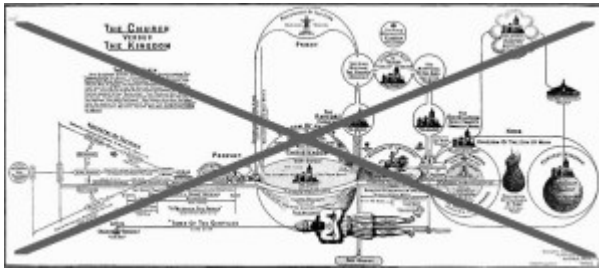


Deconstructing Dispensationalism



A complex dispensational timetable not taught in the Bible.

By Steve Gregg

Introduction

This article is an excellent talk about what Dispensationalism is, the history behind it, and why it is a set of false heretical eschatological doctrines. The Church up till sometime in the 19th century did *not* embrace the doctrines of Dispensationalism! They embraced what the Bible actually teaches. It's called Covenant Theology, man's relationship with God through various Covenants throughout time. Covenant Theology says the Book of Revelation is centered on Jesus Christ. Dispensationalism teaches it's centered on the nation of Israel. What saith the Bible?

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for **the testimony of Jesus** is the spirit of prophecy.

It was only the other day when my wife and I discovered pastor Steve Gregg's YouTube channel. We think he's a great teacher! He teaches a myriad of Bible subjects.

It was my aim to transcribe pastor Gregg's entire audio of one hour and 18 minutes, but it's slow tedious work for me now because I have the use of only one finger of my right hand to type since my accident on Sept. 24, 2023 because my left arm is still in a cast.. On top of that, it appears I picked up a cold virus and haven't been feeling well. Maybe someday I will transcribe the entire talk. But in the meantime, you can listen to the audio at the bottom of the article.

Partial Transcription

Dispensationalism is a construct, it's a theological construct, it's a framework through which Bible theology is interpreted. The Bible is read through the lens of the construct by very very many Christians.

When I first really became a student of eschatology, and this is not just an eschatological system but it is in eschatology that we usually discover

dispensationalism first. When I began to study eschatology originally, I never knew there was anything other than dispensationalism. In fact, I didn't know the word dispensationalism. Probably you didn't either.

(Note: I sure didn't! I followed dispensational doctrines since from 1971 to 1994 except for the notable exceptions of the doctrines of pre-tribulation rapture and the restoration of the nation of Israel by the United Nations as a fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Circa October of 1973 I learned the truth about those two doctrines from a good Bible teacher who rejected C.I. Scofield's teaching on those subjects. Unfortunately he didn't reject all of Scofield's doctrines. It wasn't until December 2014 that I first learned the true interpretation of Daniel 9:27 and the term, "dispensationalism.")

Many people say, "Well, what's that?" Well, turns out they're dispensationalists and always have been but never knew the name of it.

My teachers never said, "Okay, this view is the dispensational view." They just said, "This is what the Bible teaches." And since dispensationalism is so broadly taught by evangelicals in America especially, it was a pretty good chance you would hear almost everyone on the radio, almost every preacher, and say a Baptist or a Pentecostal or non-denominational Church would be taking this position if they happen to be speaking on the subject of End-times or Israel or any subject like that.

And so, I actually never heard any other view. And my view changed only by my own study of the Scripture. Just one at a time these pieces of this puzzle began to be – I had to reject them. My pastor at the time had said, and he gave this counsel from the pulpit, that as you read through the Bible you will find things that don't seem to fit your understanding. But don't worry about that, don't stop reading. Just put those aside for the time being as it were, put them in a drawer in your head, and just keep reading, and in time things will become more clear. And this is certainly true. As I would read through the Bible in my teenage years, my late teenagers is what I began to teach, and I was teaching dispensationalism though I didn't know that's what it was. As I studied my Bible I did a great deal, I read my Bible whenever I could, and whenever there was something else I had to be doing I was reading my Bible.

Over the years I did begin to see things that were like puzzle pieces that didn't seem to fit the overall picture I had of Scripture. There were verses that just didn't seem to agree with it. But like my teacher told me to do, just put them back in the shelf of your mind and don't worry about it. Just keep studying. Well eventually I had so many puzzle pieces in my drawer that I thought, I wonder why there would be so many pieces and so many things in Scripture that didn't fit what I thought the Bible generally was teaching. And then I began to pull those out and look at them and I realized that I was working on a different puzzle, that the pieces that I had in my drawer made a different picture. And then when I began to see that other picture, and this took some years from at least between four and six years of my own study I was teaching dispensationalism but beginning to find problems of various sorts, but eventually I had enough pieces of that drawer to begin the construction of another picture. And then I began to see that the whole Bible

to my mind read more smoothly and more reasonably through this other picture.

And I didn't realize until later that someone told me that what I had been taught and had been teaching was called dispensationalism. I didn't know there's a name for the new picture. In fact, I wasn't sure if anyone else had seen that picture before because I never met anyone who taught it and never read a book about it. But once I changed my view, I had come over to what I guess would be called the "covenantal view." I don't use that term for it. I would call my eschatological views "amillennial." I didn't know that was what it was called. Someone had to tell me that that's what it was called after I'd already become one because I'd never encountered it. I thought I was the only person who had thought these things, and I was actually afraid to speak them. But until I found out that this is what the Church had taught through most of its history, I became less shy about speaking out what my views were.

So the dispensational view is a relatively new view. I'm going to cover four things here. I will talk about the history of dispensationalism, then I'm going to talk about three of the distinctives of dispensationalism. There may be more but these are the big ones that set dispensationalism apart from other viewpoints.

The first distinctive is their view of a literal interpretation of the Bible.

The second is going to be on the distinction between Israel and the Church as they understand that.

The third is going to be on their eschatology which has some distinctives that the Church wasn't teaching before dispensationalism arose. And when was that? We come to first the history. Where did dispensationalism come from? Almost everyone agrees that the system called dispensationalism began with a man named John Nelson Darby around the year 1830. Now, from time to time you'll find people objecting to this suggestion. They're saying, "No Darby didn't start this. This was taught by some of the Church fathers." I have had the pleasure actually reading a couple of books. One is called *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, and one was called *Ancient Dispensational Truths*. And both of these books try to point out that there were a lot of elements of dispensationalism around before Darby formulated them. In fact, some of the earliest Church fathers including Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Hippolytus, they weren't dispensationalist by any means and even these books say they weren't, these are written by dispensationalist authors. And they're trying to prove that dispensationalism wasn't a novel thing in 1830 when Darby came up with it. But they do admit these guys they're quoting from earlier were not dispensationalists in the sense that we think of the term today but they did have some ideas similar to dispensationalism.

Now, we have to understand that when it comes to Church fathers and then the later Church theologians, there were all kinds of different camps. I mean the Church fathers didn't all agree about things. They did agree on in many cases on things that most of us would reject. In fact, they agreed with each other on things that dispensationalists reject, for example, infant baptism. A lot of the Church fathers believed in infant baptism and most dispensationalists don't. So you're going to find that there's no consensus among the earlier

Church teachers on these matters.

But what Darby did, Darby was part of a movement called the Plymouth Brethren which was kind of a radical breakaway from the establishment Church. He was an Anglican scholar, a really very intelligent man. He made his own translation of the Bible. The Darby translation is still available on many of the Bible apps where you've got several translations, the Darby translations. He wrote many theology books and he formulated the system of beliefs that are called dispensationalism today. They were also called Darbyism because of his name, Darby. In fact, in the early days it wasn't called dispensationalism, it was called Darbyism, and the people who taught it were called Darbyites.

I didn't know until just the other day that an author that I really like named Philip Morrow seems to be the one who coined the term dispensationalism. He didn't believe in it. He wrote a book against it called *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. In it he critiqued dispensationalism. I didn't realize that he's considered the first back in the 1920s to actually give it the name dispensationalism. Before that, it was Plymouth Brethrenism, or it was Darbyism, and it had other names. Today everyone knows it by the term dispensationalism.

It's called that because there were dispensations in his system that refer to periods of time, distinct periods of time, where God was testing His people by various tests. They believe there were seven dispensations, and that each one had a different test. Now, this is interesting to get into but I'm not going to get into it because the existence of dispensations is not really that controversial. From the earliest days, the Church fathers spoke about the Old Testament dispensation as distinguished from the New Testament dispensation. That was generally the way they used the word dispensation. It was like a period of time in the Old Testament as opposed to a period of time in the New Testament. Darby had the dispensations broken up into seven distinct ones. Five of them were in the Old Testament. I won't go into them right now because it's not the main thing I want to discuss. But Darby is the one who is the father of the system, and even if some elements that he incorporated were known to have been taught by some people before him, and he made a few of them from even the Church fathers, he put this together as a system and it's his baby. And frankly, all Church historians agree with this.

Now, Darby was in England, but it's probably in the 20th century America became the main distributor of dispensationalism to the Church worldwide. In America there's a name James Inglis, who put out a magazine in the late 1800s from 1854 to 1872. This man James Inglis put out a magazine called *Waymarks in the Wilderness* in America. And this was widely read and it began to have an influence on many evangelicals in the country. And D.L. Moody who was a very famous evangelist, picked up these ideas. He lived from 1837 which of course he was born around the time Darby's views were becoming popular in England. But Moody was American. But from 1837 to 1899, Moody tended to popularize this viewpoint.

And some other people much less known than him, one named James H Brookes in 1876 began something called the Niagara Bible Conference movement at Niagara Falls up in Ontario and upper New York State. They had these conferences

every year except for one from 1876 to 1897. These conferences were attended by leading evangelical pastors and interested parties and scholars and so forth, and they basically promoted the dispensational view on American soil.

The big break that dispensationalism got in America was the Scofield reference Bible. In 1909, a lawyer named Cyrus Scofield put out a Bible with notes in it. It was considered to be controversial by non-dispensationalists because it was the first time somebody had decided to write his theological positions on the same page with the Scriptures and put them in the Bible and call it the Bible. Now of course, Scofield didn't claim that his own notes at the bottom of the page were Scripture, but I mean they didn't have all these study Bibles we have now. We have lots of study Bibles now, there are probably dozens of them, and in each of them, someone writes their explanations and notes and so forth at the bottom of a Bible page so you can go through the whole Bible and read somebody's commentaries on it. That's what Scofield did in 1909. He did so specifically to spread the dispensationalist viewpoint. His Bible sold like crazy, I think three million copies sold really early on.

There are lots of Christians who carry the Scofield Bible. I actually wore out four Scofield Bibles when I was young! I actually wore the covers off of them and they were not bad covers, I just used them so much.

(Note: After I came to know true salvation in Jesus Christ in 1971 while serving in the USAF at McClellan Air Force Base near Sacramento California, the brother and fellow airman who helped lead me to Christ, David Weeks from Alabama, urged me to buy a Scofield Reference Bible for my very first Bible. I didn't heed his suggestion and got a Zondervan KJV Bible instead. In retrospect when I think about it now, what good reason would I have not listening to the advice of a brother who had been such a blessing to me? I don't see why I didn't listen to him unless it was the Holy Spirit who didn't want me to get a Scofield Bible! But though I didn't get one, I was still influenced by dispensationalism which others taught me.)

My pastor at the time, Chuck Smith, was using the Scofield Bible. It was the dispensational Bible, the go-to Bible for dispensational teaching, the Scofield Bible. Now, of course, there's been quite a few other study Bibles put out. Most of them are put out by dispensationalists, but not everyone. There are a few out there that are not put up by dispensationalists, but most of them are. And I suspect that the reason is because if you want to promote dispensationalism, then what you don't want to do is let people read the Bible for themselves. You need to put the notes in there. If you just read the Bible yourself, you won't get the dispensational ideas out of it, because in my opinion, they're not there. But if they're in the notes at the bottom of the page then of course the notes can tell you how to look at the passage in a dispensational way. And that's what Scofield's Bible did and many many study Bibles do today.

A very important event in the promotion of dispensationalism in America was the establishment of the evangelical theological seminary in Dallas, Texas. A man, Lewis Sperry Chafer, started this in 1924, and it became Dallas Theological Seminary. Most of you may have heard of Dallas Theological

Seminary. Almost all radio preachers have gone there. Almost all prophecy writers have gone there. It was established to promote dispensationalism, and it did a great job of it. John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and Dwight Pentecost, were among the names of people who were professors there. Later on, Hal Lindsey who wrote *The Late Great Planet Earth* was a graduate of there, Chuck Swindoll more recently was chancellor there at Dallas. It's hard to find a person who ever writes or speaks on prophecy who didn't ever go to Dallas Theological Seminary, or at least read commentators by those who did.

I don't know if you can still find Christian bookstores. Everyone buys online now. But I used to go into Christian bookstores all the time and to the commentary section. And I'd pull the commentary off the shelf and I'd read on the back who the author was. And I don't think I ever pulled one off the shelf where the author hadn't gotten his doctorate or his master's or some part of his education at Dallas Theological Seminary. J. Vernon McGee was a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. So some very influential people in Christian media and writers on the subject of prophecy studied at Dallas, and that's what Dallas was for. It was there to teach people to promote dispensationalism.

I mentioned that Hal Lindsey had gone there. If you don't know who he is, in 1970 he put out a book called *The Late Great Planet Earth*. It was the greatest popularization of dispensationalism to have ever come out up to that point in 1970. By 1990, over 28 million copies of *The Late Great Planet Earth* had sold, almost 30 million copies in the first twenty years. I think it's still in print. It did predict some things that could have possibly come true on the timeline that he suggested, but I think he modifies the book and puts out new additions once in a while. He was the most successful popularizer of dispensational ideas out there and his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, it was not his only book but it's his first, and it was his most successful. It eventually sold many many millions, tens of millions of copies of course.

Then in the early 70s, there were some movies that came out that many of you may not be old enough to remember. In 1972, a movie came out called, *A Thief in the Night*. It was followed by two sequels. One was called *A Distant Thunder*, and one was called *All the King's Men*. These were low-budget movies that came out based on the dispensational timeline. Basically, the idea of the story was some people had missed the rapture, and so it depicts the horrors of their life in the tribulation. That might sound familiar if you read the *Left Behind* series. Well, this is long before the *Left Behind* series, this is back in the early 70s. And over 300 million people saw those movies! Back then it was probably more than the population of the United States, 300 million people saw those movies. They were very poorly made that you knew everyone was interested in the End-times, and that's what they portrayed, supposedly from a dispensational point of view.

So that was in the early 70s. But by the end of the 70s, by 1979, Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye started something called the Moral Majority. And one of their main reasons for starting it was to push for American support of the state of Israel. Now, this was based on their dispensational understanding of the importance of Israel in the last days, and the Moral Majority wasn't just about Israel but it was a politically active movement, Jerry Falwell was a

pastor and Tim LaHaye, I think he was not a pastor, I think he was mainly an author. I knew of his works from years earlier.