

# The Dispensations

From Cover to Cover

## Rightly dividing the Word of God.

Casey and I are especially interested in a catechism for *daily* \_\_\_\_\_ *worship* in our homes. In such a family worship guide, typically five questions would be asked and answered each day for 30 days, covering all 140 questions and answers. This would be a really great way to teach our children many core principles of our Christian faith.

I have this one catechism, **A Guide to Family Worship**, and it's really good! But being covenantal, and believing that the Church is now the new Israel, it asks this question. Number 86: "What day of the week is the Christian Sabbath?" Answer: "The first day of the week, called the Lord's Day." But is that rightly dividing the Word of God? Is Sunday truly the Christian Sabbath? *And what about the tithe*. Is that Old Covenant or New Covenant teaching? And why do the majority of reformed covenantalists practice *infant baptism*? It's actually rooted in the Old Testament, and became the sign of the covenant that replaced circumcision. But no where in the NT is infant baptism practiced. What is taught and practiced is believer's baptism (Matthew 28:19).

A primary reason why I'm bringing this series to us is because of my concern that we **rightly divide the Word of God**. Again, I highly regard my reformed and covenantal brothers and sisters in Christ. And we typically agree on nearly all major doctrines. But, because of our single method of interpretation, this is where we respectfully disagree.

I believe the Bible demonstrates that there are progressive and distinct periods of time during which God uniquely works out his eternal plan on earth. As I shared at the beginning of this series, Charels Ryrle defines dispensationalism in this way: "Dispensationalism views the world as a household run by God. In His household-world, God is administering its affairs according to His will and in various stages [in the progress] of revelation in the passage of time." Michael Vlach puts it this way: "A dispensation is a noticeable era when God administers and deals with His creation in a unique way. It could be an era such as the Tribulation

**John 1:16-17:** The Mosaic Law was in operation for the nation of Israel. The era that followed, the Church Age, is characterized by "grace upon grace, for grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." These are very different and identifiable dispensations in the unfolding of history.

**Acts 1:6-9:** And in chapter 2, the Holy Spirit came, Peter preached, and the Church was born! The Church Age, I believe, ends with the letter from Christ to the Church in Laodicea (Revelation 3).

Beginning next week, we will slow down, and I will walk you through the next three dispensations. And this is where traditional dispensationalists and revised dispensationalists don't fully agree. Traditionalists bunch the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> together—**Grace & Wrath**, and leave out all together the 9<sup>th</sup> dispensation, **Eternity**.

## 7. Wrath (Revelation 4-19).

**1 Thessalonians 5:8-10.** Now **Revelation 4**. The Tribulation Period is set up in chapters 4-5 by the apostle John's vision of heaven, just before the outpouring of **God's wrath** on wicked earth. In 6-18, the scroll unrolls until it reaches the feet of Christ as His Second Coming (19). During the Tribulation, God will prepare Israel and the world for Christ's return.

## 8. Kingdom (Revelation 20).

## 9. Eternity (Revelation 21-22).

### Practical benefits of dispensational theology:

1. It exalts a consistent, \_\_\_\_\_, normal, literal approach to the whole of Scripture, *from cover to cover*.
2. It helps us study the Bible within its \_\_\_\_\_ context, so that we *rightly divide the Word of God*.

Period when God unleashes His wrath upon an unbelieving world in preparation for His Kingdom.” The question arises, how many of these eras are there from the beginning of human history to the very end?

The Bible does not specifically tell us how many ages there are, but as we work through the human-history eras, we’ll see that it’s not hard to identify changes in how God’s administration over people changes from one era to the next, and why some see seven while others see nine.

## The dispensations:

### 1. Innocence (Genesis 1-3).

Renald Showers wrote an excellent book comparing covenant and dispensation theology, **There Really Is a DIFFERENCE**. He says, “The first dispensation began with the creation of man, and ended with the \_\_\_\_\_ of man from God.”

**1:26:** On day six of creation week...

**2:15-17:** The Lord gave Adam and Eve only one boundary, with the warning that if they break through it, a terrible curse will follow.

**3:6:7: The Fall from God.** And when they heard the sound of God walking in the garden, for the first time in their lives they were terrified. And their world plunged from a sinless and innocent holiness into a curse of chaotic, unholy \_\_\_\_\_, death, darkness, and destruction.

### 2. Conscience (Genesis 4-8).

**From the Fall to the \_\_\_\_\_.** When the holy couple broke away from God’s rule, there was no written law, only godly prophets like Abel, Enoch, and Noah. So God left humanity to follow their fallen conscience. The result was that humanity thoroughly corrupted themselves and the earth (4:8). The end result was the great worldwide Flood.

### 3. Government (Genesis 9-11).

\_\_\_\_\_ **government.** In Genesis 9:1, “God blessed them and said to them to be fruitful and multiply *and fill the earth.*” He gave them an-

imals for food, He commanded them to put murderers to death, which became human government’s responsibility, and He established Noah’s covenant with them, that He would never again destroy the world with water. But instead of filling the earth, Noah’s offspring united together and attempted to exalt themselves above God and against God by building the Tower of Babel (11:1-4). So God came down!

### 4. Promise (Genesis 12-Exodus 18).

God’s promises to Abraham are found in chapters 12, 15, 17, and 22. In chapter 26, God makes a promise to Isaac, and in chapter 28, He makes a promise to Jacob. And all the promises are basically the same, promising to make Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob into a great nation, God’s people who would be blessed forever. This era ends when Israel is delivered from Egypt, and Moses leads them to Mount Sinai in Exodus 18.

### 5. Law (Exodus 19:1-John 20:30).

This dispensation begins in Exodus 19 with the giving of the Law of Moses, and continues through John 21—the end of the gospels, after Israel rejected their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Exodus 20, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Understand something here. All of the Commandments are repeated in the NT, except the Fourth Commandment in verse 8, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” We should observe *the Sabbath principle* of working and resting, but in our present dispensation, we’re never commanded to keep the Sabbath. And in time, in the book of Acts, the Gentile churches met on Sunday, not on Saturday. And nowhere in the NT is this command repeated—*this is not the Christian sabbath.*

### 6. Grace (Acts-Revelation 3).

It’s also been called the **Church \_\_\_\_\_** (Acts 1-Revelation 3), from the ascension of Christ in Acts 1 to the end of Church Age in Revelation 3. Some would say that **the age of grace** began at the coming of Christ, and in a sense that’s true. The Church wasn’t born until Acts 2, but special grace arrived with Christ. Although the grace of God was functioning throughout the OT, it clearly began to function in a new and powerful way during the life of Christ.