

7 Dispensations - Overview (Version 2/Final)

Wednesday, June 17, 2026 5:56 AM

Readings: Luke 20:34-35; John 1:17; Ephesians 1:7-10, 20-21

Handouts are underlined

Order of Study for the Dispensations and Covenants

See The Seven Dispensations Chart by Michael Penfold for potential readings & overview for each dispensation

See The Five Covenants of Scripture Chart by Michael Penfold for potential readings & overview for each covenant

See The 7 Dispensations, 5 Covenants & 3 Programs of God for a visual overview of how they fit together

Eternity Past > Creation

1. 1st Dispensation - **Innocence (Gen 1-3)**
2. 2nd Dispensation - **Conscience (Gen 4 - Gen 8:19)**
3. Bible Covenants and Covenant with Noah (Noahic) (Gen 6:18)
4. 3rd Dispensation - **Human Government (Gen 8:20 - Gen 11:9)**
5. Covenant with Abraham (Abrahamic) (Gen 15:18)
6. 4th Dispensation - **Promise (Gen 11:10 - Exod 19:7)**
7. 5th Dispensation - **Law (Exod 19:8 - Matthew 27:56)**
 - a. Covenant through Moses (Mosaic) (Exod 24:8)
8. Covenant with David (Davidic) (Psalm 89:3-4, 35-36)
9. 6th Dispensation - **Church/Grace (Acts 2 - Rev 3:22)**
 - a. New Covenant: blessing for the Church (Jer 31:31-34; Matt 26:27-28)
10. Tribulation period - (Matt 24:14-31)
11. 7th Dispensation - **Kingdom (Rev 20:4-6)**
 - a. New Covenant: blessing for Israel (Jer 31:31-34; Matt 26:27-28)

New Heavens & Earth - The Eternal State (The Day of God)

Definitions: Understanding Dispensations

A. The meaning of *dispensation* [G3622] (Ephesians 1:10, Luke 16:2)

- "An administration of affairs, a stewardship, a mode of dealing" (as "the Biden administration") (M Penfold)
- Man's stewardship of God's creation is directed by God in different ways through periods of time.
- Can we compare dispensations to stages of life? (1 Cor 13:11)
 - E.g. Infancy, childhood, adolescence, single adult, married adult, old age
 - Does an infant have the same knowledge and responsibility as an adult/spouse?

B. The meaning of *age* [G165] (Gal 1:4; Eph 1:21; Heb 1:2)

- Used in various ways, such as "for ever", "the world/universe" or "period of time"
- In context of dispensations, it is a **period of time** viewed in relation to what takes place in it. An era marked by spiritual or moral characteristics (M Penfold)
- Also G2540 - Eph 1:10 "fullness of the times", Luke 21:24 "times of the Gentiles"
- Our sovereign God exists outside of time and has a program that He will ensure is fulfilled

The Reason for Dispensations and their Importance

C. Was the concept of dispensations only recently proposed and understood by John Darby?

- See Early church views leading to modern understanding of dispensations handout

D. God doesn't change... so why does He deal with mankind differently throughout history? What is God's end goal?

E. Why is an understanding of dispensations essential to correct Bible interpretation? How does it impact our lives?

- Consider for example:
 - Romans 5:12-14 (Are things today just how God created them? Were things different before the law?)
 - 2 Thes. 2:2 (Are we currently undergoing the Tribulation of God's wrath?)
 - John 1:17; Heb 8:13 (Should we sacrifice animals today?)

Divisions and Distinctions of the Dispensations

F. How many dispensations are there? What determines a true dispensation?

- How do we know the divisions for the dispensations? What marks their start/end?
- Each dispensation is marked by:
 - a. Revelation (Privilege) from God
 - b. Responsibility (Stewardship) of man
 - c. Rebellion (Failure) of man
 - d. Retribution (Judgment) of God

G. How are Bible covenants related to the dispensations?

For future consideration: What changes are seen during each dispensation? Do God's principles of salvation by faith change through the dispensations?