

Appendix 1: Covenant Theology Compared with Dispensationalism

	Covenant Theology	Dispensationalism
<i>God's People</i>	1 people comprised of saints in OT and saints in NT	2 peoples: Israel is an earthly people, the church is a heavenly people
<i>God's Plan for His People</i>	To call out people (in OT & NT) into one body - his church	An earthly kingdom for Israel after Christ's return & a heavenly kingdom for the church. Varied opinions whether these two will be distinct in eternity
<i>God's Plan of Salvation</i>	1 plan seen in the Covenant of Grace beginning with Adam. All are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.	Generally understood to be by grace through faith in all dispensations. However, the content of faith varies until the full revelation of God in Christ.
<i>Eternal Destiny of God's People</i>	God's 1 people in God's presence for eternity	Varied opinions
<i>Understanding Scripture</i>	Some passages are literal, others are figurative. Sees more continuity. Sees all Scripture as outworking of Cov. of Red. From Genesis 3 onward, the Cov. of Grace progressively unfolds.	Stresses a literal reading with literal fulfillment. Sees more discontinuity. Sees 7 (or somewhere from 4-12) dispensations in which God relates differently with his people.
<i>Birth of the Church</i>	All the redeemed comprise the church. Pentecost was not the beginning of the church but was the pouring out of the Spirit for empowerment for the NT age	Born on the day of Pentecost; the church is not found in the OT. The church age is seen as a parenthesis in God's ongoing plan with Israel.
<i>OT Prophecies Concerning Israel</i>	Some are for ethnic/national Israel. Some are for God's 1 people (Israel/NT church)	Pertain to ethnic/national Israel. The NT church was not prophesied in the OT but was a hidden mystery.
<i>Purpose of Christ's First Coming</i>	To atone for the sin of God's people and establish the New Israel (the NT church) under the New Covenant (fulfill the covenant of grace)	To establish an earthly, physical Messianic kingdom for Israel. They rejected Christ's offer so the establishment was delayed.
<i>The Fulfillment of the New Covenant</i>	The New Covenant is fulfilled and inaugurated in Jesus in the NT	Varied opinions. But all will place Israel as participating in the New Covenant in some way. Some believe the church participates as well but in a different manner.
<i>The Millennium</i>	Either amillennial, postmillennial, or (some) premillennial.	Premillennial, often pretribulation (but not always). Christ will return after the church age to establish a literal 1,000-year reign on David's throne over Israel
<i>Christ's Second Coming</i>	Christ will bring judgement and the eternal state	(most) Christ's coming will follow the Rapture and tribulation. His purpose is to establish his 1,000-year reign, then the judgement & the eternal state.

*Adapted from a summary of a book by Dr. Richard Belcher (<https://www.monergism.com/comparing-covenant-theology-and-dispensational-theology#>) & a chart from Faith Bible Church (<http://faithbibleonline.net/MiscDoctrine/DispCov.htm>).

The following is copied from Davis Morgan's class on Covenant Theology and may be useful for a greater understanding of dispensationalism.

What is Dispensational Theology?¹

A school of evangelical Christian thinking that developed in the 19th century and was extremely influential in American Evangelicalism in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Dispensationalists have historically had an extremely high view of Scripture, been very zealous for God's Word and the spread of the Gospel and been highly successful popularizers of Biblical content (*i.e., they aren't ghouls and we shouldn't hate them*).

Important names in the development of Dispensationalism: John Nelson Darby, C.I. Scofield

Four governing concepts:

1. The literal interpretation of prophecy - attempts to take the entire Bible at its most plain, normal reading. Dispensationalists do, however, acknowledge the existence of figurative language in prophecy
2. Fundamental distinction between Israel and the Church.

"The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to the earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity..."²

3. What is a dispensation in Dispensationalism?

The dispensations in Dispensationalism are distinct periods of time in the history of salvation. Each dispensation refers to "a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God." (*New Scofield Bible*, pg. 3, n.3). There are seven total dispensations or ages in this system.

4. Seven Dispensation System
 - i. Age of Innocence (Creation - Fall)
 - ii. Age of Conscience (The Fall - The Flood)
 - iii. Age of Human Government (Noah - Tower of Babel)
 - iv. Age of Promise (Abraham - Moses)
 - v. Age of Law (Moses - John the Baptist)
 - vi. Age of The Church (Starting at Pentecost)
 - vii. Age of The Kingdom (the millennial reign of Christ on earth)

Critique of Dispensational Theology³

Dispensationalism fails to do justice to the basic unity of the Bible.

- The differences **between the dispensations outweigh the theme of the one way of salvation**
- **Specifically, the role of Genesis 3:15 in setting the course for the rest of the biblical message of redemption in Christ is lost.**
- "The principle of discontinuity between one dispensation and another has [in Dispensationalism], overruled and virtually nullified the principle of progressive revelation" (Hoekema, 195).

The teaching that God has a separate purpose for Israel and the church is an error.

- In **Galatians 6:15-16**, for example, Paul explicitly calls the church "the Israel of God."

¹Borrowing heavily from Vern Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* and Ligon Duncan's Course Lectures.

² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Dispensationalism* (Dallas: Seminary Press, 1936), quoted in Hoekema, pg. 187.

³ From Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp.194-222 (Chapter 15)

- Paul preached the Christian church and its gospel as the fulfillment of Israel's hope in the O.T. (Acts 13:32ff).
- Peter implicitly calls the church Israel in 1 Peter 2:9
- O.T. terms affiliated with Israel such as "seed of Abraham," "Zion," and "Jerusalem," are often used of the Church in the N.T.

The O.T. does not teach a future millennial kingdom on earth.

- Passages that Dispensationalists hold to be referencing the millennial kingdom are actually referencing the new earth (Isaiah 65:17ff; Isaiah 11:6ff; Ezekiel 40-48; Isaiah 2:1ff).

The Bible does not teach a future, millennial restoration of the Jews to the Promised Land.

- Most passages that Dispensationalists claim to refer to a millennial restoration of the Jews, are more likely foretelling the return of the Israelite remnant from Babylonian captivity, which occurred centuries before Christ.

Dispensational teaching about the postponement of the kingdom of God is unbiblical.

- Not all Jews in Jesus' day rejected the kingdom. Jesus' own words (to Jews) about the kingdom show no sign of postponement or failure (Matt. 12:28; 16:19).
- Jesus never offered an earthly, this-world kingdom to the Jews of His day (John 18:36).
- The Dispensational view decentralizes the cross of Christ. It practically suggests that Christ only went to the cross because His kingdom was "rejected." Christ, on the other hand, firmly stated that He had to suffer to enter His glory, as this was the plan all along (Luke 24:26).

There is no biblical basis for the Dispensational treatment of the church as a "parenthesis" in God's dealings with Israel.

- God's dealings with O.T. Israel have the ingathering and blessing of the nations in view from the get-go (Genesis 12:3).
- The Bible teaches continuity between God's people, O.T. and N.T. (Exodus 12:6, Septuagint's use of the term 'ekklesia' to translate Hebrew 'qahal' in reference to Israel; 1 Corinthians 3:16f; Ephesians 2:21f; Hebrews 12:2).

There is no biblical basis for predicting further conversions to Christ following His return.

- The clear indication of Scripture is that the entire church has been gathered by the time Christ returns, and all believers (and unbelievers) are resurrected when He comes (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 3:12f; Thess. 4:16f; 2 Pet. 3:4; Matt. 25:1-13).

The millennium of Revelation 20 is not the millennium Dispensationalists argue for.

- Dispensationalists claim this millennium concerns only those who are still alive on the earth. Resurrected saints play only an incidental role. But Rev. 20:4 speaks of people coming to life to reign, implying resurrected saints rather than those living on the earth. Conversely, Rev. 20:4-6 etc, makes no mention at all of the reign of those still living on the earth.
- Dispensationalists claim the millennial reign will be established by God in fulfillment of His promises to Israel in the O.T., but, neither the Jews nor the land of Canaan are mentioned at all in this passage. The text itself makes no mention of what Dispensationalists claim to be its central purpose.