

Frank E. Gaebelin: It is not God who has vacillated. Though there are seven dispensations, they are all one in principle, being throughout based upon the single test of obedience. And had man been found able to keep the conditions laid down by the first dispensation, the other six would have been unnecessary. But man failed. Yet, instead of casting off His guilty creature, God was moved with compassion, and gave him a fresh trial under new conditions. Thus each dispensation ends with failure, and each dispensation shows forth God's mercy.

Berkhof: It denotes a stewardship, an arrangement, or an administration, but never a testing time or a time of probation. . . . Scripture does not represent fall man as still on probation, but as an utter failure, totally unable to render obedience to God, and absolutely dependent on the grace of God for salvation.

Kenneth Horner: By a dispensation, we mean, of course, an age of history, a period of time. It is customary to speak of the age before the Cross as the Old Testament dispensation and that after the Cross as the New Testament dispensation. The former dispensation is commonly called an age of law and the latter, an age of grace.

Ernest F. Kevan (Baker's Dictionary of Theology): If the use of the word is to be kept strictly biblical, however, it will be found that it is used in the Scriptures to make only one distinction, that is, the distinction between the way the grace of God was made known before the coming of Christ and the way it was manifested after his redeeming work had been accomplished. This is the Pauline sense of the word when he speaks of God's dispensation in Eph. 1:10; 3:2,9; Col. 1:25. It is the plan that belongs to "the fulness of times." That is to say, it is God's manner of presenting his grace which belongs to his revelation in the Lord Jesus Christ. The "mystery" to which Paul refers in this connection is not the calling of the Gentiles, as some infer, but the redemption which is effected by Christ. The suggestion that a dispensation is "a period of time" is quite outside the scope of the meaning of the word and is but incidental to the fact that the two plans of God - the Mosaic and the Christian - were consecutive in their administration.

C. Norman Kraus: . . . a dispensation is not simply a chronological period of time. William Kelly stated it concisely when he said that a "dispensation" means a certain course of time, ruled by particular principles. In fact, what is pointed out in all these statements is that the distinctive thing about a dispensation in contrast to an age is the nontemporal aspect. It is the fact that "particular principles" are in force or that a test "in respect of obedience to some specific revelation" is taking place which constitutes an age a dispensation. Thus it becomes apparent that what is involved here is a methodology of redemption, a rationale of God's dealings with mankind. . . The coherence of Scofield's dispensational system is not historical or organic, but theological and schematic. It becomes historical only by virtue of being superimposed on the historical narrative.