

## What is Dispensationalism?

This is extremely difficult to cover briefly, as it is a whole (and unorthodox) theological system. We will restrict ourselves to concise bullet points.

- **It is new.** It arose around 1830 and there is no reference to its basic teachings in history from any evangelical group.
- **Its origins are heretical.** It began primarily under Edward Irving's influences and thrived in the scandalous Catholic Apostolic Church. Precursors of some teachings came from Jesuit sources and from a deluded teenage girl.
- **Key teachings** include: a) the separation of Israel from the church. b) A strict literal interpretation of scripture. c) The division of history into several dispensations where God deals differently with his people which all end in failure. d) A 1,000 year golden age where Christ reigns on earth over sinners through Jews on a material throne in Jerusalem.
- **Key errors:** two people of God, whose primary purpose is with Israel; the church is a temporary stop-gap. Thus there are two kingdoms, the most important being an earthly, Jewish kingdom. Different groups teach: three or up to seven judgments, three resurrections, two returns of the Lord and even two forms of salvation. Some teach three types of church. All teach a wrong view of law (antinomianism).
- **Main groups:** there are many variants, the most common being the classical form based upon the Scofield Bible following John Darby's ideas. This teaches a 'secret rapture' when Christ comes secretly to rescue living saints; the earth then experiences a 7-year tribulation before Christ returns again in glory. This view is called Pre-Tribulationalism. Some groups teach that Christians do not have to submit to Christ as Lord.
- **Key theological problems:** Dispensationalism is opposed to the historic Reformed faith. It is impossible to be a consistent Calvinist and hold to it.

The chief error is the separation of the church from God's promises. This results from a failure to see Jesus as the seed of Abraham and the fulfilment of the covenant with God, coupled with the failure to see the church as *in Christ*, and thus a recipient of this covenant. Dispensationalists teach that the covenantal promises pertain only to ethnic Jews and will be fulfilled literally in a future millennium on the earth. Thus all God's blessings are focused on fleshly, material things (such as an earthly, Jewish political kingdom) rather than spiritual blessings in Christ. It repeatedly fails to see the significance of the typology of the OT, even when Jesus and the apostles interpreted the types and prophecies for us. It is impossible to hold these ideas in the face of Matt 21:43, 'Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.' Dispensationalism focuses on the shadows in the law and not Christ himself, failing to see that 'all is new' (2 Cor 5:17). It is dangerous.

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