

## **GREAT DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE**

### **(Special English Edition)**

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For Rogma International, Inc.

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## **DISPENSATIONALISM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Any way to study the Bible is good if it makes its meaning clear. However a person must be faithful to the text as God wrote it. We must not twist the text to mean something it does not mean. Many people have criticized those who divide the Bible according to the dispensational point of view. (See “What is Dispensationalism,” Roman numeral I below.) Liberals (people who do not believe in a millennium) and covenant theologians (those who believe that the CHURCH is the spiritual Israel) are the ones who criticize dispensationalists (people who teach about dispensations). We will try to answer some of these criticisms.

Dispensationalists have the strong belief that God meant exactly what He said in the Bible. They believe that there is no error in the Bible. They believe that a study of the dispensations in the Bible will greatly help any person to understand it.

It is our purpose, in this lesson, to give you some definitions and present dispensationalism as a very good way to study the Bible. This is a good way to study for those who accept that every word in the Bible is true and that the Bible is without error. It is for those who believe that Christ will take the CHURCH to be with Him in heaven at the time of the Rapture. This way of interpretation is based on the belief that the Rapture will happen before the Tribulation (seven years of suffering for the unbelievers when the CHURCH is in heaven) and the Millennium (when Christ will reign on earth for one thousand years).

### **IMPORTANCE OF THIS LESSON**

- ❑ Dispensationalists believe that God did not reveal all the teachings of the Bible to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses or the prophets.
- ❑ Dispensationalists believe that the truth, which God revealed in the Bible, is progressive (God gave truth gradually, a little bit at a time). People did not know the complete meaning of many truths until Christ came and God wrote the New Testament.
- ❑ We recognize that some people carry dispensationalism to the extreme. When people do this they cause other people to seriously criticize this way to study the Bible. We believe that a correct, sensible and reasonable dispensational way to study the Bible will make many parts of it clear. This will make the Bible a book that is alive.

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## **THE LESSON**

### **I. WHAT IS DISPENSATIONALISM?**

It is a system of Bible teaching or hermeneutics (the science of Bible interpretation) which believes:

- A. That from Adam to Christ God revealed a small amount of truth at a time. None of the Old Testament writers or prophets knew all of the truth of God.
- B. That through the various periods of time, God revealed special portions of truth to man and placed man under a particular test regarding this revelation.

### **II. WHAT IS A DISPENSATION?**

- A. The word comes to the English language from the Latin word “dispensatio.” In Latin this word means “the action of giving out or distributing.” The idea is to supervise somebody and to put things in order. In other words, a dispensation is a period of time during which God supervises the affairs of man. During this time God demands something from man.

- B. C.I. Scofield said that a dispensation is a period of time during which God tests man. God wants to see if man will obey some particular revelation of the will of God. A dispensation is a special period of time in which God deals with man in a certain way. Dispensations are not different ways that God saves people.
- C. Dr. Graham Scroggie wrote that at various times God works with man in different ways. He works with man as it seems necessary to Him. All through the ages God has one great end in mind.
- D. Dr. Harry Ironside said that a dispensation is how God worked during one special period of time. He does not necessarily work the same way in another period of time.
- E. Some critics attack men who divide the Bible into time periods that we call dispensations. A serious Bible student can easily trace the progress of revelation through the Bible. The student can see time periods in the Bible during which God gave man some responsibility concerning a new revelation of that time period. We call these periods of time dispensations.

### III. THE WAY THE BIBLE USES THE WORD “DISPENSATION”

- A. The word “oiknomein” is found in Luke 16:2. In this verse it means “manager.”
  - B. The noun “oikonomos” is found in Titus 1:7 and 1 Corinthians 4:1. It is used 10 times and is always translated “steward” in the King James Version of the English Bible.
  - C. The noun “oikonomia” is found in 1 Corinthians 9:17; Colossians 1:25; Ephesians 3:2. It is used nine times and is usually translated “dispensation.”
  - D. The Lord Jesus used the term in two parables (Luke 12:42; Luke 16:1,3,8). In both parables, the word means how to manage your property. The word refers to responsibility. It talks about how to manage property that belongs to another person.
  - E. The apostle Peter used the term in 1 Peter 4:10. Peter said that we are stewards (managers) of the gifts God gave to us.
  - F. What Paul taught about dispensations:
    - 1. That God requires faithfulness from the stewards (managers) to whom He reveals the mysteries (1Corinthians 4:1-2).
    - 2. That a dispensation can end. They are definitely about time (Galatians 4:2-4).
    - 3. That God reveals special truths during dispensations (Ephesians 3:2-6).
    - 4. That dispensations are periods of time (Ephesians 3:9).
    - 5. Paul definitely mentions two separate dispensations (Ephesians 1:10; 3:2). Dispensationalists understand these dispensations the same way as Paul does.
- ◆ *The Bible does not name seven dispensations. Paul mentions the word dispensations. It is an acceptable term because the Bible uses it. It shows that this is an idea found in the Bible.*

### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF DISPENSATIONS

We can mention five main things as to what a dispensation is like:

- A. In a dispensation God reveals a part of a truth to man. God’s requirement comes along with this revelation. This requirement has to do with man’s conduct in connection with that special revelation.
  - B. In a dispensation God gives man direction on how to manage his responsibility and how to be obedient to the revelation. God gives man a definite test during a dispensation.
  - C. A dispensation is a period of time during which the special revelation controls man’s actions.
  - D. Every dispensation includes a record of God’s judgment when people fail.
  - E. Dispensations are not just periods of time. They are not different ways in which God saves people! But, they are different ways God deals with man. We can clearly see this in Bible history by new revelations of God’s will and God’s truth. Along with this God gives man a responsibility. God wants man to obey this new truth. Man can easily recognize these different stages of truth. This is what we call a dispensation.
- ◆ *A serious student of the Bible must understand these different dispensations. In order to understand the Bible, a person must make a difference between law and grace, Israel and the Church, the promises made to Abraham and the promises to New Testament believers.*

- ◆ *We can honestly say that every person who believes that the blood of Christ is sufficient, and who believes that we do not need to bring bloody sacrifices to a Jewish altar is a dispensationalist. Every person who worships the Lord on Sunday instead of Saturday is in fact, a dispensationalist.*
- F. Dispensations and ages happen at the same time in history (Ephesians 3:9).

## V. THE RELATIONSHIP OF DISPENSATIONALISM TO PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

- A. A dispensationalist believes that the Bible is a book that gives us a complete revelation of all truth. The Bible is the story of a complete revelation that God gives to man bit by bit, instead of all of it at the same time.
- B. The dispensational way to interpret the Bible helps the student to understand the progress in revelation.

### *Illustration:*

- 1. On Mars Hill Paul said that in the time past, people did not understand God, but God ignored that. Now, God tells every person in the world to change his mind concerning sin (Acts 17:30).
- 2. Moses gave the law, BUT grace and truth CAME by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).
- ◆ *Bernard Ramm was not a dispensationalist, nevertheless as a professor he wrote that dispensationalism helped people to understand clearly how God gave His revelation small bits at a time (progressively).*
- C. When God gave a truth in any special period of time, it did not cease to be truth at the end of that period of time. God gave truth a bit at a time but He also added one truth on top of another. Both truths continued to be true. Take the dispensation of CONSCIENCE as an example. Even though this dispensation came to an end, it is still a truth in our lives today (Romans 2:15; 9:1-2; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 4:2). The same is true of the dispensation of LAW. It is no longer a dispensation but it continues as an important part of Scripture. It is profitable to us today (2 Timothy 3:15-17; Romans 7:7; 15:4; Galatians 3:19, 24; 5:18).

## VI. ANSWERING CRITICS

- A. Some critics say that dispensationalists believe that the Bible shows God saves people in different ways other than by grace through faith.  
ANSWER: This is not true. I have known dispensationalists all my life. None of them believed such foolishness. God has always justified sinners on the basis of faith (Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6; Hebrews 11:7, 13:14-28).
- B. Some critics say that dispensationalism puts divisions in the Bible that are not really there. They say that it destroys the unity (oneness) of the Bible.  
ANSWER: Dispensationalists believe that there are no errors in the Bible. They believe that God breathed every word of the Bible. They also interpret the Bible exactly according to what it says, except when it is clear that a passage is an allegory (a story with a spiritual meaning). Furthermore, a dispensationalist generally believes that Christ will return for His CHURCH before the tribulation (the seven years of suffering). He believes that the tribulation will come before the millennium (the one thousand-year reign of Christ) when Christ will rule this earth. Many reject this view and say that this divides the Bible for no reason.
- C. A few critics raise the question of intelligence. They say that when a person receives a doctor's degree, he stays away from dispensationalism because it is a doctrine of people who are not intelligent.  
ANSWER: There are many fine fundamental Bible teachers with earned Ph.D. degrees who are dispensationalists.
- D. Other critics attack dispensationalism from the viewpoint of history. Some people say that since the belief in dispensationalism is new in history it cannot be true.  
ANSWER: False doctrine came into the early church, too. Some people in the early church sprinkled babies. Other people in the early church believed that baptism saved a person. Because an interpretation of a doctrine is old does not make it right. It is also true that a new way of presenting doctrine is not necessarily wrong. History is not the test of truth! The only absolute test is whether a doctrine is in complete agreement with the Bible.

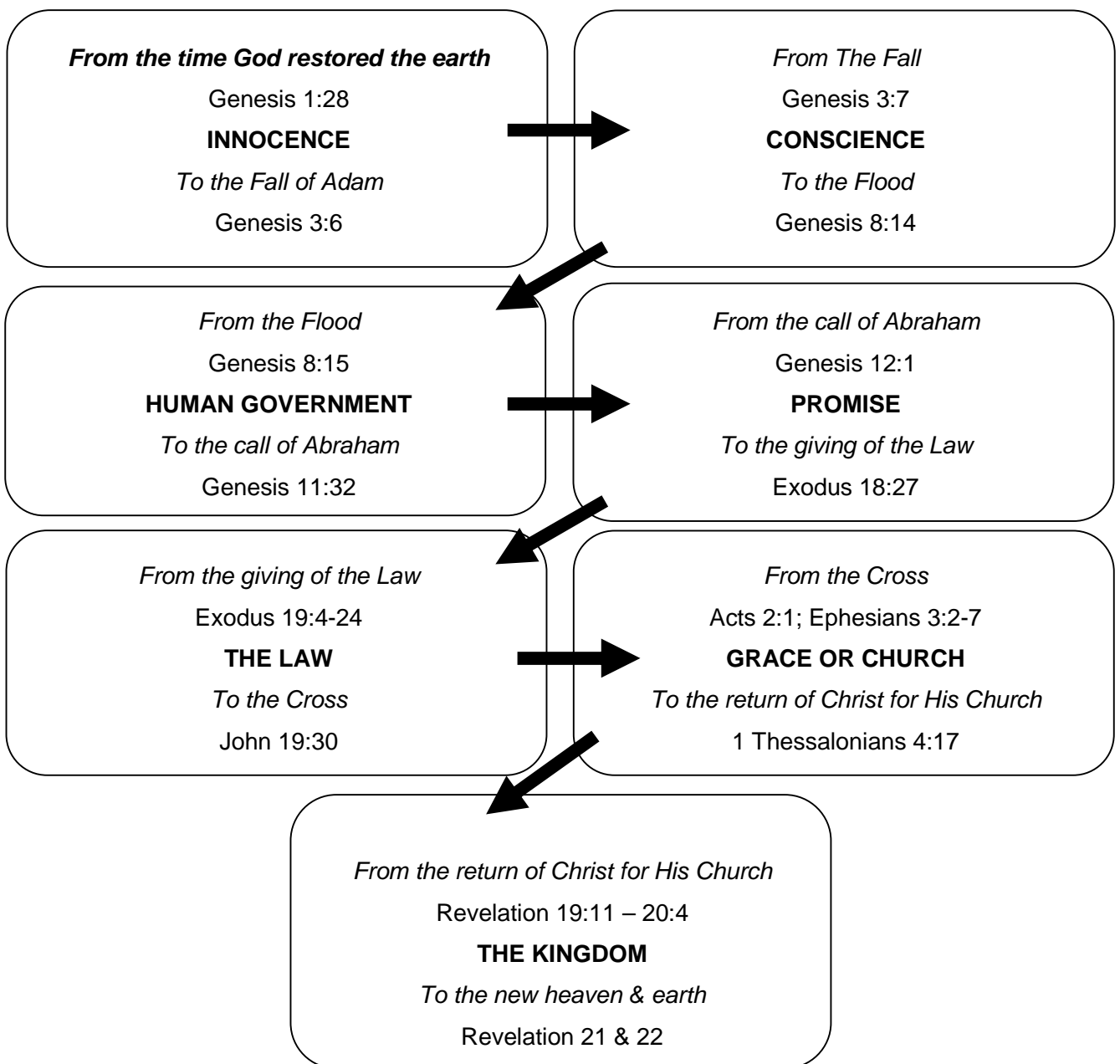
**VII. “A DISPENSATIONAL TIME TABLE” (See chart on page 5)**

Study this chart carefully. Read all the Scripture verses that teach this doctrine. This chart simply presents the time periods during which man is made responsible to obey a special revelation. We suggest seven such periods. However, it is not necessary to say that there are seven in order to be a dispensationalist. Some dispensationalists say that there are two, three, or five such periods. Our position is that we can very clearly see seven such periods.

**VIII. “DISPENSATIONAL BIBLE REFERENCES” (See chart on page 6)**

In this chart we try to show the five characteristics of a dispensation and to list the Scriptures for each one. Study this chart and read all the verses.

**A DISPENSATIONAL TIME TABLE**



**DISPENSATIONAL BIBLE REFERENCES**

<b>THE DISPENSATIONS</b>	<b>MAN'S STATE</b>	<b>GOD'S REVELATION &amp; MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY</b>	<b>MAN'S FAILURE</b>	<b>GOD'S JUDGMENT</b>
<b>INNOCENCE</b> Genesis 1:28 – 3:6	Genesis 1:26	Genesis 2:17	Genesis 3:6-9	Genesis 3:15-19
<b>CONSCIENCE</b> Genesis 4:1 – 8:14	Genesis 3:22-24	Genesis 4:7	Genesis 6:5	Genesis 6:17-18; 7:11
<b>HUMAN GOVERNMENT</b> Genesis 8:15-11:32	Genesis 7:1	Genesis 9:1	Genesis 11:1-11	Genesis 11:5-9
<b>PROMISE</b> Genesis 12:1- Exodus 18:27	Genesis 12:1	Genesis 12:10; 15:17-18 & 26:1-5	Goshen Genesis 47:1- 50:26 In a coffin	Exodus 1:13 (They served with rigor)
<b>LAW</b> Exodus 20 – John 19:30	Exodus 19:4-24	Exodus 19:5	2 Kings 17:7-23	Deuteronomy 28:63-68
<b>GRACE or CHURCH</b> John 19:30 – Cross To 1 Thessalonians 4:17	Luke 19:10	John 1:11-12	2 Timothy 3:1-5	Matthew 24:21
<b>THE RAPTURE</b>	John 14:1-3	1 Thessalonians 4:15-18	2 Thessalonians 2:1-8	Jeremiah 30:7
<b>THE TRIBULATION</b>	Matthew 24:29	Daniel 9:24-27	Daniel 12:1	Revelation 4-18
<b>THE KINGDOM</b> Revelation 19 & 20 New heavens & earth, Revelation 21	Acts 15:16	Isaiah 2:2-4 & Ch. 11	Revelation 20:7-9	Revelation 20:11-15

### **IX. THE VALUE OF DISPENSATIONAL STUDY**

- A. Paul advises Timothy to study so that he will be able to work with the Word of God correctly (2 Timothy 2:15). A study of the dispensations makes a person able to interpret the Bible.
- B. It is absolutely necessary for Bible students to understand that the promises God made to Abraham, to David and to the nation of Israel are different than the promises God made to the CHURCH. When a person studies the Bible according to the dispensations, he will interpret the Bible correctly. He will not spiritualize certain verses in the Bible. He will designate all the promises to those to whom God gave them.
- C. We can easily recognize certain periods of time in which God gave special revelation of His truth to man, and then He gave man a test or responsibility in connection with it. Only dispensations can account for these different periods of time when God unfolded His plans.
- D. All Bible teachers know that there is a difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament time. A dispensational study shows that this difference is correct.
- E. Dispensationalists believe that God will establish Israel in the land of Palestine. God promised this land to Abraham. They believe that Christ will return as “David’s greater Son” and sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem. Christ will reign on earth for one thousand years. To the dispensationalist the return of Christ is the goal of history. A-millennialists and covenant theologians reject this idea. They teach that the struggle between good and evil ends when we get to heaven. Dispensationalism gives a correct goal of history.

### **Conclusion:**

*A dispensationalist then is one who:*

1. Believes that the revelation of truth was progressive.
  2. Believes that the scriptures, as originally given, were verbally inspired and inerrant.
  3. Does not unnecessarily spiritualize or allegorize scripture, but rather gives to them a normal, plain and literal interpretation.
  4. Believes God’s purpose in history and in eternity is His own glory.
- ◆ *In all fairness, we must issue a warning. There are some we call “ultra-dispensationalists” who have brought discredit to the system by their extreme views. For example, some of these utterly discard and disregard the Old Testament, The Sermon on the Mount, and the Gospel of Matthew as having nothing for us today. The view held by most dispensationalists is that “ALL scripture is given by inspiration of God AND IS PROFITABLE...” (2 Timothy 3:16), and that while all scripture is not directed TO us, it all is FOR our learning and benefit. So study “To show thyself approved unto God...” and rightly divide the Word!*

**GREAT DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE EXAM  
LESSON 28**

Questions to be answered by every student enrolled in the Rogma International Free Bible Study Course

Register No \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

**Choose and Round  the correct answer in the following: -**

1. The serious Bible student will find that a study of the dispensations will: (Value 4 points)
  - a. make the Bible a living book to him.
  - b. make all Bible problems become clear.
  - c. make him a better teacher or Christian.
  
2. Dispensationalism is: (Value 4 points)
  - a. a way to study the Bible that looks for all Old Testament prophecies to be fulfilled in the New Testament.
  - b. a way of Bible study that shows that revelation from Adam to Christ was progressive.
  - c. a way of Bible study that looks for types in the Old Testament to be fulfilled in the New Testament.
  
3. Christ used the word “oikonamia” in two parables. It is used in relation to: (Value 3 points)
  - a. responsibility.
  - b. opportunity.
  - c. privilege.
  
4. Peter used the word “oikonomia” in 1 Peter 4:10 to mean: (Value 3 points)
  - a. he had a responsibility.
  - b. he was privileged.
  - c. he was a steward.
  
5. **Mark the four** major characteristics of a dispensation. (Value 12 points)
  - a. A portion of God’s truth is revealed to man along with God’s requirement of man.
  - b. A privilege is extended for those who keep the requirement.
  - c. God gives a designation of man’s responsibility during each dispensation.
  - d. Every dispensation closes with a record of man’s failure.
  - e. There is always a record of rewards earned during the dispensation.
  - f. There is always a record of God’s judgment at the close of the dispensation if man failed.
  
6. One clear characteristic of a dispensation is that it: (Value 3 points)
  - a. shows a new way to be saved.
  - b. clearly shows that it is only a period of time.
  - c. distinguishes a stage of revelation.
  
7. A truth given during a certain dispensation is valid: (Value 3 points)
  - a. only during that dispensation.
  - b. into another dispensation.
  - c. until Jesus returns.

*Dispensationalism*

8. A dispensational study of the Bible helps in differentiating among the promises because: (Value 3 points)
- all the promises in the whole Bible are for believers today.
  - only promises in the New Testament are for believers today.
  - promises are valid only to those to whom they are made.
9. An “ultra dispensationalist” is someone who: (Value 3 points)
- believes that all Scripture is given by God.
  - disregards the Old Testament and the Gospel of Matthew.
  - does not believe that the book of “Revelation” should be part of the Bible.

**Matching**

10. Some of the things Paul taught about dispensations were: (Value 9 points)  
(Place the letter in front of the Bible reference on the line before the phrase.)
- |                                                                      |                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| ___ faithfulness is required of those to whom mysteries are revealed | a. Galatians 4:2-4     |
| ___ dispensations are connected with time.                           | b. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 |
| ___ dispensations are related to specific revelation.                | c. Ephesians 3:2-6     |

**Fill in the Blanks**

11. To complete this statement, pick the correct words from underneath the statement.  
(Value 16 points)
- “Through various \_\_\_\_\_ God revealed special \_\_\_\_\_ to man and placed him under a particular \_\_\_\_\_ regarding \_\_\_\_\_.”

**(Words to choose from: years, periods of time, requirements, opportunities, portions of truth, test, privilege, reward, responsibility, revelation)**

12. Fill in the blank spaces using the words below. (Value 16 points)
- A dispensationalist believes that the revelation of truth was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A dispensationalist believes that the Bible, as originally written, was \_\_\_\_\_ inspired and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A dispensationalist believes in the \_\_\_\_\_ interpretation of the Bible.

**(Words to choose from: true, progressive, Scripture, plenary, verbally, inerrant, partially, literal, symbolical)**

13. List the dispensations as taught in this lesson. (Value 21 points)

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 7. _____ |          |