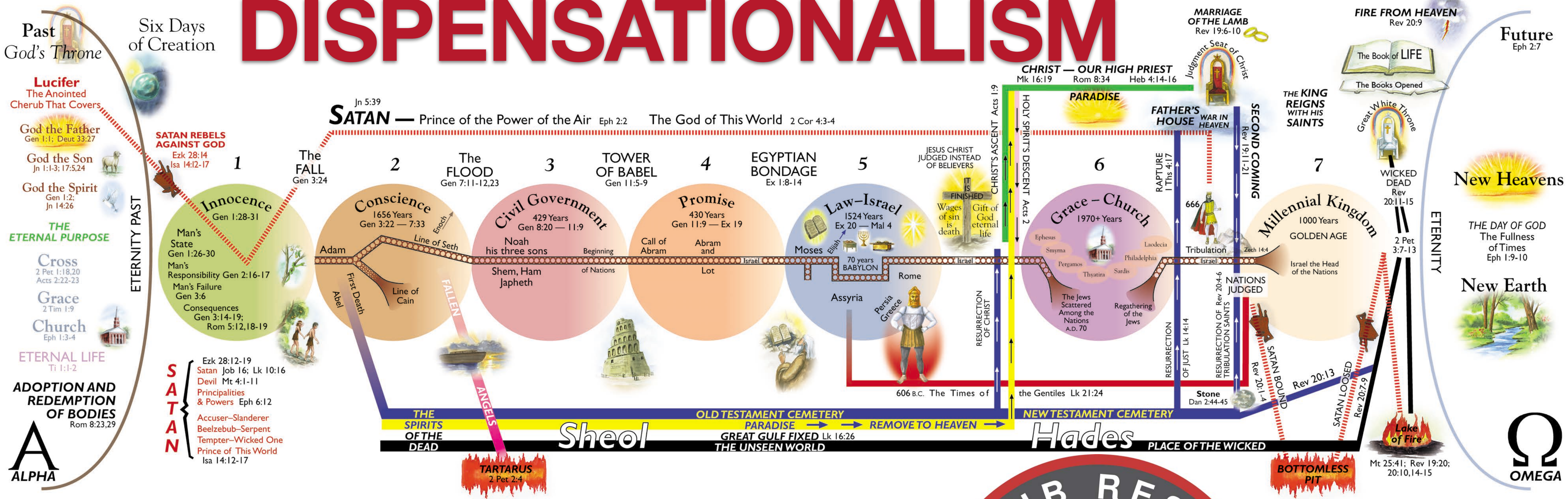


# A HISTORY OF DISPENSATIONALISM



by Thomas Ice  
 The Pre-Trib  
 Research Center



# The Biblical Dispensations

Eternity Past

Creation

Innocence



Responsibility

**Obey God**  
Gen 1:26-28;  
2:15-17

Failure

**Disobedience**  
Gen 3:1-6

Judgment

**Curse and Death**  
Gen 3:7-19

The Fall

Conscience



**Do Good, Blood Sacrifice**  
Gen 3: 5, 7, 22; 4:4

**Wickedness**  
Gen 6:5-6,  
11-12

**Flood**  
Gen 6:7, 13:  
7:11-14

The Flood

Human Government



**Scatter and Multiply**  
Gen 8:15-9:7

**Did Not Scatter**  
Gen 11:1-4

**Confusion of Languages**  
Gen 11:5-9

Israel

Tower of Babel

Promise



**Dwell in Canaan**  
Gen 12:1-7

**Dwelt in Egypt**  
Gen 12:10;  
46:6

**Egyptian Bondage**  
Exod 1:8-14

Exodus

Law



**Keep the Whole Law**  
Exod 19:3-8

**Broke Law**  
2 Kgs 17:7-20;  
Mt 27:1-25

**Worldwide Dispersion**  
Deut 28:63-66  
Lk 21:20-24

Law Fulfilled  
Mt 27:50-51

Dispersion of Israel

Church Age



Ezk 36:16-19

Ezk 36:20-24

**Faith in Jesus, Keep Doctrine Pure**  
Jn 1:12; Rom 8:1-4;  
Eph 2:8-9

**Impure Doctrine**  
Jn 5:39-40;  
2 Tim 3:1-7

**Apostasy, False Doctrine**  
2 Ths 2:3;  
2 Tim 4:3

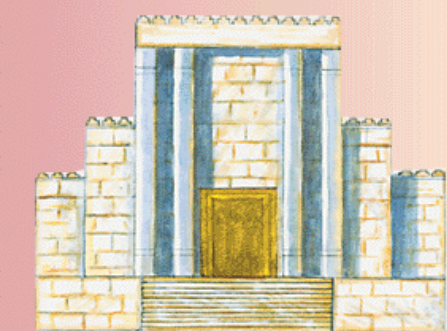
Rapture of Saved  
1 Ths 4:16-17



7 Years Tribulation  
Armageddon

Return of Christ in Glory  
Rev 19:11-16

Millennial Reign



**Obey and Worship Jesus**  
Isa 11:3-5;  
Zech 14:9,16

**Final Rebellion**  
Rev 20:7-9

**Satan Loosed, Eternal Hell**  
Rev 20: 11-15

Great White Throne

Eternity Future



Biblical Dispensations

Lake of Fire

# What is a dispensation?

A dispensation is a distinguishable age, economy, or period of time in which God tests man within the context of His master plan for history?

# ***Dispensational List of Concerns***

- **Inspiration and Authority of Scripture**
- **Consistent Literal Interpretation**
- **Premillennialism**
- **Futurism**
- **Distinction Between Israel and Church**
- **Doctrine of the Church's Uniqueness in God's Plan**
- **Pretribulationism**
- **Dispensations (periodization)**
- **Progress of Dogma**

# **Dispensationalism**

- 1. Consistent Literal or Plain Interpretation of the Scripture**
- 2. Progress of Revelation—Expressed through Dispensations and Covenants, yet, one way of salvation**
- 3. Ecclesiology—Distinctiveness of God's plan for the Church from Israel**
- 4. Eschatology—Futuristic Premillennialism**
- 5. Pretribulational Rapture**
- 6. Purpose of History—Glory of God**

# Dispensationalism

- 1. Definition of a dispensation**
- 2. Scriptural use of dispensation**
- 3. Features of dispensationalism**
- 4. Definitions of dispensationalism**

**Ryrie** describes the essentials of dispensationalism as “a distinction between Israel and the church. This grows out of the dispensationalist’s consistent employment of normal or plain or historical-grammatical interpretation, and it reflects an understanding of the basic purpose of God in all His dealings with mankind as that of glorifying Himself through salvation and other purposes as well.”

**Dispensationalism, p 41.**

# ESSENTIALS

**1. Consistent Literal Interpretation**



**2. Distinction Between God's Plan for Israel and the Church**



**3. The Glory of God is the Purpose of History**

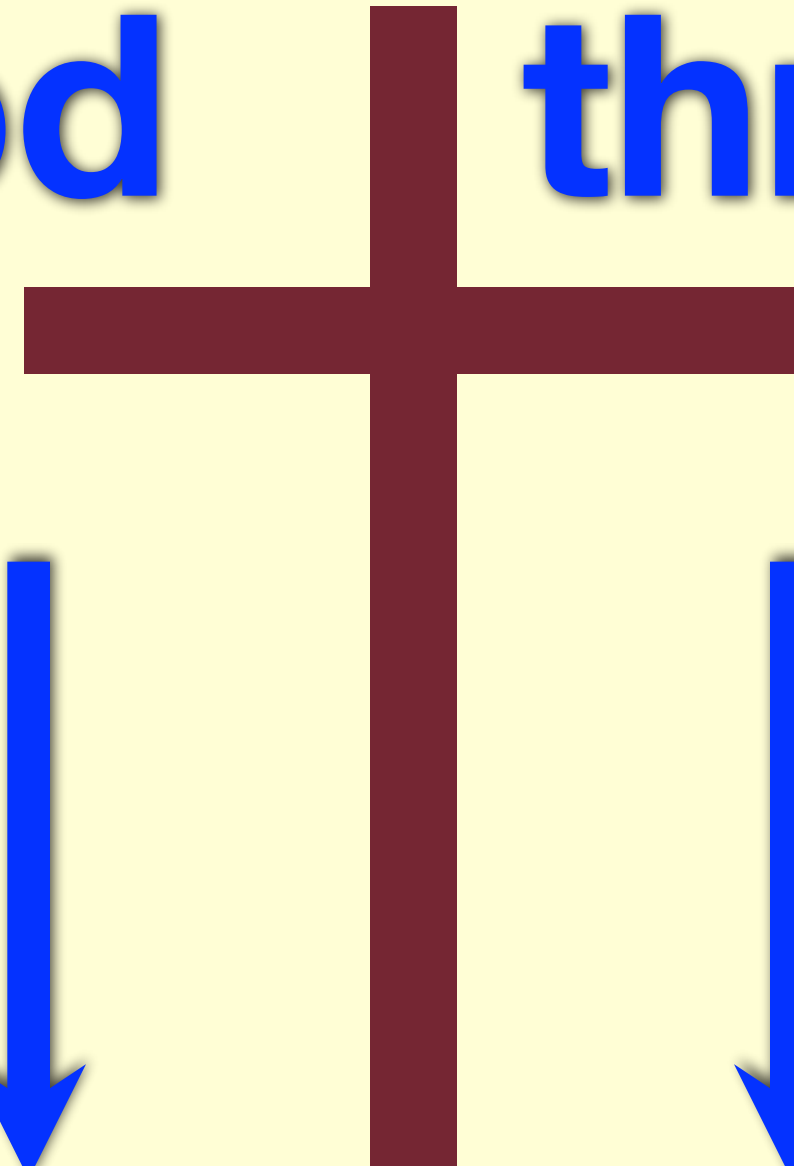


The purpose of history is the glorification of God, through Jesus Christ.

*“For **from** Him and **through** Him and **to** Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”*

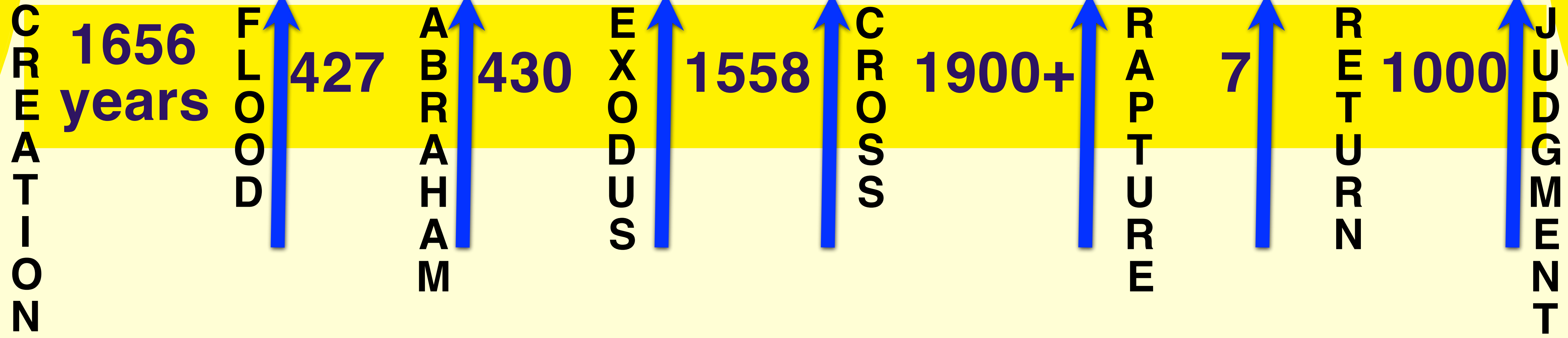
**—Romans 11:36**

# Glorification of God thru Jesus Christ



ETERNITY

ETERNITY



1656 years

FLOOD 427

ABRAHAM 430

EXODUS 1558

CROSS 1900+

RAPTURE 7

RETURN 1000

JUDGMENT

# **Jesus Christ is the Hero of History**

**The focus and purpose of history is Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, Who saves elect humanity by becoming the 2nd Adam through a plan of His work which is implemented by grace to those who believe the message of the gospel.**

# **THE PROGRESS OF DOGMA**

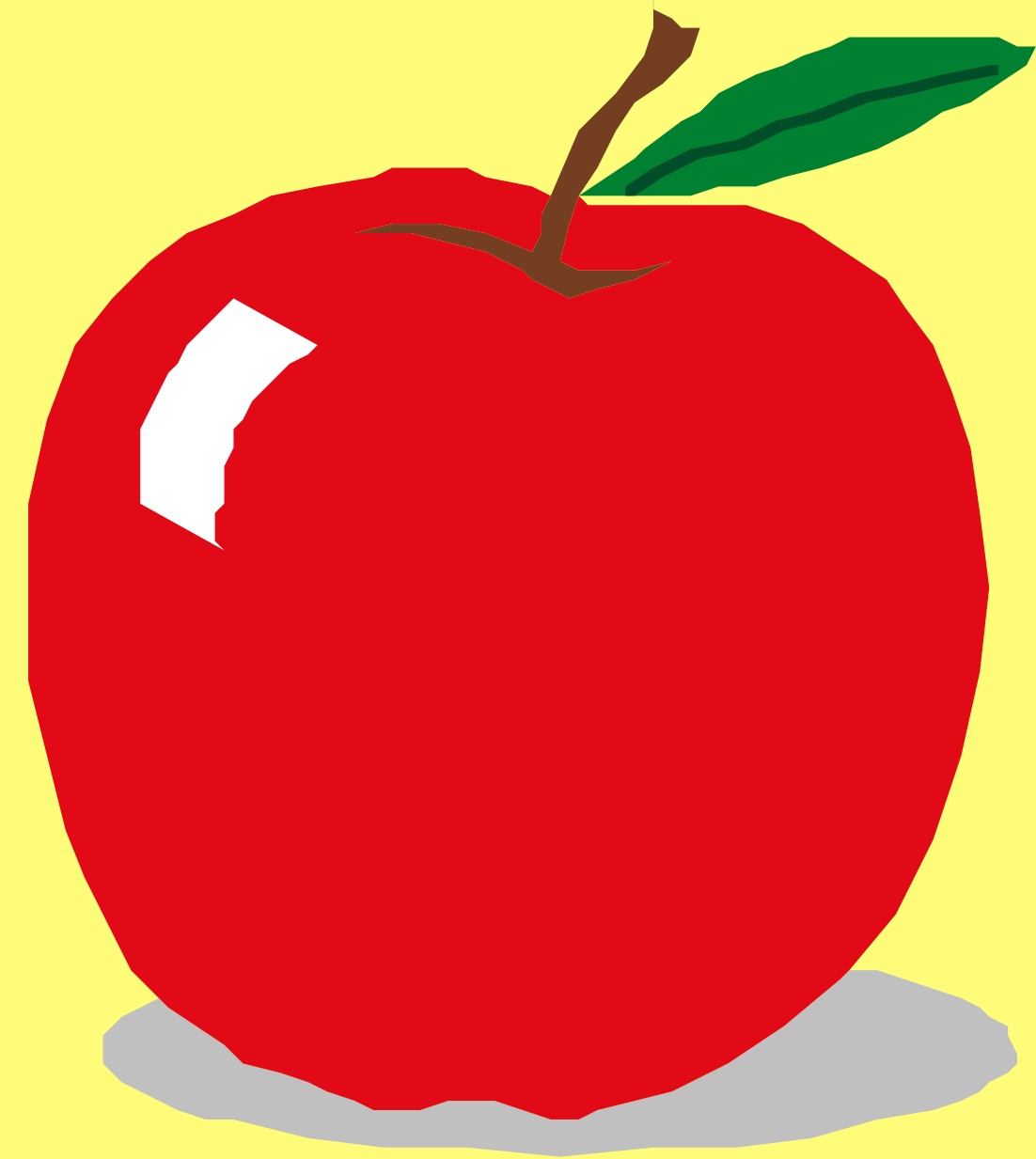
- 1) Theological Prolegomena and Bibliology**
- 2) Theology Proper — Trinity**
- 3) Anthropology — Nature of man and doctrine of sin**
- 4) Christology — Doctrine of Person and work of Christ**
- 5) Ecclesiology — Doctrine of the church**
- 6) Eschatology — Doctrine of the last things**

# Interpret Bible Prophecy Literally

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “literal” means “of or pertaining to letters of the alphabet.” Also, “representing the very words of the original.” Then this dictionary says in relation to the Bible, “the distinctive epithet of that sense or interpretation of a text which is obtained by taking its words in their natural or customary meaning, and applying the ordinary rules of grammar; opposed to *mystical*, or *allegorical*.”

# TWO SENSES OF "LITERAL"

## INTERPRETATION



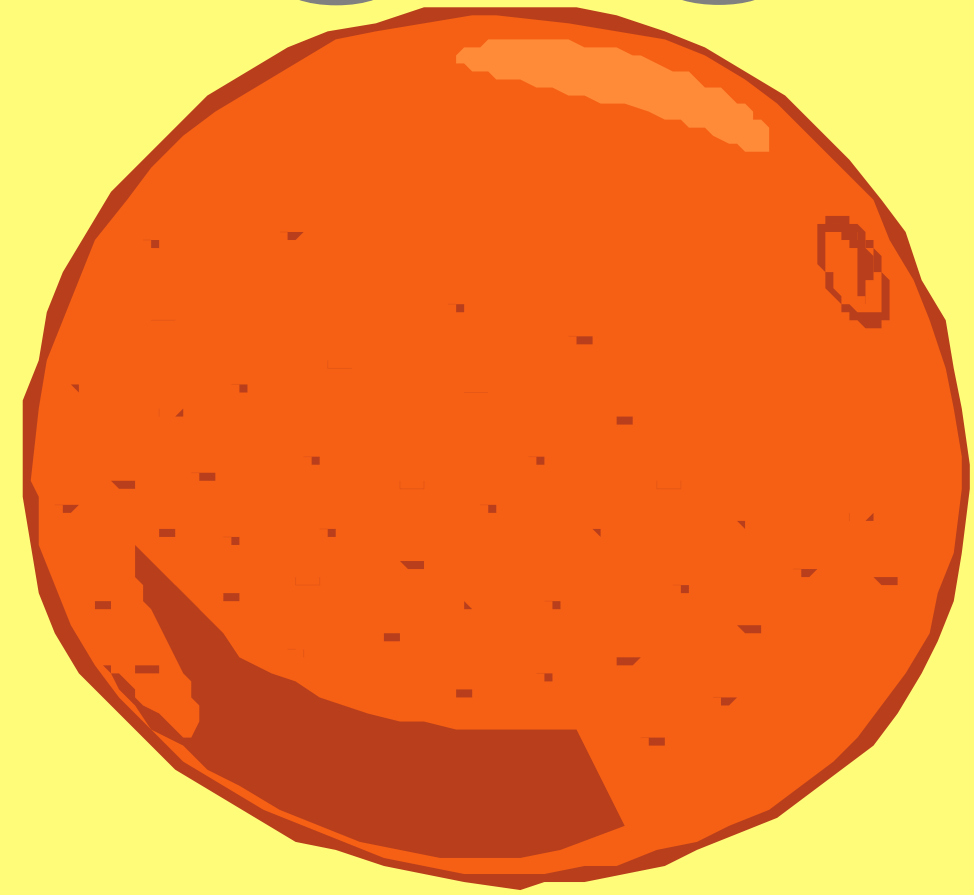
**"Literal" means according to the letter and thus is textual interpretation.**

**Literal interpretation understands a text according to what is written.**

**Example: Israel means Israel;  
Church means Church**

# TWO SENSES OF "LITERAL"

## FIGURE of SPEECH



Words or phrases can be:

1. Plain/literal (denotative)
2. Figurative (connotative)

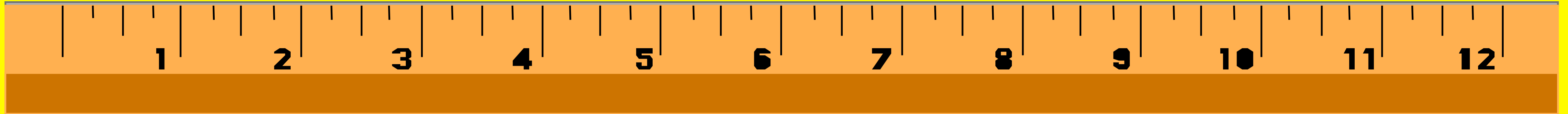
Context determines whether something is a figure or plain and can be explained by textual factors.

**Example:**

**Literal = *He died***

**Figure = *He kicked the bucket***

# Golden Rule of Interpretation



**When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.**



**The  
Dispensations  
deal with God's  
plan for history**

**The Covenants  
deal with how  
God relates to  
people in history.**

**Dispensations =  
historical plan**

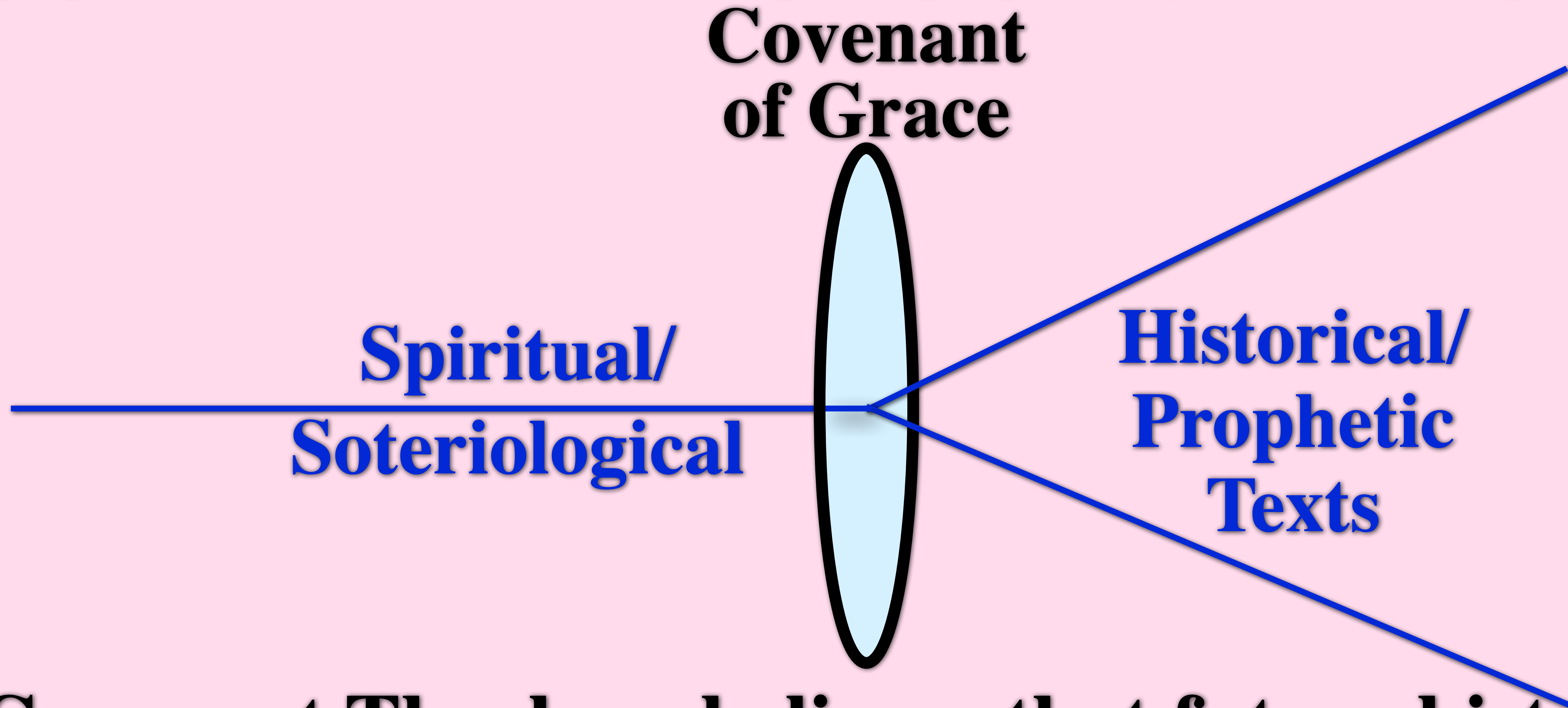
**Covenants =  
relational plan**

# **The Theological Covenants**

## **(Covenant Theology)**

- **Covenant of Redemption**
- **Covenant of Works**
- **Covenant of Grace**

# COVENANT THEOLOGY'S APPROACH



**Covenant Theology believes that future historical passages will not take place in history, but are only illustrative of the doctrine of salvation.**

# **Implications of Covenant Theology**

**Covenant Theology believes the entirety of Scripture revolves around the first coming of Christ and His soteriological redemption of humanity. Therefore, God's unfinished plan for Israel, which has been postponed during the current Church Age, has no purpose in history. Thus, Israel is replaced by the Church and her future history is spiritualized and abstractly applied to the Church.**

# **SALVATION IN DISPENSATIONALISM**

- ***Basis*** of salvation is always **Christ's death**
- ***Requirement*** of salvation is always **faith**
- ***Object*** of faith is always **God**
- ***Content*** of faith changes in each dispensation, but always focus is on Christ

**The idea and use of the term dispensation has been used throughout church history in the writings of the Fathers up until the last 100 years by theologians of all stripes. It appears that the modern development of the system of theology known as “dispensationalism” has lead to the disuse of that term.**



**The Westminster Confession of Faith  
does mention “dispensations” in  
Chapter VII, Section VI: “There are  
not, therefore, two covenants of grace  
differing in substance, but one and the  
same under various **dispensations.**”**

**“It seems likely that the roots of the whole doctrine of ages and dispensations will have to be traced back to the six creative days, and the seventh day of rest, of Genesis, which have been considered prophetically symbolic of a number of periods of development to be followed by a period of utopia, as the Sabbath follows the six days of work.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“David Gregory, a learned mathematician and astronomer of Oxford, England, who died in 1710, says: ‘In the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis, the Hebrew letter Aleph, which in the Jewish arithmetic stands for 1000, is six times found. From hence the ancient Cabalists concluded that the world would last 6000 years.’”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“Because also God was six days about the creation, and a thousand years with him are but as one day; ... therefore after six days, that is 6000 years duration of the world, there shall be a seventh day, or millenary sabbath of rest.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“Rabbi Baal Katturim (1734) said, ‘There are six millenniums in the first verse of the first of Genesis, answering to the 6000 years which the world is to continue.’”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“Rabbi Gedaliah (@1610) says, ‘At the end of 6000 years the world shall return to its old state, without form and void, and after that it shall wholly become a Sabbath.’”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“Theopompus**, who flourished 340 B. C., relates that the Persian Magi taught the present state of things would continue 6000 years, after which Hades or death, would be destroyed, and men would live happy. **Bishop Russell**, from whom we extract, adds, that the opinion of the ancient Jews on this point may be gathered from the statement of a Rabbi who said, ‘The world endures’”  
—**Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“6000 years, and in the 1000, or millennium that follows, the enemies of God will be destroyed.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“The Jewish tradition of the six thousand years, followed by the Sabbath millennium, dates at least from the second century B.C., the approximate date of Rabbi Elias, according to Bishop Russell of Scotland.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“The Christian sex- and septa-millenary tradition dates back at least to the Epistle of Barnabas, the earliest of the Apostolic Fathers (70–79 A.D.). The Epistle contains the following lines: ‘And even in the beginning of the creation he makes mention of the sabbath. And God made in six days the works of his hands; and he finished them on the seventh day, and he rested the seventh day, and sanctified it.’”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**



**Irenaeus** (c. 130–?), Bishop of Lyons, writes:

“For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded ... For the day of the Lord is as a thousand years; and in six days created things were completed: it is evident, therefore, that they will come to an end at the sixth thousand year.””

—**Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“Isaac Watts (1674–1748),** the great hymn writer, was also a considerable theologian.

He wrote an essay of some forty pages entitled, **“The Harmony of all the Religions Which God ever Prescribed to Men, and all his Dispensations towards them.”** Watts said, **“the dispensations of God may be described more briefly, as the appointed moral rules of God’s dealing with mankind, considered as reasonable creatures, and as**

**“accountable to him for their behaviour,  
both in this world and in that which is to  
come. Each of these dispensations of God,  
may be represented as different religions, or,  
at least, as different forms of religion,  
appointed for men in the several successive  
ages of the world.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**I—The Dispensation of Innocency, or, the Religion of Adam at first**

**II—The Adamical Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace, or the Religion of Adam after his Fall**

**III—The Noachical Dispensation; or, the Religion of Noah**

**IV—The Abrahamical Dispensation; or, the Religion of Abraham**

**V—The Mosaical Dispensation; or, the Jewish Religion**

**VI—The Christian Dispensation.**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“As dates come and go and the millennium fails to materialize, revisions are necessary. It would appear, however, that if the year 2000 A.D. should come and go without the great event’s taking place, the whole septa-millenary tradition and theory would be proved erroneous, for hardly anybody would want to place the commencement of the first millennium any later than 4004 B.C.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“This brings to a close the history of the sex- and septa-millenary tradition. Perhaps it is not out of place to caution again here that this is not dispensationalism; but in order to study dispensationalism intelligently, especially in its time-period aspect, it is necessary to know the background of this tradition.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“The year 1825 seems to be the logical dividing-line between the old and the new dispensationalism. This is not to forget that many of the roots of later systems are to be found in works before that date, nor that much of the older philosophy is carried over to the later period.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**

**“The year 1825 seems to be the logical dividing-line between the old and the new dispensationalism. This is not to forget that many of the roots of later systems are to be found in works before that date, nor that much of the older philosophy is carried over to the later period.”**

**—Arnold Ehlert, “A Bibliography of Dispensationalism”**



**(I—Paradisaical state), to the flood**

**II—Noah**

**III—Abraham**

**IV—Israel:**

**a—Under the law**

**b—Under the priesthood**

**c—Under the kings**

**V—Gentiles**

**VI—The Spirit**

**VII—The Millennium**

**Darby's  
View of  
Dispensations**



**John  
Nelson  
Darby**

**Darby (1800–1882)** is considered the primary father of dispensationalism through a movement known as the Plymouth Brethren made up primarily of former Anglicans in the late 1820s. For the first 50 years the Brethren were made up of a large number of the highly

**educated and scholarly class, however, today it is just the opposite. Even though they were very strong Calvinist, as was the Anglican Church at that time, this is no longer the case today.**

**An Evangelical in every parish in England by the 1840s. This is where the use of the term “chapel” developed.**

**By 1850 it is estimated that over 50% of the Anglican clergy were premillennial Calvinists.**

# Darby's Rapture View Development

**First**, Darby says that he realized “the absolute, divine authority and certainty of the Word, as a divine link between us and God,” which caused “the scriptures to gain complete ascendancy over me.”

**Second**, he states: “I came to understand that I was united to Christ in heaven, and that consequently, my place before God was represented by His own.” Again he wrote, “personal assurance of salvation in a new condition by being in Christ; the church as His body.”

**Third**, Darby understood more fully his present standing with Christ in heaven. Such a heavenly standing becomes the basis for much of Darby's theology that sees the believer already positioned with Christ in heaven. "I was in Christ, accepted in the Beloved, and sitting in heavenly places in Him. This led me directly to the apprehension of what the true church of God was, those that were united to Christ in heaven."

**Fourth**, he says that he realized that he should daily expect the Lord's return. "At the same time, I saw that the Christian, having his place in Christ in heaven, *has nothing to wait for save the coming of the Saviour*, in order to be set, in fact, in the glory which is already his portion 'in Christ.'" Further he says, "I saw in that word the coming of Christ to take the

church to Himself in glory.” Darby speaks of “being in Christ; the church as His body; *Christ coming to receive us to Himself; . . . all this was when laid aside at E. P.'s in 1827.*”

Again Darby says of his convalescence discovery: “The coming of the Lord was the other truth which was brought to my mind from the word, as that which, if sitting in heavenly places *in Christ*, was alone to be waited for, that I might sit in heavenly places *with Him.*”



**Fifth**, Darby saw a change in dispensation.

This could mean that it was at this time that shifted in his eschatology from postmillennialism to premillennialism.

“Christ coming to receive us to Himself; and collaterally with that, the setting up of a new earthly dispensation, from Isaiah xxxii. (more particularly the end); all this was when laid aside at E. P.'s in 1827.”

He writes of his studies in Isaiah: "Isaiah xxxii. brought me to the earthly consequences of the same truth, though other passages might seem perhaps more striking to me now; but I saw an evident change of dispensation in that chapter, when the Spirit would be poured out on the Jewish nation, and a king reign in righteousness."

Isaiah xxxii. it was that taught me about the new dispensation. I saw there would be a David reign, and did not know whether the church might not be removed before forty years' time. At that time I was ill with my knee. It gave me peace to see what the church was. I saw that I, poor, wretched, and sinful J. N. D., knowing too much yet not enough about myself, was left behind,

and let go, but I was united to Christ in heaven. Then what was I waiting for? J. G. B. came up and said they were teaching some new thing in England. "I have it!" I said.

# Darby's Rapture View

Darby's rapture views, to end current church age, were most likely a result of his own study of Scripture during his convalescence from a riding accident in December 1827—January 1838. They are a product of his literal hermeneutic which produced a futurist view of the details concerning God's plan for history.



Darby brings to North America his view of the rapture during 7 trips to America. **James Hall Brookes (1830–1897)** a Princeton trained Presbyterian pastor becomes Darby's primary host and advocate of dispensational pretribulationism. Brookes is the most popular pastor in the United States in the late 1800s. He disciplined **C. I. Scofield** after his conversion.

JAMES HALL BROOKES SU

BORN

FEB. 27 1830

ABSENT FROM THE BODY

AND AT HOME WITH THE LORD A

APRIL 18 1897.

HAVING LIVED TOGETHER IN LO

THEY AWAIT TOGETHER IN HOPE

RUSH HUDSON LIMBAUGH III

AMERICAN PATRIOT

1951 - 2021



# Influence of Brookes

- Verse by verse teacher called a Bible reading
- Built the largest church in St. Louis in his day
- President of the Presbyterian denomination: 4 yrs
- Darby spoke often at his church
- Discipled C. I. Scofield
- Edited the largest monthly magazine: *The Truth*
- Headed the annual Niagra Bible Conference
- Wrote 1st fundamentalist creed: *Niagara Creed*
- 1st million selling prophecy book: *Maranatha!*





**C. I. Scofield (1843–1921)**

**Discipled by Brooks in  
Saint Louis**





# Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952)

The son of a Presbyterian  
clergyman who dies while  
Chafer was a boy in Ohio.



John Nelson Darby



Cyrus Scofield



Lewis Chafer



John Walvoord



Hal Lindsey



Tim LaHaye



**Dispensationalism is best seen as a system of theology viewing God as the Sovereign ruler of heaven and earth; man as a rebellious vice-regent (along with some angels); Jesus Christ is the hero of history as He saves some by His Grace; history as a lesson in the outworking of God's glory being displayed to both heaven and earth. Dispensationalism is a theology that I believe is properly derived from biblical study and lets God be God.**

**Dispensationalism, especially in America, has been a widely held theology by conservative Protestants in North America and wherever their missionaries have gone throughout the world. It reached its height of popularity during the 60s and 70s throughout North American Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. It has been in decline for the last 30 years as can be seen in the drift from their founding by most Bible colleges and seminaries established almost exclusively by dispensationalists.**







