

Inferred Teachings of Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism makes various inferences, most notably that history is divided into distinct eras (dispensations) where God interacts with humanity in different ways, leading to key conclusions like a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church, a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, and a future, pre-tribulation rapture and millennial reign of Christ. This view infers that the promises made to national Israel have not yet been fulfilled and will be completed in a future, earthly kingdom.

The dispensational eschatological system is built upon "inferences," which can be defined as drawing conclusions using contextual clues and prior knowledge to understand what is not directly stated. The process involves combining existing knowledge and observations to "read between the lines" and figure something out that has not been plainly stated. In contrast, "direct scriptural evidence" is information that is explicitly, or plainly stated.

Inferred beliefs about dispensations and covenants

Based on the dispensational view that God has interacted with humanity through distinct "dispensations" or ages, several inferences can be made.

- **Distinct plans for Israel and the Church:** Dispensationalists infer a fundamental distinction between the ethnic nation of Israel and the Christian Church. God's unconditional promises to Abraham and Israel are understood as having an earthly, national fulfillment. The Church is seen as a different "heavenly" people of God. This inference contrasts with covenant theology, which sees the Church as the spiritual fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.
- **The Church Age as a parenthesis:** Because God's covenants with Israel are still valid and unfulfilled, the existence of the Church is inferred to be a temporary, mysterious interlude in God's prophetic timetable for Israel. This "parenthesis" began in the book of Acts and will conclude with the rapture.
- **The Mosaic Law is not binding on Christians:** Dispensationalists infer that since the Mosaic covenant was specific to Israel during the dispensation of the Law, the Christian is not under its regulations. Instead, the believer is under the "law of Christ," though many moral principles from the Old Testament are reaffirmed in the New Testament.

Inferred eschatological beliefs

The literal hermeneutic and the distinction between Israel and the Church lead to specific inferences about end-times events.

- **Pre-tribulation rapture:** The most distinctive and well-known inference is the pre-tribulation rapture. Since prophecies concerning the tribulation are considered part of God's program for Israel, it is inferred that the Church must be "caught up" and removed from the world before this seven-year period of judgment begins.

Inferred Teachings of Dispensationalism

- **Future fulfillment of prophecies for Israel:** Prophecies in the Old Testament regarding Israel's future restoration, land, and dominance over the nations are inferred to be fulfilled literally during the millennium. This implies a physical, Jewish-centered kingdom on Earth with Christ reigning from Jerusalem.
- **A restored Jewish Temple:** Based on prophecies in books like Ezekiel, it is inferred that a rebuilt Temple will exist in Jerusalem during the millennial kingdom. This is also connected to the seven-year tribulation period, during which the Antichrist will desecrate the Temple.
- **Satan's binding during the millennium:** It is inferred that Satan will be bound for the duration of the 1,000-year reign of Christ, allowing for a time of global righteousness and peace.
- **Final judgment and the eternal state:** At the end of the 1,000-year reign, a final rebellion led by Satan will be defeated, followed by the final judgment and the creation of a new heaven and new Earth.

Inferences about interpreting scripture

Dispensational beliefs rely on certain interpretive assumptions.

- **The literal-historical method is primary:** The core inference is that a plain reading of the text is the correct one, especially for prophetic passages. This is in contrast to the historical premillennial approach, which infers that New Testament teachings on the church should inform how the Old Testament is interpreted.
- **Progressive revelation:** Dispensationalists infer that God's plan is revealed progressively through history. This means that new revelation (e.g., from the New Testament) can add to, but cannot change or spiritualize, the meaning of previous revelations (e.g., Old Testament prophecies for Israel).

Most Problematic Issues concerning Dispensational Premillennialism:

1. Placing a two-thousand-year gap between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's Seventy Weeks Prophecy (referred to as the "gap theory"). This is not stated in the text, but is imposed on the scripture.
2. The final seven years of Daniel's prophecy is the tribulation period where God's wrath is poured out on the world. Again, this is not stated in the text, but is imposed on the scripture. Without the seven-year tribulation, the dispensational view falls apart.
3. Changing the identity of the prince, which is the subject of the Seventy Weeks Prophecy, from the Messiah to the Antichrist in Daniel 9:26 where it speaks of "the people of the prince who is to come."
4. Assigning all the signs Jesus gives in the Olivet Discourse about "the end" to the distant future at the end of history, and not connecting it to the events of A.D. 70. This ignores the context concerning Jesus's discourse and the "next generation" time statement that sets the stage for the timing of when all these things take place. This also affects the

Inferred Teachings of Dispensationalism

interpretation of the book of Revelation since it is an apocalyptic version of the Olivet Discourse.

5. The “wooden literal” hermeneutic in interpreting prophetic/apocalyptic passages.
6. Implying that there are two peoples of God, Israel, and the church, following two different plans, with two different destinies.
7. The pretribulation rapture is not supported by any direct text that there are two separate phases of Christ’s second coming. The rapture timing views are all based on its relationship with the seven-year tribulation, which was a first century event as described in the Olivet Discourse and not a distant future event at the end of history.