** ~I Corinthians 15:52. Like everyone else, your problem is your sin! **"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."** ~Romans 3:23. Then we read in Romans 6:23: **"For the wages of sin is death..."** That is not just the body but body and soul in a place called the Lake of Fire! You may not believe that but it is true nonetheless. But thank God for the last half of Romans 6:23: **"But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."** Christ, in love and mercy, came into this world to pay for your sins. There is only one way to be saved and to be rid of your sins - **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."** ~Acts 16:31. If you are not a true "born again" child of God, I plead with you to trust Jesus Christ as your Savior right now.

By Rolland C. Starr.

You may reach us at **CORNERSTONE BAPTIST CHURCH, Box 438, Belmont, MA 02478**
or at rcstarrkjv@aol.com