

What is Dispensationalism?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 July 2026

Preacher: Nathan Rambeck

[0:00] Okay, so like I said, we're going to be starting a new series. We just finished up with the Ten Commandments, and we're going to start a new series here. I actually kind of had in mind to start the book of Galatians next.

But I thought, well, we're kind of transitioning from law into a letter in Galatians that actually speaks very much to how Christians are not under the law and should stay away from putting themselves under the law.

So it's quite a—Paul gets very animated in that letter to the Galatians about that topic. And so I thought it would be useful.

We have talked about dispensationalism, and it's a big word. We'll get into kind of what it means and what it's all about a little bit over the years since I've been here preaching from the pulpit for the last three and a half years, but just kind of touching on it.

I thought it would be good just to do a series here on the topic. And like I said, it will probably be about six weeks or so. The topic is dispensationalism.

[1:06] It's a big word. It's not something that we use in everyday language. So it might be somewhat intimidating, and I kind of want to avoid it becoming too much of like an academic exercise of getting into a complex-ism of theology.

So I want to try to make it as practical as possible. It's going to be somewhat high level. We won't get into too much detail. Like I said, there are other resources from Pastor Marv's old messages that can get into more detail.

The other thing is it might generate some questions along the way. So we're going to be collecting questions throughout the series.

I don't know if we actually did this. Did we get those cards in the back of the seats? No. Okay. So in future weeks, we'll put little index cards kind of in the back of the seats. And if a question pops in your mind while we're teaching through this, go ahead and write that down.

Stick it in our giving box back there. And we'll go through those at the end of the series. At the end, you know, week seven or whatever it is, we'll have a whole service just dedicated to Q&A.;

[2:21] So like I said, one of the purposes of this series is to kind of set us up for going through the book of Galatians. But the other reason is because there's, at least from my perspective, somewhat of a cultural moment here when it comes to this topic of dispensationalism.

If you ask a hundred people in this country, what is dispensationalism, how many of them would be able to tell you? Well, probably close to zero from my estimation, from what I can tell.

Most people have no idea what dispensationalism is. Yet at the same time, we're seeing some very popular figures in media talking about dispensationalism and talking in very negative terms.

You know, there's always been a debate or there's been theological debates among Christians, right, on all kinds of different topics. Dispensationalism as kind of a system, and again, we'll get into exactly what that is, has only been around for a few, a couple hundred years, since about the mid-1800s.

And there's always been disagreements about whether, you know, it's the right approach to the Bible or not. But lately, it seems like the debate has come to somewhat of a fevered pitch. And from what I can tell, it's driven primarily by one big thing.

[3:49] And that is a hatred or sometimes a suspicion of Jews. You know, what are these Jews doing out there in Israel and out in the Middle East?

And people are making accusations, well, the Jews aren't just, you know, defending themselves from people who want to attack them. But there actually, there are, there is a, there's, how do I put this?

Kind of conspiracies about the Jews being involved in a lot of the ills in the world. What does dispensationalism really have to do with Jews anyway?

Well, dispensationalism, as different from other kind of ways of approaching the Scripture, sees a future for Israel, a future for Israel and the Jewish people, that God has a plan for their future. And so people who hold to a dispensational view of Scripture tend to be fairly positive towards Jewish people and their future.

[5:05] Some of the people I'm talking about in the media, we'll just name a few names. These are the two, I think, that are probably the most well-known. The first is Tucker Carlson.

How many people know who that is? One. Okay. And how many people have, you know, seen, you know, or watched any of his stuff? Okay. He has, you know, he used to be on Fox News, became very popular on Fox News, had his own show.

And then, I don't know exactly when on, but there was a parting of ways, and he started his own kind of mini media empire. But especially recently, he's been interviewing a lot of people.

And most recently, the last couple of weeks, had an interview with a guy named J.D. Hall, who he introduced as a theological expert. Not really a theologian, but it seems he had him on because he shared his own kind of views.

But a lot of that interview was about dispensationalism and where it came. And there were a lot of disparaging remarks about dispensationalism, how it's a novel theology, it's new, doesn't have historical roots in early Christianity.

[6:20] As part of that conversation, which was really negative towards Jewish people and the nation of Israel in particular, they made claims like the Jewish people are very antagonistic towards Christians and persecute Christians.

And that during the past, Christians who live in that area of the Holy Land fared much better under Islam than they did when the Jews took over Israel.

Which is quite a claim, quite a claim, but it was claimed quite confidently. Another quote here from Tucker Carlson is he said that he dislikes Christian Zionists more than just about anybody else.

And well, what is a Christian Zionist anyway? A Christian Zionist is just somebody who believes that Israel has a right to have their own nation. To have their own nation.

That's what a Zionist is. Somebody who believes that Israel has the right to exist as a nation. And so he said that of those people that believe that, of Christians that believe that, he dislikes them more than anybody else.

[7:44] Wow. Another person who, from what I understand in the last, I don't know, this was six months ago, I saw that it was announced that this person had the most popular podcast on all of the internet.

The most popular podcast on all of the internet. On all of the internet. That's Candace Owens. I've been corrected. I've said in the past, Candace Owens. But I guess we need to add, I need to add the S on there.

Candace Owens. And she is well known for her suspicion of the Jewish people. And she promotes all kinds of conspiracies about the Jewish people.

And basically has also brought up dispensationalism. And her view and what she promotes is this idea that dispensationalism is basically a shrouded psyop that was developed in the 1800s as a way to promote Jewish power in the world.

That's the idea that she promotes. And there's all kinds of claims about where dispensationalism came from.

[8:56] There's a popular study Bible called the Scofield Reference Bible. And she has this whole claim and conspiracy about how that came to be because of Jews funding it and trying to get it out there as a way to promote their power in the world.

So there's somewhat of a cultural moment here that I wanted to speak to in regard to that. Because there's a lot of people saying, hey, dispensationalism is this ugly thing.

It's something that is having a negative impact on the world and making claims that it has nothing.

It's completely unbiblical. And so this is an opportunity to kind of correct some of those things.

A little bit of history. A little bit of history before we get into definitions. A little bit of history.

Dispensationalism as kind of a label or a system kind of came about in the 1800s.

There's a man named John Nelson Darby who was part of a group called the Plymouth Brethren, if any of you are familiar with that group. And he became a Christian.

[10:04] His early life was, I believe he was an alcoholic. His family was broken apart. He was kind of a pretty bad guy. But then he found the Lord. He became a Christian. And his life changed.

And his life was transformed by the gospel. And he started studying the Bible intensely and became somewhat of a theologian. And started to, as he was reading and studying the Bible, put some things together and connect some dots that he wasn't really seeing other people doing.

And the dots that he was connecting became somewhat popular. Other people were seeing those same dots being connected in the Bible and finding great that they could understand the Bible better based on what he was teaching.

Through that era, there was also this movement we'll call the Bible Study Movement, which a lot of people were learning to study the Bible.

Not just going to church and listening to a pastor, a preacher, or a priest talk about the Bible, but actually reading and studying it for themselves. But one of the things that was very common at that time was that much of what was in the Bible was seen and painted by many as allegorical.

[11:25] Now there's a spectrum to this. But there was a lot of people that made the Bible very much an allegory. Especially things about the future, but then also other things as well.

To the extent that even some very liberal groups would paint even the resurrection of Jesus Christ as an allegory about how we as Christians just need to live a resurrected life of morality and hope in the future.

Instead of Jesus actually rising physically from the dead. And so with John Nelson Darby and others that came along, they took a very literal approach to the Bible.

Reading it quite literally. Now the Bible has both literal aspects to it, but also there are allegories and metaphors in the Bible.

But much of the Bible is quite literal and should be read that way. Well along comes another guy, Schofield.

[12:32] In fact, I think I might have gotten my facts wrong. It was Schofield who was the one that was an alcoholic and had broken up his family. That wasn't John Nelson Darby. And he started studying the Bible as well and learning some things from John Nelson Darby.

But he ended up creating what we call today a reference Bible or a study Bible. And so he published this study Bible called the Schofield Reference Bible.

And it was just a regular Bible, King James Version, but in the margins were notes that helped you understand what was in the Scriptures. In that podcast with that episode with Tucker Carlson, the claim was made that that was the first study Bible ever made.

It actually wasn't. It actually wasn't. From what I understand, the Geneva Bible, which came a couple hundred years before that, was really the first kind of study Bible like that with notes in the margin.

But that Schofield Reference Bible sold millions and millions of copies all over the world. It became quite popular. And because of that, the viewpoint that it promoted through the study notes became quite popular as well.

[13:50] The viewpoint was dispensational in nature. One aspect of dispensationalism is taking prophecy about the future of Israel very literally.

Because most Christians at that time took those prophecies somewhat metaphorically. I mean, Israel was gone. How could there be a future for this nation that has kind of disappeared among the nations?

And so it was just seen as, well, those prophecies that were never fulfilled, they'll be fulfilled more as metaphors or allegories among us Christians. That was the predominant view.

Well, something happened in 1948 that caused people to really wonder, well, maybe these prophecies really are going to come true literally.

In 1948, Israel, Jews from around the world, came to the land of Israel and formed a new nation again. They hadn't been a nation for 2,000 years.

[14:49] And they became a nation again. Which, by the way, is unprecedented in the history of the world. There's no nation that has disappeared, that has been disbanded. And then hundreds or thousands of years later has become a nation again.

But because of that happening, it actually caused this great interest in this dispensational theology that took the prophecies of the Bible quite literally.

And so Bible colleges and seminaries began to promote more of Schofield's reference Bible and the teachings of dispensationalism. And it became actually really the predominant view among Christians over the 20th century, over the 1900s.

To the extent that, there was a popular book in the 1970s written by a man named Hal Lindsey. It's called The Late Great Planet Earth.

And if anybody's familiar with like the Jesus Movement and Calvary Chapel, Hal Lindsey was a part of that movement. He wrote this book and it was mostly about the future of Israel and the end times and what's going to happen and how Christians should maybe prepare for the future.

[16:00] That book was a bestseller. In fact, that book was the best-selling book of the entire decade of the 70s.

Not the best-selling Christian book. It was the best-selling of all non-fiction books of that decade.

That's incredible. And it was from a dispensational author on an end times topic.

But since that time, and I think maybe around that time or maybe even into the 90s, because there was another book or a book series that was very popular in the 90s that was from a dispensational perspective on the end times.

Does anybody remember the Left Behind series? That was very popular. Yeah. But since that time, dispensationalism has fallen on hard times. And I think probably the biggest reason for that, besides just anti-Israel sentiment, is that one of the things that happened among dispensationalists and looking at the end times was there was this tendency to want to figure out exactly when Jesus is coming and to set dates.

In fact, Hal Lindsey himself tried to set some dates based on that 1948 date when Israel became a nation. In others, there was a book called 88 Reasons Why Jesus is Coming in 1988.

[17:29] And then it didn't happen. And other people set other dates and then they didn't happen. And on and on and on. And now, you know, we're here in 2026, and people have looked at some of these dispensationalists who have set these dates with suspicion.

Because, well, these things didn't work out. They didn't happen as you said they would. And so that's why I think we as Christians ought to be careful about trying to determine specific dates. I think the Bible actually teaches us that we won't know when Jesus will come and rapture his church.

Even though we might know times and seasons and things to look for. But regardless of that, people don't typically say, hey, I'm a dispensationalist.

But I think the general views of people in this country, anyway, are dispensational broadly in nature. Most people have generally kind of a dispensational view of Scripture. So, that gets us to the next question. What is dispensationalism? What is even this dispensationalism thing?

[18:40] Well, first we're going to look at the word. It's a biblical word. It's not an extra-biblical word. There are some extra-biblical words that we use in theology to describe things. The Trinity is one example.

The word Trinity is not in the Bible, but it's a word that we use to describe teachings in the Bible. So, dispensational is actually a word that we find in the Bible. It's found eight times. At least the Greek root word that's translated dispensational is eight times in the New Testament.

Go ahead and turn in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. We're going to look at a couple of Scriptures there. But while you're turning there, the Greek word is oikonomia. Oikonomia.

That's the word that's translated dispensation. And it's actually, if you can hear from that word, it sounds like an English word. That's where we get the English word economy.

Economy. Oikonomia. And in some, it's translated dispensation. Sometimes it's translated as stewardship. Sometimes it's translated as administration.

[19:39] The word literally means, in a very literal sense, means house rules or household management. It's, you know, two words put together.

And so, if we kind of look at that, house rules, we can, it kind of tells us a little bit about what the word means. You know, different homes have different ways that they operate.

Every family is different. Sometimes it's from culture to culture. And sometimes, even in a neighborhood, right, people have different rules for how their household operates. I think about culturally, here in the U.S., when we're eating dinner, we go sit at a chair, in a chair at a table. And we eat dinner together. If you go into Asia, you might sit on the ground and the food is placed on a mat on the floor. That's a difference in how the household operates.

But even in the same neighborhood, you might have one household where the rule is, you're not allowed to watch television during the day. Or video games are only played on Saturday mornings, and that's it.

[20:44] No other time. Or you have to get your chores done before breakfast. Or, here's a common one, and this can be different from one house to the next, is when you come in our house, you have to take your shoes off.

No shoes allowed in our house. Especially if you live on a farm, you don't want to track in all that stuff from the farm. And, you know, none of these rules have a moral component, per se. There might be some wisdom component in there, but not a moral component. And each of these families that have these different rules, they might have different rules, but they all might be moral and upstanding people.

But they just have different ways of operating. It's the same way with biblical dispensations. With each dispensation, there's just a different way that God has provided for people to operate with him. The other word that we'll look at, or the idea, is an administration. That's another way that this word dispensation is translated as an administration. And that term is, I think, more familiar to our ears, especially when it comes to politics and government.

[21:54] We think when a new president takes office, we call his rule in the White House his administration. There's a new administration that has come into play.

And with a new administration comes new policies, new ways of working, new ways to order the government. The president will choose cabinet members, secretaries, to manage things, and they'll each manage things different from the previous administration.

Now, the country is still founded on the same constitution, the same laws. But within that framework, upon that foundation, there's just different ways of working.

Different ways of working with the press. CNN, you're out of here. You're not allowed in the press room. Or foreign relations, how we're going to work with other countries who are our allies.

And, well, hey, who are we maybe not going to work the same way with? How you deal with trade imbalances, tariffs, the extent to which you regulate immigration. You know, what people we allow into the country or don't allow.

[23:01] Infrastructure improvements, whether we're going to work on our roads or work on other things. Or our defense strategy. How we're going, are we going to build up our nuclear arsenal? Or are we going to allow it to kind of deteriorate?

Are we going to create more warships? Or are we going to kind of tighten our belt and put less money into our defense? Those are all things that have to do with an administration of government built on the same constitution and the same laws.

Biblical administrations work the same way. It's the same thing. It's the same God. The same foundation of truth. The same moral truths of right and wrong.

And it's the same created order. But God is working with men in different ways across these different dispensations. There are different covenants that he's made with various people.

Different promises that he's made for their present and for their future. And then different conditions that he has made for being part of God's people or God's family.

[24:10] Now typically, a dispensational approach will identify seven or eight dispensations. We'll just briefly go over them here.

The first one, and these are mostly time-based, but dispensations aren't just based on time. They're based on other things as well, like covenants or people groups.

But time is usually what most people focus on. So the first one is called the dispensation of innocence. And that is targeted at, or we're looking at, that era in the garden.

Where Adam and Eve were created and they lived in innocence in the garden. We don't know exactly how long that was, but I think it was a fairly brief time. And then after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, we have the next dispensation identified is the dispensation of conscience or human conscience.

In which sin came into the world and people became familiar with right and wrong. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[25:18] And their conscience came to bear. And they lived by their conscience. Just whatever their heart told them was right and wrong. And that was from the time of the fall to the time of Noah.

One of the things that happened was, remember that Cain killed his brother Abel. And what did God tell Cain? Or tell, really, Cain was concerned what?

That somebody was going to come and avenge his brother and kill him. And God actually said, no, I don't want anybody to take vengeance. At least, not for now. We find that after the time of Noah, Remember, Noah came off the ark.

He offered his sacrifice to the Lord. And God gave him some new rules. Some new ways to order things. And he said, hey, listen. If a man sheds an innocent man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed.

And that instituted or started a new dispensation of human government. In which God expected human beings to govern themselves when it came to legal matters, criminal matters. Then the next thing, and that continued on until the time of Abraham.

[26 : 18] By the way, these dispensations don't necessarily have clear markers of stopping and finishing. In fact, I think many of them overlap. I would say that the era of human government continues to this day. But the next one we identify is the dispensation of promise.

And that started with Abraham, which he was given a promise about him and his family and their future. And that continued on through Moses, the time of Moses, in which a new dispensation started called the dispensation of law.

God gave Moses on Mount Sinai those ten commandments that we just studied. And not only those, but other commandments in which they ought to live. And they were given something called the Old Covenant.

At that time, it wasn't called the Old Covenant. It was just called God's covenant with Israel. Now we look at it and see it as old because there was prophesied a new covenant was coming.

But it was the covenant that God made through Moses with the people of Israel. And then that covenant continued on all the way through into the book of Acts until the time in which a grace dispensation was established.

[27 : 28] We're not going to get into the details of exactly this, at least today. We'll look at these more in future weeks. So, if you've lost count, I've got the count here.

The grace dispensation, which by the way is the dispensation that we live in today, is number six. And that will end with the rapture and or the tribulation, the tribulation period.

Right before Jesus returns, before his return. And we can use that as the kind of delineating marker. And then from Jesus' return for a thousand years, there will be a seventh dispensation called the dispensation of the kingdom in which there will be a earthly kingdom established here on the earth for a thousand years.

And then that's the seven dispensations. And then, well, what about after that? Well, there's not very much the Bible says except for calling it a new heaven and a new earth that will be established after that.

And so, that can be identified as an eighth dispensation, the new heavens and the new earth. There are a couple of verses. Now, when you open up your Bible and you look at the table of contents, you don't see, oh, well, here's the dispensation number one.

[28 : 41] You know, section one, dispensation of innocence. Section two, dispensation of conscience. You're not going to find that in the Bible, right? But we do see references to at least a couple of these dispensations that help us to see that, okay, this is how God operates.

If you're in Ephesians, look at chapter 1, verse 10. Here's what it says. That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ.

Paul here is describing something God's planned for the future. And he's saying there is a dispensation coming in the future, an administration that is coming in the future that he calls the dispensation of the fullness of times.

It's at the very end. I think most people think he's talking about here the new heavens and the new earth, that final era. That's coming in the future.

If you move forward in Ephesians to chapter 3 and verse 2, so just a couple of pages forward, we see another reference to a dispensation.

[29 : 49] Ephesians 3, 2 says this, If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which was given to me for you. Paul here is describing to the Ephesians a dispensation or an administration that was given to him for the people that he was writing to.

And he calls it what? A dispensation of grace. A dispensation of the grace of God. This is an administration that was given to him to administer or dispense grace. It's different from past administrations. Paul makes that very clear in many of his letters. He said, Here's how things were before, and here's how things are now. Especially you see that in the book of Ephesians.

Well, just to look, because there's a lot of details, right, about what has changed or what hasn't changed. There are many things that have not changed. You know, we talked about just truth and reality, the created order, men and women, right?

That's not changing. What's a man? What's a woman? Also, just fundamental moral principles of right and wrong. Those things have not changed. But there are things that have. We'll just look at one.

[31:06] And this, I think, is easier to identify. Eating meat. How many of you eat meat? Yeah, most of us. Now, you don't have to eat meat. There are vegetarians. That's totally fine.

You can be a vegetarian if you want. But in the Bible, we read that at certain times, God actually provided certain rules in these administrations for what they were allowed or not allowed to do when it came to meat.

You know, when Adam and Eve were in the garden, what kind of food did God provide for them? It was just the plants. It was the herbs. It was things that grew out of the ground.

And we read that. Genesis 129 says this, That was it.

So there was no eating animals at that time. But then, after the flood, after the flood, that same time when God gave the death penalty and said, Hey, we need to start a human administration of law here.

[32:09] He says this in Genesis 9, verse 2. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that moved on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea.

They are given unto your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. Just like I gave you herbs from the ground, plants to eat, now you can also eat any animal you'd like.

Anyone. All animals, they are free for you to eat. That's what happened after the flood. Well, then there was another change. In Leviticus chapter 11, Leviticus chapter 11 and verse 2, under the law of Moses, this was the requirement if you wanted to be part of God's household.

He said this, Speak to the children of Israel, saying, These are the animals which you may eat among all the animals that are on the earth. Among the animals, whatever divides the hoof, having cloven hooves and chewing the cud, that you may eat.

That was it. So there was this category of clean animals and unclean animals. You could eat the clean ones, and there's some description about their hooves and chewing the cud and all that, that identified the clean ones from the unclean.

[33:24] But you can't eat the unclean ones. Now, you could before, and it was fine, but now, if you want to be part of God's household, these are the rules. This is the new policy. This is the new administration.

And then, we read from Paul. Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. He, as he described himself, he is the administrator of grace. And he teaches this in 1 Timothy 4, verse 4, for every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Here's another change. Paul says, for Christians under grace, you can eat any animal. Again, just like under the previous dispensation at the time of Noah.

And so, you see this pattern. Now, if you don't understand who things are written to, and that there are different groups, and eras, and people groups, and covenants, then this will cause a lot of confusion as you read through the Bible.

As a Christian, am I allowed to eat meat? Am I allowed to eat certain kinds of meat? Can I eat pork or not? The Jews weren't allowed to eat pork. What am I to do as a Christian? And so, this demonstrates that as Christians, we need to read the Bible from the big picture perspective, taking in the context of what is there.

[34:51] And this gets into a concept that many call rightly dividing the scriptures. And that's because of a term that Paul used. Open up your Bible, or turn to 2 Timothy chapter 2.

2 Timothy chapter 2. You know, many people have said this about the Bible regarding context. everything in the Bible was written for us, but not everything was written to us. There are instructions maybe for other peoples, but not for us in particular. We can learn from them, they can be helpful, but we don't necessarily need to follow them as they were given. In 2 Timothy 2.15, Paul says this to Timothy, Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. And that term, a lot of times, in fact, some translations will actually translate this rightly interpreting the word of truth. And I think that's partially what it means, but the actual terminology used is to divide, to cut, to separate. [36 : 06] And so it's important as we're reading the Bible to make contrasts, to make distinctions between things. Because if we don't, if we mix everything together in a jumbled mess, we will become confused.

Now at the same time, that doesn't mean that we use our knives to divide and then throw away, right? We just need to discern, discern. In fact, just a couple, just the next chapter over, 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 16, Paul says, All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. It's important that we make distinctions, that we make contrasts. And really, that's what we're going to spend the rest of our series doing, is looking at specific things that as Christians, we need to make contrasts about.

Other systems, and the other one that kind of competes with dispensationalism is called covenant theology. And it's only, really, probably another 100 or 200 years, maybe 200 years older than dispensationalism, as far as, you know, something that people have systematized. But what covenant theology tries to do is unify everything in the Bible and try to mix it together to try to unify it and make it work.

[37 : 34] And I think that gets some people into trouble. And there are certain things that should be unified, but there are also other things that should be separated, should be made distinct.

The law is distinct from grace. Under covenant theology, the law is grace. That's what they will teach. That the law is grace.

It's under the covenant of grace is what they'll teach. Israel is distinct from the church today, the body of Christ. Now, in covenant theology, those are combined.

Israel and the church is the same group of people. And then other things, like, are we talking about the earthly kingdom that God is planning to bring to the earth?

Or a heavenly kingdom in which our citizenship, the Bible says, is in heaven. There's a great quote from Miles Coverdale that has been quoted at this church many, many times that really gets to the heart of this and the importance of context.

[38 : 36] Miles Coverdale was the first person to translate the Bible into English. This was back in the 1500s. And here's a quote from Miles Coverdale about how you should read and study the Bible. He said this, It shall greatly help you to understand Scripture if you mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom and to whom and with what words and at what time and where and to what intent and with what circumstances considering what goes before and what follows.

We need to understand the context of what we're reading. We can't just open up a Bible verse in our Bible and say, Oh, here's a promise that God made to somebody and I'm going to apply that to myself.

That's not the appropriate way to read the Bible. It might be a promise to us, but maybe it's not. But we need to understand why. I'm going to finish off here with a story.

A story. This is actually a true story from World War II about a Japanese soldier whose name was Heru Onoda. Heru Onoda.

In December 1944, as World War II raged in the Pacific, a 23-year-old soldier, he was a second lieutenant of the Imperial Japanese Army. He was deployed to Labang Island in the Philippines.

[39 : 51] His orders were clear. Conduct guerrilla warfare, harass the enemy, and under no circumstances surrender or take his own life. When Allied forces overran the island in early 1945, Onoda and three comrades retreated into the dense jungle.

Japan formally surrendered on August 15, 1945, just less than a year later. Leaflets were dropped announcing the end of the war and search parties tried to locate the remaining Japanese soldiers.

But Onoda and his men dismissed these reports as enemy propaganda. They continued their mission, raiding villages for food, clashing with locals, and Philippine forces and surviving in hiding. One comrade finally surrendered in 1950. The others were eventually killed. But Onoda, he pressed on by himself.

For nearly 29 years after the war ended, Onoda lived as if the conflict still raged. Japanese government officials declared him dead in 1959.

[41 : 11] Multiple rescue attempts failed because he refused to believe the latest news. It took a remarkable intervention. In 1974, his former commanding officer, Mayor Yoshimi Taniguchi, traveled to Lubang Island, formally relieved him of duty, and convinced him that the war was truly over.

And finally, on March 9, 1974, Onoda emerged from the jungle still in his tattered uniform carrying his rifle, and he finally laid down his arms.

He was 52 years old. You know, in some senses, right, Onoda's story is one of incredible loyalty and commitment and discipline.

he faithfully devoted to following the orders that he was given beyond what any of us can even imagine. But his story is also tragic, right?

He wasted 29 years of his life following orders that were outdated. And that's the risk that we as Christians have if we do not read the Bible correctly, if we do not rightly divide the truths and the scriptures.

[42 : 25] We can waste years of our Christian life trying to live under orders that, by the way, are from God, but they're not meant for us. Onoda, he spent decades fighting a war that had already been won.

And you know what? Many Christians today, they exhaust themselves fighting battles under the old covenant that Christ has already settled once and for all.

They're trying to earn God's blessing or avoid his curse by keeping Israel's law, trying to live under the law instead of enjoying God's grace, trying to climb their way to heaven instead of savoring the heavenly citizenship that they have been given as a free gift from God if only they'll receive it.

Trying to sometimes establish God's kingdom on earth instead of just simply being ambassadors of God's grace. you know, Onoda lived for 29 years eating grubs and berries in the tattered uniform of an army that no longer existed.

And today, many believers live their lives in the tattered and the filthy rags trying to produce their own righteous works in order to please God, in order to make a way for themselves instead of living and walking under grace in the pristine robes of righteousness that God gave to them.

[44 : 01] Rightly dividing dispensationalism, this is not just an abstract theological concept, not just some dry theology, it is the key to living in the freedom and the power and the joy of this present dispensation of grace that God has given to us, that he wants us to live in.

And so, if we understand correctly our orders, we can confidently lay down the outdated commission, the commission given to others in the past, and embrace instead the finished work of Jesus Christ and serve faithfully as ambassadors of his under a new commission.

under a new commission of grace until the time when he returns again in which he will initiate a new dispensation, the next one to come.

That's the importance of what we're studying. And in the future weeks, we're going to get into looking at all of these different contrasts, things like the difference between prophecy about the future and the mystery that God had hidden throughout the ages.

The messengers that God had like Moses, and Jesus was a messenger, but also the twelve apostles were messengers, and then the apostle Paul was another messenger.

[45 : 30] Contrast between God's people, you have Israel and the body of Christ. Contrast between the kingdom and the church. Contrast between law and grace. Contrast between the mission of Israel and our mission.

Contrast between our future and the future for Israel. Let's go ahead and stand up on your feet, we'll end there. And let me close in a word of prayer and then we'll sing the doxology together. Father, I hope that these words drove home the importance of rightly understanding the scripture, not just reading it without trying to understand the context, but really understanding what he's meant for us so that we can live our Christian lives as faithful ambassadors of yours, not in tattered rags like that Japanese soldier who lived in confusion all of his life, but that we would understand the

scriptures and look to understand what it is that you want us to know about dispensations and times and context that is important for us to understand your current instructions to us and how we ought to live today.

May you help us to do that in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. So, the doxology. I'm going to try to get the right key. Everybody sing with me.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise him, all creatures here below.

[47 : 08] Praise him above ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Amen. Amen. Thanks, everybody.