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Three Rivers Fellowship

Dispensationalism

A Normative Approach

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1. Abstract

In this outline we provide a very brief overview of the theological scheme called *Dispensationalism*. Like its counterpart, *Covenant Theology*¹, Dispensationalism has a rich theological history and has been around for millennia.² We provide a brief discussion on the problems of “traditional” dispensationalism and present a solution that is far reaching and rich in theological content (sadly, the latter is beyond the scope of this brief discussion).

2. Typical-Traditional Dispensational Schemes

The accusation that Dispensationalism is historically new is patently false. As far back as the post-apostolic age men have tried to categorize God’s soteriological dealings with fallen men. It is true however that the *systemization* of Dispensationalism is relatively new, but so is Covenant Theology (17th Century). It is often claimed that the rigorous systemization of Dispensationalism began with John Nelson Darby in the early to mid-19th Century. This is a truer statement than the notion of Dispensationalism being historically new.

2.1. Historical Comments

Modern Dispensationalism, which we shall allow to begin with Darby³, grew out of the work of many Plymouth Brethren of the early 19th Century.



Figure 1. John Nelson Darby in 1840 (Age 40)

The Brethren were made up of all segments of society from working-class folk and nobility to world-class scholars. Perhaps someone has heard of or has in their library, Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words, or the New Englishman’s Greek and Hebrew Concordances and Lexicons (Wigram), or Thomas Newberry’s Greek and Hebrew Interlinear Bible, or even perhaps the works of the great textual critic Samuel P. Tregelles.⁴ Indeed, it was the Brethren to whom we owe so much re-discovery of Biblical truth in the areas of Eschatology and Ecclesiology. From their work particularly in the UK and America, Prophetic Conferences (“tent meetings”) were set up to study the issue of Biblical Prophecy. This movement went on for decades and not only

¹ Sadly, Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism are often presented in such a way as if they contradict one another. However, the author believes and maintains that in fact when properly articulated from the text these two theological schemes are actually hermeneutically related. Though we provide a small section on the relationship between Covenant Theology and “Normative” Dispensationalism a detailed discussion on this matter is beyond the scope of this brief outline.

² The author recommends reading in detail References (10)(11)(17)(24).

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nelson_Darby

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Prideaux_Tregelles

included Brethren writers, but many differing denominations who tended to hold a more “literal” or “normative” approach to the whole of Scripture including Biblical Prophecy, specifically. This included many Presbyterians. Indeed, many of the early Brethren had “Calvinistic” leanings and Darby himself was for the most part a Calvinist, holding to at least four of the so-called “five points”.⁵

2.2. A Brief Sketch of Early Dispensational Schemes

Many of the Dispensational schemes developed during this time were based on the idea of God experientially and historically working out the doctrine of the total depravity of man (the First Point of Calvinism), where God provides a set of requirements to follow and man subsequently not keeping them. Each dispensation then is a new set of requirements by which man is to follow, thus manifesting his inability at keeping them. With the exception of the eternal state, each dispensation ends with disobedience, thus proving the doctrine of Total Inability.

The figure below illustrates a handful of dispensational schemes developed by various early dispensational authors and theologians, mostly from the 19th and early 20th Centuries.

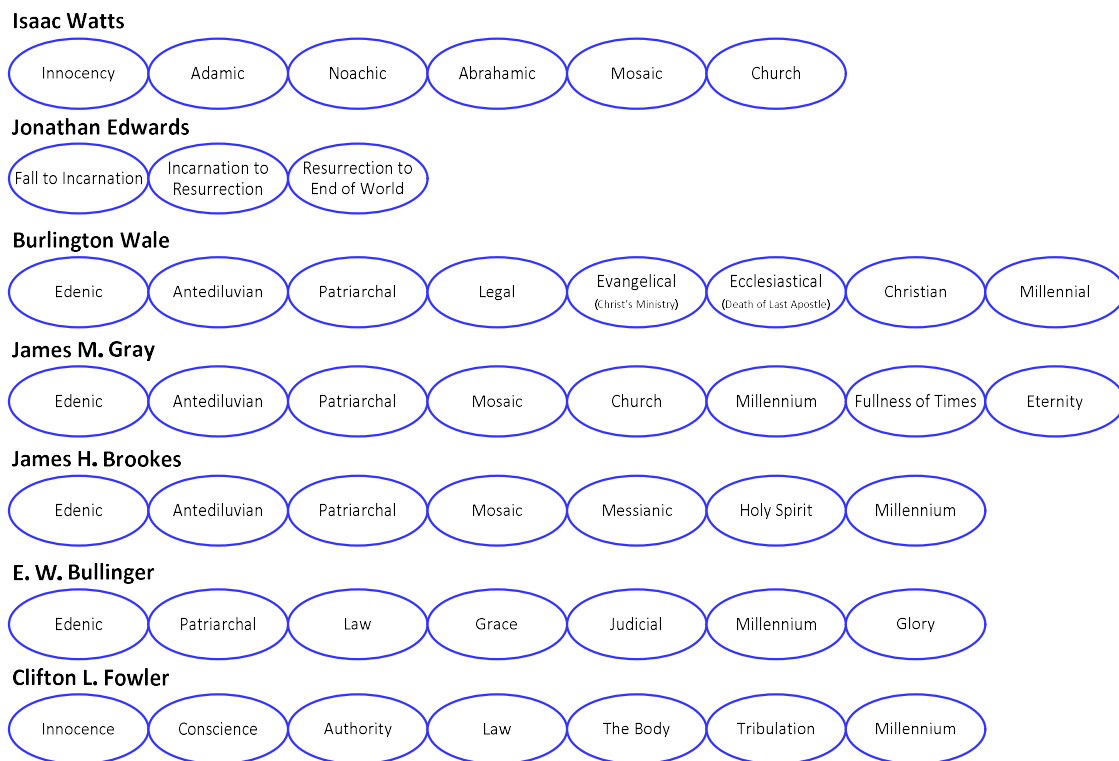


Figure 2. Various Dispensational Schemes

⁵ It can be *lightly* argued that Darby also held to Particular Redemption, but he wrote little on the extent of the atonement.

Each of the above schemes⁶ attempts to understand God’s salvation dealings as men see distinction within the Biblical text. Many of the schemes above have elements in common. For example, all of the above schemes either explicitly or implicitly recognize a time when man was innocent (prior to the Fall). They recognize a distinct change within the period between the Fall and the Flood. Each seems to see a distinction with the giving of the Law to Moses and that the so-called “church age” is distinct from other periods of redemptive history. Finally, most recognize a time when peace reigns upon the earth ... the Millennium.

Most of us, even if we do not know it, are familiar with two very closely related dispensational schemes: Larkin[Ref. 13] and Scofield [Refs. 18, 19]. Here we have chosen Scofield’s scheme to briefly discuss since it was globally popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible (circa 1909) and became the theological “lingua franca” of Dispensationalism for over half of the 20th Century and is still with us today (circa 2020).

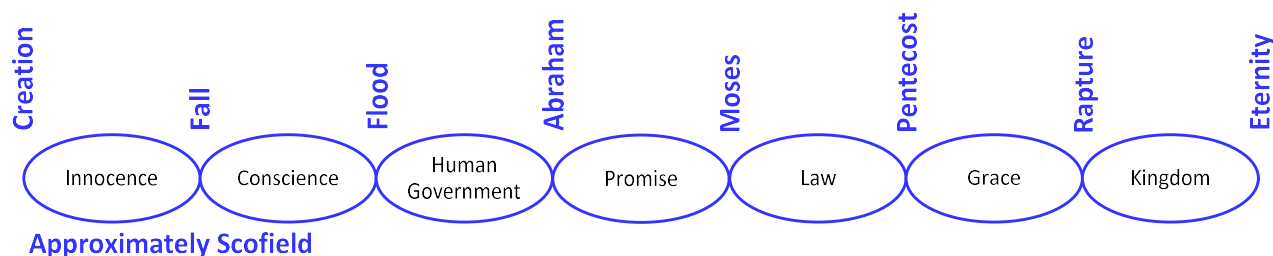


Figure 3. The Dispensational Scheme of C.I. Scofield

Scofield’s scheme comprises seven (7) distinct periods that he calls “dispensations”. Each dispensation is a period of time where man is tested with respect to some specific revelation of the will of God. Scofield’s dispensational scheme is briefly described below.

(1) Innocence

The first dispensation is defined to be the time period between Creation and the Fall of man. During this time man’s obedience was tested by not eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man failed and fell into sin and death.

(2) Conscience

The second dispensation is essentially equivalent to the Antediluvian period and is defined to be the time when man was ruled by his conscience as God had written his law upon the hearts of men. Paul refers to this period in Romans One. God’s Law had not yet been codified (written down). Man fails at each stage through a variety of sins starting with Abel’s murder by Cain to the total corruption of humanity causing the Flood.

⁶ Abstracted from Reference (12). In all fairness however, neither Isaac Watts nor the great Jonathon Edwards were dispensationalists of the order of modern traditional Dispensationalism.

(3) Human Government

The third dispensation begins immediately after the Flood when God instituted human government through Noah, where such government is responsible for justice and due process. Here we see for the first time the instituting of capital punishment (Gen 9:6).

(4) Promise

The fourth dispensation begins with the call of Abram (Gen 12) who is promised by God to be a blessing among the nations of the earth and that Messiah will come through his seed. Part of this promise was that Abraham would be the father of many nations. Within this dispensation comes circumcision.

(5) Law

The fifth dispensation begins with Moses (Exo 3) and the formal giving of the Law to a specific nation. Up until this time the written laws of nations were incomplete and somewhat arbitrary extensions of the law written upon man's hearts. A prime example of this written expression is the Law of Hammurabi. With Moses God formally places His stamp of approval on the nation of Israel as His chosen people to be the channel of blessing to the Gentile nations and the nation (family) to which the Messiah is to come.

(6) Grace

The sixth dispensation or the so-called "church-age" is the time when God is saving by grace through faith (Eph 2:8,9).⁷ This is the period that Paul calls the mystery not seen in the past but revealed for the first time to creation through him (Paul). This dispensation begins at Pentecost (Acts 2), or some maintain with John the Baptist.

(7) Kingdom

The seventh and final dispensation begins with the rapture of the church and continues through eternity in various phases. First, the tribulation period, then the Millennial Kingdom, and finally the eternal kingdom.

It becomes clear that the boundaries set by each "dispensation" are rather *arbitrary*. Any change in the "rules of the game" could very well constitute the beginning of a new dispensation. One that seems to be mostly missed is the "second law" from the book of Deuteronomy. "Deuteronomy" literally means "second law" and was given to the nation of Israel as they entered the land. Does this not correspond to another dispensation for Israel? It could be argued that it does. Also, what about the times of Israel's captivities when they were considered "Lo-Ammi" and not treated as God's People. Can these periods be considered different dispensations, especially since often the Tabernacle or

⁷ Some have argued that prior to the so-called "Age of Grace" God did not save by "grace through faith". Contrary to this statement God's salvation was always by grace through faith (Hab 2:2).

Temple was not available for worship, requiring a different ceremonial infrastructure⁸ for the captive nation?

The point being made here is the defining of the chronological boundaries of a dispensation is fuzzy, murky, and imprecise. This concern seems to underlie the inherent problems with these schemes.

The definition often given by classical dispensationalists after the order of Scofield is seen in the following quote of Scofield himself.⁹

"A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God."

There are several items inherently wrong with this definition:

- (1) As mentioned above identifying the boundaries of each dispensation is significantly problematic. It does not provide a clean definition and God is not the author of confusion nor *ugly theology!*
- (2) Related to #1 above, defining a dispensation as a period of time makes the defining of a dispensation itself inherently arbitrary. Anytime a rule change comes along a new dispensation could be defined. The nature of the revelation of Israel's Kingdom Gospel was progressive over time and therefore does not necessarily allow for clean boundaries for each dispensation. For example, Ezekiel's Temple represents a significant change in the temple ceremonial service. Does this change constitute a new dispensation?
- (3) The nature of this definition is inherently humanistic, since it places a consistent emphasis on man and his obedience to God's revelation. What becomes important is man and his ability to keeping the rules of the game, whether or not he is capable of playing by the rules. Thus, this definition is inherently Arminian or Amyraldian at best.

A similar problem in defining a dispensation is seen in the following outtake from a Facebook Group devoted to Mid-Acts Dispensationalism.¹⁰

A dispensation (oikonomía) is a particular program (set of instructions) that God administers or dispenses. The word dispensation comes from the word oikonoméō (house law or house rule - economy) and means dispensary or to dispense something. If you take the verb and make a noun out of it, it is the dispensation - that which is dispensed.

In the Bible, a dispensation is simply a set of instructions that God 'dispenses' (gives) to mankind, or to a section of mankind, for him to apply to life during a particular period. God has given the rules on how He is going to relate to man at

⁸ The synagogue system grew out of the Assyrian/Babylonian Diaspora, where Israelites scattered throughout Gentile lands needed a local place of worship within the villages they lived.

⁹ See the New Scofield Reference Bible, Note in Genesis 1:28. Page 3 in the New Scofield Reference Bible, Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 1967. See also the Original Scofield Reference Bible, Page 5 (circa 1909 & 1917).

¹⁰ See <https://www.facebook.com/groups/249539172118285/permalink/249615785443957/>

a particular point. God revealed unto Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, the dispensation of the grace of God. This is the administration that we are under today. The set of instructions by which we operate for the obedience of the faith are found in Paul's writings in the books of Romans through Philemon...

In this definition the emphasis is on the "rules of the game" as opposed to a period of time. This definition at least begins to use the intended construction of the compound word "oikonomia" but does not yet properly ascertain the intent of the word and gather the richness of the word's meaning.

To summarize the two most common ways in which people have gone about defining a "dispensation" are:

1. A period of time when man is tested according to a set of rules, only to miserably fail at keeping them.
2. A set of rules that God dispenses to mankind.

Whereas, the time-period definition is inherently arbitrary, the rules-set approach at least gets closer to the proper way of understanding a Koine compound word of this type. Still, if we have a set of rules, we are left with attempting to identify the household to which these rules belong. One goes about the "Biblical neighborhood", knocking on everyone's door and asking if these rules are theirs. While this approach is not necessarily arbitrary once the rule set is properly defined, it is extremely inefficient, and God is not a God of confusion nor *inefficient theology!*

To solve this dilemma we need to examine the hermeneutics of Koine compound words and determine how they are to be understood. Thus, there is a third approach based on sound hermeneutics, exegesis, and logic.

3. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpreting Scripture. How do we know how to read and understand the Word of God? By what method do we read the words of Scripture? How can we determine if we are ascertaining the meaning which the Spirit of God intended?

3.1. Comments on Hermeneutics

The goal of every regenerated student of Scripture is to ascertain the meaning / interpretation of the text *as intended for and understood by the original audience*. The way in which one does this is to *understand the text using the same method by which the Spirit of God communicated to the writers, and the same method by which the writers penned the text, and therefore the same method by which the original audience*

was to understand the inscripturated word. We call this *method* the *Normative Hermeneutic*. The Normative Hermeneutic¹¹ is briefly defined as:

A word, phrase, or grammatical construction is assigned its normal usage, unless something in the context demands otherwise.

When this method is consistently applied to the entire Biblical text various doctrines fall out. These doctrines are said to be “hermeneutically equivalent”. The term “normative hermeneutic” addresses the “method” by which we derive the meaning and the interpretation of the text; while its sister term the “grammatico-historical method” is used when the *goal* of the process is in view.

3.2. A Word on the Word Dispensation

The word “dispensation” is actually a borrowing of the Latin word “dispensatio” used in the Latin vulgate to translate the original Greek word “oikonomia”. An example follows:

Eph 1:10 in **dispensationem** plenitudinis temporum instaurare omnia in Christo quae in caelis et quae in terra sunt in ipso (Vulgate)

Eph 1:10 εἰς **οἰκονομίαν** τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ (Greek-NA28)

Eph 1:10 That in the **dispensation** of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: (KJV)

The KJV Translators chose not to translate (or even transliterate) the Greek word directly into English but use the Latin word from the Vulgate. This is a bit of a sad case since the full meaning and richness of the Greek word “oikonomia” is shrouded, resulting in fuzzifying the perspicuity (clarity) of the underlying Greek text and negatively affecting the English Translation.

The word “oikonomia” appears nine (9) times in the Greek New Testament: Luke 16:2, 3, 4; 1 Cor 9:17; Eph 1:10; 3:2; 9; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 1:4.

“Oikonomia” is a compound word from “oikos” meaning *house* or *household* and “nomos” meaning *law* or *management*. Oikonomia is the Greek word from which we derive our English word Economics (e.g., management of a nation’s finances, goods, and services).

Koine Greek in particular is rich in compound words, and they come in many forms. As can be gleaned from our current word of interest, generally a compound word has two

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion see Robert Walsh, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Creation, Proceedings of the First International Conference on Creationism, Volume 1*, Creation Science Fellowship, Inc., Pittsburgh, PA, 1986, pp.121-127. ICC Website - https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/icc_proceedings/vol1/iss1/18/

words making up the compound. In our case with oikonomia we have the compound form where the first word “oikos” drives both the *arena* of the second word “nomos” and the meaning of the entire compound.¹²

The graphic below illustrates the constituent parts of the compound construction of oikonomia¹³ and the overall meaning of the compound word.

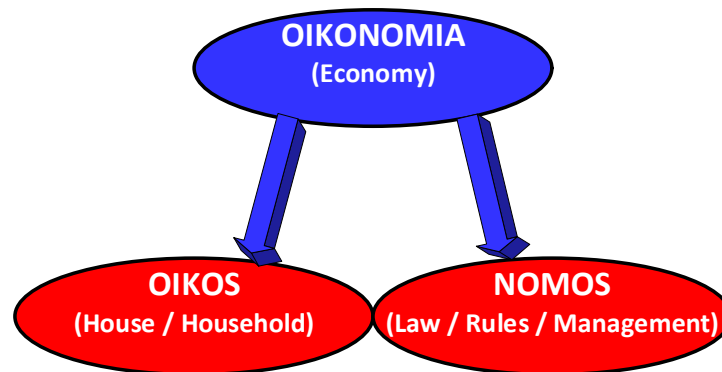


Figure 4. The Compound Construction of Oikonomia

To use Blass and Debrunner¹⁴, the *arena of interest* of the compound is found in the first word “oikos” (household) and the second word “nomos” (management) provides the *specific piece of that arena* in question. To summarize this construction:

1. The first word provides the *arena of interest*.
2. The second word provides the *specific piece of the arena* under consideration.

Thus, this construction provides the reader with two very important axioms:

1. Since the “context” of the compound is seen in the first word “household”, the reader is to first identify which household is being discussed.
2. Once the household has been identified the management of THAT household can be identified.

To summarize our two bullet points it behooves the reader to identify the household first, then determine the management of that household second. This is the normative approach to understand our compound word, oikonomia.

4. A More Excellent Way

The problem with the traditional methods as presented above (Section 2.2. A Brief Sketch of Early Dispensational Schemes) and the one which is ubiquitous within dispensational circles is the “time period” definition. To a lesser extent examining the

¹² Blass and DeBrunner, *The Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, 1961, p. 62.

¹³ Note that the first word, *oikos* is not inflected in its compound construction. This construction indicates the type of Koine compound word.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 62-65

rules of management first then identifying the household as an approach is a distant second.

As shown above, the solution to this problem is to identify the house or household first then determine the “rules of the game”.

Thus, hermeneutically it is proper and more rigorously elegant to determine the first part of the compound word (the main part), namely the *household* (oikos) and THEN determine the *household’s rules* (nomos).

This places the regenerated student of Scripture in a position where they can exegete the intended meaning to the original audience for themselves.

4.1. Establishing the Household of a Dispensation

If the household is first to be established, how does one determine the identity of the household? What is the name on the mailbox?

Hermeneutical-Exegetical Axiom

To determine the identity of an individual’s household, first identify the individual’s hope.

The particular household of a member of God’s Trinal Elect is determined by their hope.

Individual’s Household = Function(Hope)

As we study Scripture, we find there are three specific hopes.¹⁵

Firstly, there is the **hope of the Gentile**, whose hope includes the inheriting of the earth, filling the earth with people, and managing the environmental and technical details of the earth-system. This was first given in Gen 1:26-30.

Gen 1:26 And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which *is* the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to everything that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for meat: and it was so.

¹⁵ Here we are simply providing a high-level summary. For a very systematic and rigorous derivation of establishing the hope of a believer, see Stephen E. Rodabaugh, *A Dispensational Survey of Scripture Centered Around the Seven Ones of Ephesians Four*, (unpublished) Trinity Grace Fellowship, Pittsburgh, PA 1983. Soon to be placed on the TRF Web Site.

As we examine Scripture and see that an individual's hope is as described above, we conclude his hope is Gentilic.

Secondly, we find that the Gentiles failed¹⁶ in establishing God's salvation economy on the earth, and God, in His sovereignty, ordained and used this failure to bring into salvation history His second salvation economy (dispensation) as identified first with Abram being called out as a *special* nation (household) and to bless the Gentile nations (Gen 12:1-3).

Gen 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

Israel's hope includes being the channel of blessing to the Gentile nations and in administrative and priestly authority over them.

Finally, the **hope of the Body of Christ** is partially defined for us in Eph 3:2-6.

Eph 3:2 If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:
3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,
4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)
5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;
6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

Note for the Body of Christ there is only one body where Jews and Gentiles are equal. This is unheard of in the Old Testament and non-Pauline New Testament.

We see that there exist three distinctive hope categories in Scripture:

- (1) Gentile Hope
- (2) Jewish Hope
- (3) Body Hope

These hopes define the redemptive households of Scripture and therefore the Redemptive Dispensations of Scripture (See Section 4.3. Identifying the Dispensations of Scripture).

¹⁶ A study of the evil Nimrod would do the student of Scripture a world of good in understanding the history of politics and economics. As an example, see Flavius Josephus, Works of Flavius Josephus, Baker Book House, 1974, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Vol. 2, Book 1, Chapter 4, Para. 2, p. 79.

4.2. Establishing the Rules (Administration) of the Household

Establishing the rules of each household requires the cataloging of each revelation of the household's law over time.

Gentile Administration

The administration of the Gentile dispensation as we saw above began in Gen 1 and included their managing of the earth in every respect. In Gen 4:1-5, we see that Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to Jehovah.

- Gen 4:1 And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.
2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.
3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.
4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

Based on Jehovah's making of leather clothes for Adam and Eve, it is clear that blood sacrifice was required for the Gentiles. Cain's sacrifice being unacceptable to Jehovah, while Abel's sacrifice respected by God.

We see that a form of ceremonial ritual as part of the Gentile hope.¹⁷

As we continue through time (Gen 9:3-7) we see that additional revelation is given to the Gentile ruleset.

- Gen 9:3 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.
4 But flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.
5 And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.
6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.
7 And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.

As Noah left the ark and started a new life on the post-Flood earth additional elements were added to the Gentile household management. First, God reiterates the administration of filling and replenishing the earth, but now He adds:

- (1) Allowance for meat eating.
- (2) Prohibition of drinking blood.
- (3) Capital punishment.

Later we find that the Gentiles are also to participate only the Feast of Tabernacles from Leviticus 23.

¹⁷ Recall that during the Millennial Kingdom an altar will be used as part of Egypt's hope and perhaps by extension all righteous Gentile nations. See Isa 19:19-25.

Next, we come to the Jewish hope.

Jewish Administration

We saw above that Israel was ordained to be the chief priestly nation interceding on behalf of and administrating the Gentile nations. As part of their hope Israel was given the Law through Moses, which is the formal codifying of God's attributes and moral character and man's sinfulness. For Israel, the Law includes the State which is to manage the due process of enforcing the Law, as well as the ceremonialism associated with the Law.

To manage this political and religious administration an entire infrastructure is to be put into place, including the Land promised to Abraham as defined in the Palestinian Covenant.

Gen 12:7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

Gen 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever.

See also Deut 30:1-10.

The Land provides the property by which the nation is to lead the Gentile nations to prosperity.

Within this political and religious infrastructure a throne is included from which King David directly rules the nation and the Gentile nations. The covenant that covers this throne and political/religious relationship is called the Davidic Covenant.

2 Sam 7:12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever.

14 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

15 But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I put away before thee.

16 And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established forever.

In this covenant God promises to establish David's throne forever and that His son will sit upon it. It is beyond the scope of this brief outline, but the working out of this throne establishes Christ as Messiah, ruling from the Third Heaven and seated upon the Father's Throne, with David himself seated upon the earthly throne as the earthly king (prince). Israel's throne is multi-faceted as we see below. While David provides the political (and some of the religious) arm of Israel, we also see the Apostles providing the legislative and judicial arms of the future kingdom.

Mat 19:28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rev 21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The Twelve will be acting as the judicial and legislative branches of the Israelite Government in both the Millennial and Eternal kingdoms. This infrastructure is how the administration of the kingdom program will be managed... but there is more!

Overseeing the religious and ceremonial wing of Israel will be the great prophet, Ezekiel.

Ezekiel and the sons of Zadok lead the Priestly Branch. Ezekiel acts as the Segan, the Chief Priest (not High Priest), and is given headship over the priestly line of the sons of Zadok.

Eze 43:18 And he said unto me, Son of man, thus saith the Lord GOD; These *are* the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon.

19 And thou shalt give to the priests the Levites that be of the seed of Zadok, which approach unto me, to minister unto me, saith the Lord GOD, ...

The details of the Millennial Temple and Priesthood are provided in Ezekiel 40-48, outlining additional activities that Ezekiel is to oversee.¹⁸

Within all these elements Israel will follow the ceremonial law including the Feasts of Jehovah of Lev 23. This also contains additional revelation for the Gentile hope in that they are now required to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles which shows Jewish authority over the Gentile nations.

In Rev 21 we see during the eternal kingdom the righteous Gentile nations bringing their taxes into New Jerusalem:

Rev 21:24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

26 And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.

27 And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither *whatsoever* worketh abomination, or *maketh* a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

So, the entire economic administration of the eternal kingdom is managed from within New Jerusalem.

Finally, we come to the Body Hope.

¹⁸ Walsh, Robert, *A Survey of the Millennial Kingdom*, Three Rivers Fellowship, Pittsburgh, PA, 2005, p.7. Web site - chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.7ones.org/_files/ugd/2935de_048c3b48c4e24ac58dbad73c39131587.pdf

Body Administration

The administrative rules of the Body of Christ are significantly distinct from that of the earthly kingdom program, whether Jewish or Gentilic.

Whereas both Jews and Gentiles are to participate in the ceremonial traditions of the kingdom program, the Body of Christ forbids these activities and indeed has no infrastructure to support such activities.

Gal 4:8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Col 2:6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

9 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

15 *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ

Whereas Israel and her Gentiles celebrate and participate in holidays, rites, and rituals, the Body of Christ has no such activities. The reason is that we have been saved to an eternal position in authority over the angels and as such are not to participate in anything that declares our subjugation to the angelic realm. In other words, for the Body of Christ, the atonement of Christ has secured a hope which is non-ceremonially expressed.

The Body of Christ will be seated upon the Father's throne ruling the entire created order.

Eph 1:20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

22 And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,

23 Which is his body, the fulness Eph 2:5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) of him that filleth all in all.

6 And hath raised *us* up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Rev 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

The Body of Christ as a group made up of Jews and Gentiles in a non-ethnic manner sits on the very same throne as Christ in His humanity, which is in fact the Father's throne ruling the entire created order. We have been made conformable, indeed capable of sitting within the unapproachable light of God (inside the angelic cloud).

Col 1:12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in (Gk: "the") light:

As his Body we will sit in "the light" and thus at the Rapture receive glorified bodies that allow us to sit in such a situation. A glorious hope indeed. From this seat we administrate the entire created universe with Christ (Eph 1:10 [Greek Text]).

So, the administrative rules for the Body include non-ceremonies on earth and in heaven and includes activities that manage the affairs of the entire created universe.

4.3. Identifying the Dispensations of Scripture

Related to section 4.1. Establishing the Household of a Dispensation, once the households are defined essentially each dispensation is identified. What is not yet identified at that point is the administration or the rules of the household (See Section 4.2. Establishing the Rules (Administration) of the Household).

There are three and only three redemptive dispensations in Scripture, none of which are defined as periods of time.

Each dispensation is a *salvation economy* including the household **and** all of the administrative rules which members of that household are to obey. Thus, a dispensation is a uniquely complex soteriological economy designed and ordained of God to reflect His Triune nature (See Section 5).

The first dispensation is the **GENTILE Dispensation**. It includes as its household(s) all of the righteous Gentile Nations, ordained to be under the righteous authority of the nation of Israel. Their administrative rules include (1) managing the earth's environment; (2) providing taxes to Israel for her managing activities of the Gentiles; (3) filling the earth as expressed through nations; (4) participating in the Feast of the Tabernacles; (5) etc. This salvation economy was introduced from "jump street" to pre-fallen Adam in the Garden and repeated to his offspring (e.g., Noah).

Examples of members of the Gentile Household are Abel, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Ninevites, righteous Assyrians, righteous Egyptians, Syrophenician woman, Cornelius, Ethiopian Eunuch, etc.

The second dispensation is the **JEWISH Dispensation**. It comprises all righteous Jews as a nation ordained to be a nation of priests, interceding on behalf of the Gentile Nations. Their hope also contains (1) living in the promised land during the Millennial kingdom; (2) erecting Ezekiel's Temple during the Millennial Kingdom; (3) with the aid of Assyria and Egypt administrating the political and economic affairs of the earth; (4) interceding in a religious manner for the Gentile nations; (5) operating fully under the righteous authority of the elect angels; (6) to live in the New Jerusalem for eternity after the Millennial phase; (7) etc. This salvation economy was promised to Abram and its administration progressively revealed through Moses and the Prophets.

Examples of members of the righteous nation of Israel are Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Rahab, David, Nathan, Ezekiel, Zechariah, (Luke, as a Proselyte of Righteousness) Peter, James, John, John the Baptist, Tribulation saints, Jews born in the Millennium, etc.

The third and final dispensation is the **BODY Dispensation**. The Body dispensation is also known as the Great Mystery (Eph 5). The Body of Christ comprises both Jews and Gentiles, each of which lose their ethnic relationship to each other and Christ and become equal in a singular group as the righteous non-incarnate extended humanity of Christ. The hope of the Body of Christ includes: (1) inheriting Christ's authority over the created order; (2) eternally sitting upon the Father's throne; (3) ruling the entire created order; (4) administrating the affairs of the angelic realm; (6) equal in authority to the righteous humanity of Christ; (7) etc.

Examples of members of the Body of Christ are Paul, Timothy, Titus, Aquila and Priscilla, Phoebe, Onesiphorus, Philemon, etc.

4.4. The Dispensations and their *Relationship to Time*

How does God reveal and operate His salvation economies in time? In other words, how do the dispensations work themselves out in time?¹⁹

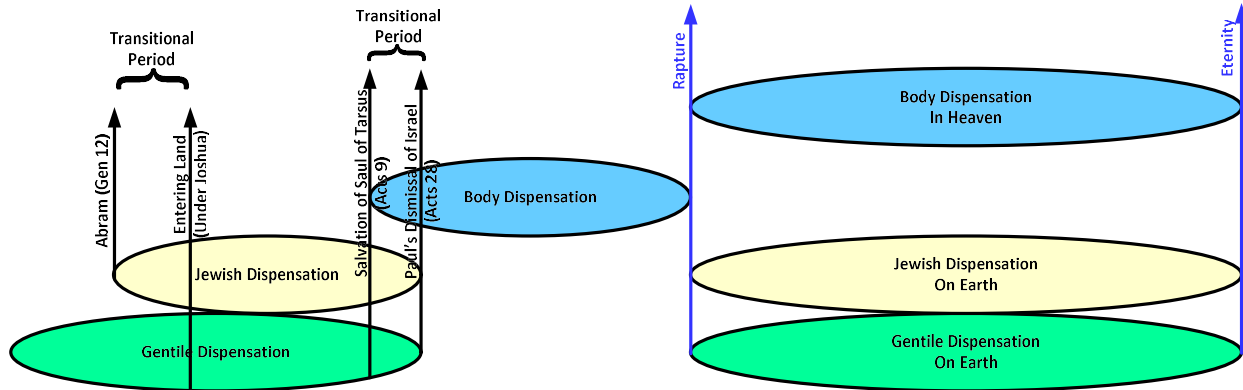


Figure 5. The *Normative* Dispensations Working Themselves Out in Time

The Gentile Dispensation is the first salvation economy to be introduced in space and time. First revealed to Adam and Eve and repeated to Noah, this dispensation comprises all righteous Gentiles who will be under the authority of elect Israel.

The second salvation economy is the elect nation of Israel as God's chosen nation to intercede on behalf of the Gentile nations and act as their priests and administrators in all areas of life (political, economic, and religious). Israel is directly under the authority of the angelic realm whereby the entire earthly kingdom program has been given through the agency of the angels (Gal 3, Acts 7). Israel is to be the channel of blessing to the righteous Gentile nations.

The third and final salvation economy revealed in space and time is the Body of Christ. The hope of the Body of Christ is to sit upon the Father's throne ruling the entire created order with Christ.

The Authority Principle and Transitional Periods

God is a God of due process and authority. He is the ultimate authority on all things since He is the sovereign Creator of all things. As such when God "lends" His authority to others outside of Himself he "preserves" that authority when that authority is to cease. There is a period of "due process" by which the exiting authority is superseded by a new incoming authority. As such, in redemptive history God preserves the authority of the existing dispensation as He introduces an administratively superior dispensation into space and time. There is a time of "due process" called a "transition period", during which God "transfers" the authority of the first dispensation to the second.

¹⁹ Note that this question implies that dispensations are not periods of time, but rather work themselves out in time.

We see the first transition period as God rolls out the Jewish dispensation beginning with the call of Abram in Gen 12. All communication between God and Abram is private until as such time as it becomes public information that a new dispensation is being put into place. This period continues until the new dispensation enters its hope and as far as Israel is concerned this occurred under the leadership of Joshua. During a transition period the future administratively superior dispensation is in a position of compromise / deference and submits itself to the existing dispensation. Similar to a person taking over the role of the previous person holding that role as the new person is being “trained” by the outgoing individual.

The second transition period is seen when God introduces the Body of Christ into the earthly scene. Christ’s initial revelation to Paul was all done privately. The first recorded individual saved into the Body of Christ after Paul was Sergius Paulus (Acts 13). Finally, Paul makes the final pronouncement and dismisses the rabbis of Israel one final time in Rome and Israel is finished as an active dispensation. After Acts 28 the practice of the Body of Christ is no longer compromised for the sake of the remaining kingdom saints. All due process is complete and the nature of the book of Acts records the “downfall” of Israel!

What about the Rapture when Israel and the Gentile dispensations are reintroduced into the earthly scene? Why is there no transition period then? Excellent set of questions 😊.

Since the Body of Christ is taken out of the earthly sphere and enters its hope the Body’s authority is also taken out of the earthly sphere and transferred to heaven. As such there is no need for a transition period.²⁰

5. Normative Dispensationalism and the Trinity

Everything that God does in some way reflects His Nature and His salvation plan is no exception. God is Trinity and as such comprises three (3) Persons in One (1) Unified Essence or Being.

As there is one Being of God there is one Redemptive Elect. As there are three Persons of Deity there are three distinct households.

Thus, we have three distinct households in one redemptive elect. Each household of God’s redemptive elect “maps” to a particular Person of the Trinity in such a way that the household being mapped is the eternal inheritance of that Member of the Trinity. The figure below illustrates this relationship.

²⁰ For details on the topic of introducing dispensations into space and time see references (23)(24).

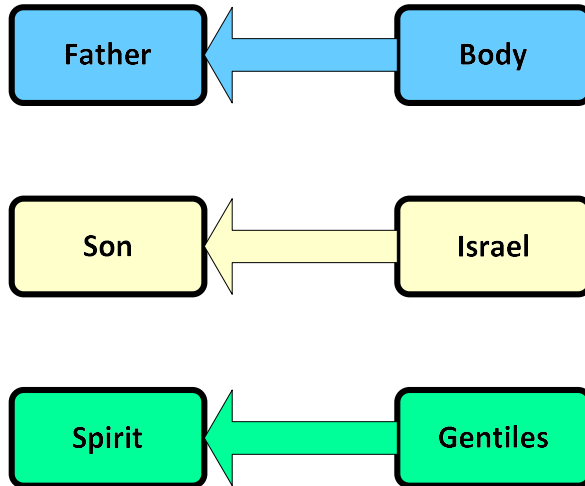


Figure 6. Mapping each Elect Household to a Member of the Trinity

As an inheritance, each household displays a unique relationship to its Owner-Member of Trinity.

- (1) As the Father is First among Equals and as such rules all things, so the Body of Christ sits upon the Father's Throne with Christ ruling the entire created order.
- (2) As the Second Person is to inherit the nation of Israel, so Israel is the elect nation²¹ who would provide the fleshly body of the Incarnate-Savior.
- (3) As the Spirit of God represents the omnipresence of the Godhead, so the Gentiles "fill" the earth.

6. Normative Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology

Covenant Theology began to be systematized in the 17th Century. It is an attempt to determine "God's thoughts after Him" as the same is true of Dispensationalism. Sadly, there has been such bad blood between these two schools of thought that few if any have been able to sit down and have a rational and dispassionate discussion, let alone think through the noise and ascertain a solution.

Briefly, Covenant Theology attempts to determine God's thoughts through a series of Covenants that God has made. Generally, there are three Covenants within Covenant Theology:

- (1) **Covenant of Redemption.** This covenant was made within the Godhead to bring about creation and salvation and established the roles that each Member of the Godhead would perform in both creation and salvation.

²¹ So there is no confusion on this point, nothing during the "Body Age" can fulfill anything within Israel's prophetic program, therefore the modern state of Israel does not fulfill any Jewish Biblical prophecy. Sadly, on this point the overwhelming number of Dispensationalists (of all stripes) and even many Premillennial Covenantalists have fallen prey to this great error. On this point traditional Dispensationalists have been quite inconsistent with their dispensationalism since they lack in their understanding of the great distinction between Israel and the Body of Christ. In other words, unlike the errant Covenantalists, Dispensationalists should know better!

- (2) **Covenant of Grace.** This covenant establishes the mode and method by which the Godhead accomplishes the salvation of each household-member of the Elect.
- (3) **Covenant of Works.** This is the covenant made by God with man (through Adam our Federal Head) as a standard for obedience. Some covenant theologians do not include this covenant in their model. We too shall ignore it for this discussion.

Since the Covenant of Grace is the covenant that establishes the means of God’s salvation plan, we shall focus on that for our current dispensational discussion.²²

There is one (1) Covenant of sovereign grace. In this one covenant there exist three (3) dispensations (salvation economies):

- (1) The Body Dispensation
- (2) The Jewish Dispensation
- (3) The Gentile Dispensation

In each of these dispensations is the fulness of the one covenant.

The relationship between the One Covenant and the Three Dispensations is graphically shown below.

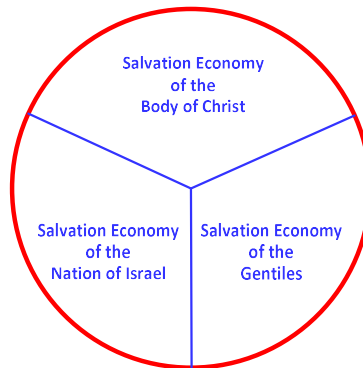


Figure 7. The Three Dispensations of the One Covenant of Grace

Note the natural trinal layout at the covenant level. The one covenant comprises three salvation economies, each of which have been ordained by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and applied by the Spirit.

²² We shall borrow this discussion from Reference (17).

The objects of the one covenant comprise the one redeemed elect. In this elect are three households:

- (1) Body of Christ
- (2) Israel
- (3) Gentiles

Each household manifests God's sovereign grace.

The one elect of the covenant is trinal as well. The one redeemed elect comprises three households as seen in the figure below:

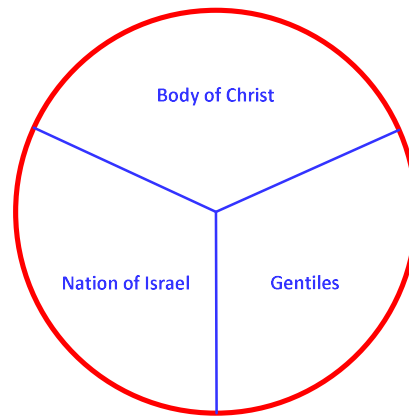


Figure 8. The Three Households of the One Redeemed Elect

At every level of the Covenant of Grace the trinal nature of its makeup and decree is seen. This is true for the Covenant of Redemption as well, but beyond the scope of this brief outline.

7. Summary

The fundamental weakness of traditional Dispensationalism lies in its errant definition of a dispensation. We have shown very briefly the normative approach and solution to the traditional dispensational dilemma, without thinking that one must abandon the “dispensational” doctrine all together. After all, dispensations are explicit elements of the Inscripturated word. The normative understanding of Scripture not only destroys the notion inherent in traditional dispensationalism, but rebuilds it into a rigorously Biblical doctrine that is a significant part of the doctrinal framework contained in Scripture.

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