

7. Dispensationalism

I. Dispensationalism

Founder: J. N. Darby (1800-1882), founder of the Plymouth Brethren.

Cyrus I. Scofield (1843-1921)

popularized Darby's ideas.

pamphlet *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1888).

The Scriptures divide time ... into seven unequal periods, usually called dispensations (Eph. 3:2), although these periods are also called ages (Eph. 2:7) and days, as in "day of the Lord." (Ch 2, The Seven Dispensations)

- Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15 KJV).
- the stewardship (dispensation KJV, Gk *oikonomia*) of God's grace given to me for you (Eph 3:2).

"These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions: of sin, and of man's responsibility. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment, marking his utter failure in every dispensation."

	<i>Dispensation</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Judgment</i>
1	Innocence	Garden	expulsion
2	Conscience	to Flood	Flood
3	Human government	Noah-Babel	confusion of tongues
4	Promise	Abraham-Egypt	bondage in Egypt
5	Law	Sinai-Christ	exile
6	Grace	Church age	Great Tribulation judgments
7	Messianic	Millennium	great white throne

Scofield's dispensationalism became widespread through *The Scofield Study Bible* (OUP, 1909; rev. 1917); *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967).

Dallas Theological Seminary

founded 1924 as Evangelical Theological College (renamed 1936) by Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952), who served as first president (1924-52).

Chafer's *Systematic Theology* (8 vols., 1947) laid out a comprehensive premillennial dispensationalism.

Distinctive Features of Dispensationalism

1. progressive revelation: dispensations, often with associated covenants.
2. “literal” interpretation: claim to historical-grammatical method.
3. distinction bt Israel and church

“just as distinctly as Israel stands connected with temporal and earthly things, so distinctly does the church stand connected with heavenly things” (Scofield, *Rightly Dividing*, 1. The Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God.

Abraham has two seeds:

- a. as numerous as the sand on the seashore = physical seed
- b. as numerous as the stars in the sky = spiritual seed

The Components of Premillennial Dispensationalism

The Prophetic Clock

In the first year of Darius the Mede, conqueror of Babylon, Daniel perceived from reading Jeremiah (25:11-12) how many years must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem: 70 years (Dan 9:1-2). This prompted a prayer of confession and petition for forgiveness. Gabriel brought a reply:

Seventy weeks (‘seventy sevens’) are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place” (9:24).

These 70 sevens are assumed to be 70 weeks = 70×7 years = 490 years.

Gabriel divides them into 3 periods: $7 + 62 + 1$, with the final week in turn divided in half.

Progressive Dispensationalism

II. Covenant Theology

The main alternative to dispensationalism is covenant theology.

Three covenants:

1. eternal covenant between Father and Son
2. covenant of works: Adam in garden
3. covenant of grace: Gen 3:15 onwards.

New Covenant Theology