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Introduction

This is an attempt to summarize Dispensational Theology, very popular among many conservative Christian Evangelical churches, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and even cults. This theology has also come to be known as Dispensationalism which may be characterized as a comprehensive interpretive scheme for understanding the bible. Popular dispensationalism has 7 ages, parts, tenets, or "dispensations" that are *vitally* interconnected with "all" the others dispensations. This scheme attempts to "systematize" biblical data in such a way as to "organize understanding" that results in "automatic conclusions" in some areas. While there may be disagreement among the dispensationalists upon the specific number of dispensations, (so what else is new?) it is generally agreed that there are seven. They'll be summarized along with a brief section on the origins of dispensational theology.

Origin of Dispensationalism

John Nelson Darby created Dispensationalism and founded the Plymouth Brethren movement. Dispensationalism was popularized through the Scofield Reference bible and many conservative seminaries embraced dispensational theology as their "sole" or official theological position. The dispensational movement in the United States had its start via the Dallas Theological Seminary.

The PRIMARY aspect of dispensationalism is that it is first and foremost a method of interpreting scripture. The very construct of the position immediately relegates dispensationalism to "eisegesis" that is - reading "into" scripture from a predetermined understanding or belief as opposed to "exegesis" - taking "from" scripture that which it is actually communicating. At its core is the premise that all Scripture is to be interpreted literally and where the plain meaning of a passage makes sense, one MUST NOT look further. While this appears reasonable on its surface, (and very often is) the practical application of this principle leads to the rejection of all allegorical interpretation and all liberal attempts to explain away the supernatural elements of the bible, namely miracles. The latter is a good thing, the former is not. While this system may have its positives, the negative is that it presumes itself to be the method of how God works and "exclusively" deals with His human creation. The problem with this position is thus, the bible must speak to us, not us to it.

Within dispensationalism, ISRAEL is ALWAYS understood as a reference to national or ethnic Israel and NEVER a reference to the New Testament church. Dispensationalists place GREAT EMPHASIS upon the DISTINCTION between Israel and the church. This aspect of dispensationalism is addressed in the appendices and the separate study on Israel and the Church: One Body. A natural result of this false dispensational understanding is that prophesy is much skewered and misrepresented. Dispensational eschatology and dispensational ecclesiology are the primary victims, as both are

inseparably intertwined. Dispensational theology cannot withstand challenge or defeat in any of its constructs because it is so interwoven and interdependent upon the other theological constructs that defeat in one area causes collapse in all areas. Whenever a foundation is faulty, the construct will be equally faulty. Well did Jesus speak when He said the words recorded in Matthew.

Matthew 7:24-27

- Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.
- 25 "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.
- 26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.
- 27 "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Dispensationalists claim evidence in God's Word that He has a series of dispensations or economies by which He manages the world. These dispensations are successive stages on how God has revealed His purpose to mankind. Each one is interdependent upon the other and each dispensation ends with a judgment. Let's summarize the common dispensations:

Common Dispensational Periods

Innocence: The first dispensation covers the second and third books of Genesis. The first book of Genesis is the creation and not part of a formal dispensation. This is referred to as the Edenic age. It ends in judgment - expulsion from Eden.

Conscience: This second dispensation covers Genesis 3 to 7 and is referred to as the Antediluvian (pre-flood) age. It ends in judgment - the flood

Human Government: The third dispensation covers Genesis 8 through 11 and is referred to as the postdiluvian (after the flood) age. It too ends in judgment - Babel.

Promise: The fourth dispensation covers Genesis 12 through 40 and Exodus 1 through 12 and is referred to as the Patriarchal age. It ends in judgment - bondage.

Law: The fifth dispensation covers the largest period of time and the greatest number of books in Scripture. The Law dispensation begins with the book of Exodus and continues through to the first 5 books of the New Testament; all four gospels and Acts 1 through 11. There are several subdivisions to the Age of Law or Legalism that I'll not list here. It ends in

judgment of sin at Calvary, but really ends in Acts 11. Reasons why this dispensation of Law is extended to Peter's vision will be discussed later.

Grace: The sixth dispensation is the ecclesiastical age or the Church Age. Some also refer to this as the Age of the Spirit. It includes Matthew 24 and 25, Acts, 1Ths. 4:13-18, Daniel and Revelation. It ends in Judgment - the return of Jesus Christ.

Kingdom: The final dispensation is the Messianic Age that is followed by the Eternal Age. This covers the books of 2 Tim, Rev. 5:10 through 20:6. It ends in Judgment - the Final Judgment. This seems to include two dispensations, that of the Kingdom and Eternal Ages, but most don't like to acknowledge this because they want to claim Divine providence ... and with 7 being the number of completion ... well you get their logic here, don't you?

In any event, all appears fairly cop esthetic until one begins to delve into this theological construct. Like most things, the devil is in the details. When biblical truth contradicts this construct, too many are more than willing to adjust the meaning of scripture rather than to simply adjust their construct. We should exercise caution in allowing any theological construct of man to rule our lives. That's why it is so critical for each of us have the "spirit of the Berean" so we can examine the Scriptures for ourselves to see whether these things be so or not. I see no evidence of dispensational ages or periods being a method of teaching in New or Old Testaments, as dispensational tradition claims, so we must exercise care in what we accept as truth and why.

Matthew 15:3

And He answered and said to them, "Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?

Mark 7:8-9

- 8 "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."
- 9 He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

These verses in Matthew and Mark do indeed apply to the folly of dispensationalism.

Problems With The Dispensational System Of Theology

Many dispensationalists misinterpret Second Timothy 2:15 as the <u>command</u> to <u>DIVIDE</u> the Word of God into dispensational periods. Upon examination of the verse we see this not to be the command at all but to <u>rightly handle</u> the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB95)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling** the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 (King James Authorized Version. 1769) Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing** the word of truth.

Let's take a look at the original Greek language and see which Greek is translated as *rightly dividing* in the King James and *accurately handling* in the New American Standard Bible, 1995 translation. It should be noted that the NASB95 version is probably the most literal American English translation of the bible in print today.

3718 oryotomew orthotomeo (or-thot-om-eh'-o)

from a compound of 3717 and the base of 5114 and temnw temno; TDNT-8:111,1169; v (to cut); to cut straight:—

NAS-accurately handling (1).

AV-rightly divide 1; 1

- to cut straight, to cut straight ways
 to proceed on straight paths, hold a straight course, equiv. to doing right
- 2) to make straight and smooth, to handle aright, to teach the truth directly and correctly

The Greek word or yotomew (orthotomeo) literally means to cut straight. Its use is to express accurate and true handling or construction of a thing. But as soon as one shows the dispensationalists the errors of their way in 2 Timothy, they leap and hotfoot into new area's of confusion. Expect dispensationalists to flee whenever challenged by exegesis (taking out of Scripture what is there) for their interpretive scheme is based upon eisegesis, reading into Scripture whatever their interpretive scheme must see. As a result of their eisegetic approach to Scripture, dispensationalism leads to false and apostate teaching in the following areas:

Baptism: Some Dispensationalists try to eliminate water baptism as a rite of the church claiming baptism is for the Jews only.

Holy Spirit: Dispensationalism requires that *no indwelling* of the Holy Spirit ever occurred prior to the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, despite clear Scriptural evidence to the contrary. Dispensationalists refuse to see the key difference between the Old and New Covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit as the promise of *permanent* indwelling to *all* born again believers under the New Covenant.

Church: Dispensationalism fails to understand the truth of Salvation and prophesy by creating a false understanding of the role and relationship of the Old Covenant church, Israel to the New Covenant church, Spiritual Israel.

Prophesy: Dispensationalism Carves up the word of God in such a manner as to create a false understanding of God's prophetic plan for His People. This interpretive scheme

completely eliminates the New Covenant church in all prophetic writings. All prophesies concerning God's judgment and punishment is falsely and exclusively relegated to Israel, which excludes spiritual Israel, the New Covenant church.

The Return of Jesus: Dispensationalism has Jesus coming twice where scripture states Jesus returns only once. Dispensationalists emphatically squall at this characterization. So as not to be in complete defiance of Scripture by claiming two returns, dispensationalism constructs a scenario of one return but in **two stages** separated by a 7 year period of great tribulation. The first stage is the return of Jesus for His church (rapture) and the second stage is the return of Jesus with His church (judgment) seven years later. Regardless of how you twist and carve up Scripture, two returns are two returns.

There seems to be so many variations of dispensational theology it's hard to pin down anyone to "fessing up" to the non-biblical and apostate aspects of this theology. When an exegetical analysis of God's Holy Scripture proves dispensational error, the one presenting such error should expect to be personally impugned and attacked. You can expect to hear such things as, "you've erected a straw man just to knock down," or "that's not what I/we teach/believe," along with other such rhetorical cliché's. These do tend to get real old real fast. The "straw man" of dispensationalism was erected around 1830 as a "system" to defeat liberal theology which was eroding through denial, sound biblical understanding. In dispensationalism's attempt to counter Liberal theology, which denies Divine Inspiration of Scripture, denies all miracles and supernatural acts of God recorded in Scripture, by claiming these miraculous acts of God were nothing more than natural phenomena that ancients simply could not understand or offer some other rational explanation. Liberal theology was gaining popularity in American churches back in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

However, the objective of studying God's Word is not to *defeat* one weak theology only to replace it with another weak theology. The objective study of God's Word is for God to bring us into closer relationship with Himself. As we continue to yield ourselves in humble submission to God, He will draw us closer to Himself by revealing more of Himself as we grow in grace, knowledge and understanding through the study and practical applications of His revealed truths.

I believe dispensationalism has survived because it has defeated liberal theology on the one hand and has removed the church from all forms of prophetic judgment and suffering on the other hand. Dispensationalism's appeal is antiseptic and very appealing to carnal minds pre-occupied with the flesh. Some natural outgrowths of apostasy associated with dispensationalism are *hyper-dispensationalism* which has moved into the realm of cult and cultic beliefs as do pentecostalism and charismaticism, renegade children of dispensational theology. Such is the natural progression of a faulty system of biblical interpretation when allowed to go unchallenged and unabated because of a short term gain, namely the defeat of Liberal Theology. This is akin to alliance with terrorists who target people and groups you don't like. Evil gains strength when unopposed and it's only a matter of time before evil turns to devour you. Such is the state of dispensationalism today

and why I am very vocal in my opposition to it. Give no credibility to any system or philosophy that denies any Truth of God. Dispensationalism denies many truths of God.

Dispensational Teaching is Scripture?

Some claim that dispensationalism is how scriptures have been taught throughout the ages and try to twist Scripture to justify this. Some go so far as to accuse the Apostle Paul of dispensationalism. That's quite a feat considering the invention of Dispensational Theology had it's origins around 1830, almost 2,000 years after the death of the Apostle Paul. The United States of America as a nation is *older* than dispensational theology.

Nonetheless, let's take a look at the whether dispensationalism is the means by which all Scripture is taught. The term dispensation is used only in the King James Version of the bible, so it is not surprising to find many of these folks also laying claim that the King James Bible is the only *real* and *true* translation of Scripture that should be read today. Some even go so far as to claim other translations of Scripture as satanic. A pitiful group of people are these. Let's examine the two Greek words oikonomia (oikonomia) and oikonomov (oikonomos) which is translated as dispensation four times in the King James Version of the bible.

3623 oikonomov oikonomos oy-kon-om'-os

from 3624 and the base of 3551; TDNT-5:149,674; n m (to manage); the manager of a household:—

NAS-manager (3), managers (1), steward (2), stewards (3), treasurer (1).

AV-steward 8, chamberlain 1, governor 1; 10

- 1) the manager of household or of household affairs
 - 1a) esp. a steward, manager, superintendent (whether free-born or as was usually the case, a freed-man or a slave) to whom the head of the house or proprietor has intrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to the children not yet of age
 - 1b) the manager of a farm or landed estate, an overseer
 - 1c) the superintendent of the city's finances, the treasurer of a city (or of treasurers or quaestors of kings)
- 2) metaph. the apostles and other Christian teachers and bishops and overseers

3622 oikonomia oikonomia oy-kon-om-ee'-ah

from 3623; from 3621; TDNT-5:151,674; n f; stewardship, administration:—NAS-administration (3), management (3), stewardship (3).

AV-dispensation 4, stewardship 3; 7

- 1) the management of a household or of household affairs
 - 1a) specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of other's property
 - 1b) the office of a manager or overseer, stewardship
 - 1c) administration, dispensation

The term oikonomia means to administer and manage. This is so problematic when folks with an agenda rush to build broad theologies upon a narrow use of a word or a single verse of Scripture. This haphazard treatment of the Word of God is so problematic. It gives rise to false doctrines, teachings and gross misrepresentation of Scripture in a number of areas.

Nonetheless, let's look at the following comparison of the rendering of the Greek term *oikonomia* from the King James and the NASB to see if you can come up with their scriptural mandate to justify their theological construct of dispensational theology.

SCRIPTURE COMPARISON

Luke 16:2-4 (NASB '95)

- 2 "And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management <3622 oikonomia>, for you can no longer be manager.'
- 3 "The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management <3622 oikonomia> away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg.
- 4 'I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management <3622 oikonomia> people will welcome me into their homes.'

Luke 16:2-4 (King James Authorized Version. 1769)

- 2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy **stewardship <3622 oikonomia>**, for thou mayest be no longer steward.
- 3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the **stewardship <3622 oikonomia>**, I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.
- 4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the **stewardship**, **<3622 oikonomia>**, they may receive me into their houses.

We can see from the above comparative analysis of Scripture, there is little justification to build an unsound theology based upon the use of the Greek term oikonomia. The King James translates the term as steward in the above verses in Luke and as dispensation in the next verse in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church below.

1 Corinthians 9:17 (NASB '95)

For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a **stewardship <3622 oikonomia>** entrusted to me.

1 Corinthians 9:17 (King James Authorized Version. 1769)

For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a **dispensation** <3622 oikonomia> [of the gospel] is committed unto me.

For the true understanding of the meaning of dispensation, stewardship, management, appointed job all carry the right and appropriate meaning in context. Proper contextual understanding permits such an interchangeable use between the two terms. Both carry the proper sense of good management or sound stewardship. Paul compared His job assignment from the Lord to be his stewardship. He implies this is a godly mandate to him, and not something that he merely chooses to do. The text above does not simply mean the gospel as the King James translators imply, but should be understood in the broader context of Paul's Apostleship and slavery or service to God as an indentured servant. The next verse in Ephesians carries this theme of dutiful service appointed to us by God.

Ephesians 1:10 (NASB '95)

with a view to an **administration <3622 oikonomia>** suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is,* the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him

Ephesians 1:10 (King James Authorized Version. 1769)

That in the **dispensation <3622 oikonomia>** 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:

The above verse in Ephesians is in the context of our predestination as servants to the Living God by the grace of His calling and through Jesus. We have all been chosen by God to fulfill our calling which we will all be called to give account. We with an indwelling of God the Holy Spirit are secure in our Salvation in Jesus, but must also tremble when we are called to give an account to all God has charged us to do. The above verse is speaking of our given duty when we are all gathered together to give an account. God has freely gifted to us all that is necessary for us to be good stewards of His lavish gifts. Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to not be lax concerning the management or administration of the tasks God has called us to do and to be faithful to our service to the very end. To alter this to mean anything other than what God says is to be an *unprofitable* servant.

The context follows true throughout the letter. Paul is now referring to his task as a **bond servant** of God, as one imprisoned as a slave, to deliver to the Gentile believers the stewardship or management of the task delivered to him by God through His grace. Paul's task is to reveal the secret things of our Lord the Messiah to the Gentiles as given to him by the grace and will of God. Paul is using himself as an example of what and how the Corinthians (albeit all believers in Jesus) are to do with what God has predestined for them to do.

Ephesians 3:2, 9 (NASB '95)

- 2 if indeed you have heard of the **stewardship <3622 oikonomia>** of God's grace which was given to me for you;
- 9 and to bring to light what is the **administration <3622 oikonomia>** of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

Ephesians 3:2, 9 (King James Authorized Version. 1769)

- 2 If ye have heard of the **dispensation <3622 oikonomia>** of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:
- 9 and to bring to light what is the **administration <3622 oikonomia>** of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

The interchangeability of the words management, administration, stewardship should give us valuable clues to the right and proper context and usage of the translation and how, in context, dispensation is to be understood. Not as an era or time period, but as a task or duty a person is charged to perform.

Colossians 1:25 (NASB '95)

Of this church I was made a minister according to the **stewardship <3622 oikonomia>** from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of* the word of God,

Colossians 1:25 (King James Authorized Version. 1769)

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the **dispensation <3622 oikonomia>** of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God;

Upon examination of ALL the appropriate scriptures using the Greek term, *oikonomia*, one is hard pressed to find dispensational theology anywhere in scripture.

Israel Verse The Church

Another cornerstone of dispensational theology is the distinction and separation of the church from Israel. It should be noted that the scriptures do not speak to Israel as the nation we know of today off the Mediterranean Sea in the Middle East. It speaks to Israel as the people of God and His plan for them. Israel is the Old Testament church and Israel is the New Testament church. The Old Testament is church is predominantly ethnic Israel with some Gentile proselytes, and the New Testament church is *all* spiritual Israel which includes Gentiles grafted in by God and ethnic Israel when restored by God. Jesus the Messiah came to ethnic Israel first, but they rejected Jesus, they rejected their own.

John 1:11

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

The time for Ethnic Israel has not come to fruition until the fullness of the Gentiles has come. Therefore, the first shall be last.

Matthew 19:30

"But many [who are] first will be last; and [the] last, first.

Ethnic Israel through the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit will be gathered *into* spiritual Israel. The natural branch returns to the tree after the unnatural is fully grafted in. Romans 11 offer a wonderful summary of this truth. I'll list but a few key verses.

Romans 11:7, 11-12, 20-21, 24-25a

- 7 What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;
- 11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous.
- 12 Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!
- 20 Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;
- 21 for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.
- 24 For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?
- 25 For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;
- 26 and so all Israel will be saved;

Kingdom Of Heaven And Kingdom Of God

Do the Scriptures teach a clear distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, God's people Israel in the Old Testament and God's people spiritual Israel, His church in the New Testament? Dispensationalism would have you say yes. This system is so convoluted and intertwined, that to collapse one area is to collapse the entirety of the theological construct. That's why methinks the dispensationalists doth protest so loudly on all points and then deny any point that clearly defeats their premise.

Appendix D lists all the Kingdom scriptures. The dispensationalists claim there is a distinct difference between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. To the dispensationalists, these are two separate and distinct places and promises.

Let's examine the Scriptures in the New Testament to see if this distinction is valid, and then compare it with the Old Testament writings and prophesies.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a term used only in the gospel of Matthew. It is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Perhaps this is a reason the dispensationalists claim this is a separate and distinct "earthly" kingdom, distinct from the Kingdom of God. It is also the claim of some dispensationalists that the gospel of Matthew is for the Jews only.

They often reject many of the teachings of Jesus on that basis, that, "this id for the Jews only." An in-depth New Testament examination is included in Appendix C.

Upon examination of the Kingdom of God vs the Kingdom of Heaven Scriptures, we must conclude that any such claim that the Kingdom of Heaven is distinct and different from the Kingdom of God is false and misleading. The Scriptures themselves strongly refute any such claim. When we compare the gospel accounts between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, a very interesting result emerges.

The following graphic illustrates the point: Compare the Scriptures for yourself. See Appendix C for a comprehensive listing of all the kingdom scriptures in the NT.

Kingdom of Heaven	Kingdom of God
Matt 4:17	Mark 1:15
Matt 5:3	Luke 6:20
Matt 5:10	Acts 14:22
Matt 5:17-24	Mark 12:29-34
Matt 7:21	Acts 28:23
Matt 8:11	Luke 13:28-29
Matt 10:7-8	Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2,11; 10:9; Ac 28:31
Matt 11:11-12	Luke 7:28; 16:16
Matt 13:11	Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10
Matt 13:24	Mark 4:26
Matt 13:31	Mark 4:30-31; Luke 13:18
Matt 13:33	Luke 13:20-21
Matt 18:3-4; 19:14	Mark 10:14-15; Luke 18:16-17
Matt 19:23	Matt 19:24; Mark 10:23-25; Luke 18:24-25
Matt 20:1	Matt 21:43
Matt 22:1-14	Luke 14:7-11

It is significant to note that the term Kingdom of Heaven is only used in the gospel of Matthew and nowhere else in Scripture. When we compare the use of the term Kingdom of Heaven in the gospel of Matthew, we will notice that is nearly every occurrence of the term, there is a parallel account using the term Kingdom of God.

Based upon the comparison in interchangeability of the Kingdom of Heaven with the Kingdom of God, there is absolutely no evidence to support the dispensationalists claim of there being two different places or promises taking place. The interchangeability of the two terms tends to support singularity, not duplicity.

A thorough study of dispensational eschatological understanding concerning their teaching on pretribulation rapture is examined in-depth in the study, *Rapture: Pre-Tribulation Rupture?*

That study located in the Topical Bible Study section of The Lord's Children Fellowship website. http://TheLordsChildren.org/pretrib.htm

Conclusion

When all aspects of dispensational theology is examined carefully, thoughtfully, truthfully and diligently through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, one is forced to conclude dispensationalism to be an utterly corrupt, ungodly, unbiblical, false and misleading philosophy disguising itself as theology. Dispensational teaching is to be rejected by all bible believing, God fearing Christians.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 But examine everything [carefully;] hold fast to that which is good;