

### **1.2.8 Dispensationalism**

Dispensationalism is a theological belief attributed to John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Generally speaking, it states that God deals with humanity throughout biblical history in a number of periods (usually seven) of time, economies, administrations, or dispensations (i.e., Innocence, Conscience, Government, Patriarchal Rule, Mosaic Law, Grace or the Church Age, and the Millennial Kingdom). Traditionally, all dispensationalists hold to the following four major doctrines: 1) a distinct separation between an earthly Israel and the heavenly Church; 2) a clear separation between Old Covenant Law and New Covenant Grace; 3) the New Testament Church is a “parenthesis” in God’s plan and was not foretold in the Old Testament; and 4) a clear distinction between the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ, separated by the seven-year tribulation. All of their beliefs are based on a literal, plenary interpretation of the Bible (Elwell 2001:343-5).

According to Richard Kyle, who quotes Darrell Bock of Dallas Seminary, there are three types of modern dispensationalism: Scofieldian, revised and progressive. Scofieldian dispensationalism “rigidly separates Israel and the church.” Revised dispensationalism “allows for more continuity between Israel and the church and between the various dispensations.” Progressive dispensationalism “is even more moderate. It sees considerable continuity in God’s plan for humanity and avoids wild prophetic speculations” (Kyle 1998:117; Bock 1994:26-29) – (Also, see Ryrie’s *Dispensationalism* (1995) for more specific details on dispensationalism).

As mentioned above, there is much orthodox scholarship that remains outside the realm of dispensationalism, and strictly speaking, the author is not a dispensationalist either. The author believes that the New Covenant was a fulfillment of the Old Covenant (as grace is a fulfillment of the Law) and that the New Testament Church is foreshadowed in the Old Testament as Israel

and is the spiritual fulfillment of both physical and spiritual Israel. Additionally, Jesus Christ was born Jewish in Israel, as a fulfillment of all the Old Testament messianic prophecies and became the bridge between Old Testament law, which He came to fulfill (Matt 5:17-18; Luke 16:16-17) and New Testament grace, which is exhibited by His Body, the Church. Both covenants were connected and accessed through the same concept – faith (Rom 4:1 – 5:1). Besides the individual raptures of Enoch (Gen 5:21-24) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:10-12), which are outlined in the Old Testament, there is documented research that shows that the Rapture of the Church may have also been foreshadowed in the Old Testament by Psalm 7:6-7, Joel 2:28-32 and Zephaniah 2:1-3 (Cooper 1961:119-125). Therefore, based on the discussion in all of the preceding sections, the remainder of this thesis will be treated from a premillennial-futurist, pretribulational eschatological perspective.