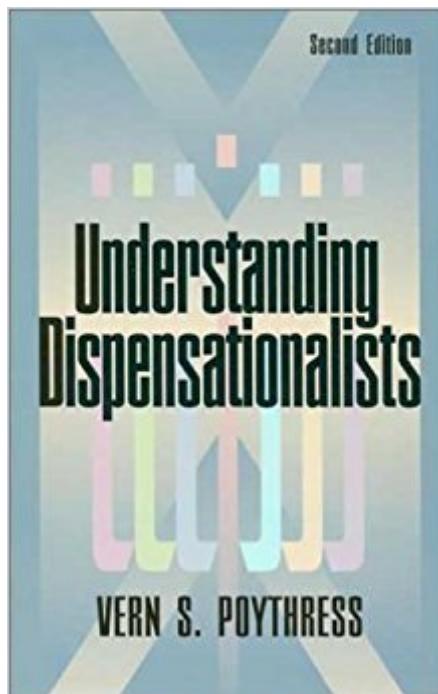


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# Understanding Dispensationalists



## **Synopsis**

Vern Poythress believes that dialogue is possible between dispensationalists and covenant theologians. This second edition adds a postscript in which Poythress responds to feedback from dispensational readers.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"... a fair, irenic evaluation. . . . Poythress should be thanked for helping to open up healthy dialogue among brothers and sisters in Christ." --Darrell L. Bock". . . poses some searching questions for dispensationalists. . . . should lead to improved understanding and greater mutual respect." --David L. Turner

Vern S. Poythress (MLitt, University of Cambridge; PhD, Harvard University; DTh, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa) is Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He is also the author of Understanding Dispensationalists; Science and Hermeneutics; Implications of Scientific Method for Biblical Interpretation; Symphonic Theology; The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology; and The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses.

The book is short and to the point. Poythress makes a very concerted effort of not simply disagreeing with Dispensationalists (D's), but he explains in clear terms how they reach their conclusions and why their approach is, to them, logically consistent. He points out the assumptions that lead D's to

their conclusions and why he would differ with these assumptions. He is an amillennialist himself, but he doesn't allow his approach to color his explanation of the difficulties associated with the "literal" interpretation of scripture touted by the D's. He gives a very clear explanation of what literal can mean from; word based "first thought" to "flat" or "plain language meaning" to full "historical/grammatical, contextual" interpretation. His conclusions are not forced on the reader but rather the logical outcome of his explanations. This is not a book to understand the historical origins of D nor the variety of it's current expressions. For that, one could read the entry in Wikipedia and be fairly well informed as an overview. This book is better understood as an explanation of the underlying assumptions of the D's and how they could be otherwise interpreted, and what difficulties arise from the attempts to apply these assumptions.

Very good book on the topic.

This is the first book I have ever encountered which reasonably and calmly describes the beliefs of the dispensationists without resorting to hyperbole and emotional accusations and condemnations. In spite of all the books I have read on Dispensationalism, I still learned something new from this book. Well worth the read. As a result of reading this book I somehow feel an emotional bond to the author; and I would read his other books without hesitation.

This book helped me to understand dispensational theology from it's beginning to where it is today. What I liked was: 1. The author truly tries to understand this theology, not tell just enough to rip it apart. 2. He consults many dispensationalists. 3. It is woven with counter points from covenant theology. If you want to read a book that helps to differentiate these two theological systems in a healthy way, then this is the book for you. It is obvious that the goal of this author is to open dialogue between people in these two "theological camps"

Poythress provides a very thoughtful, honest look at dispensationalism from a reformed perspective. It is a short and easy to read book, and should be required for all dispensationalist (or anyone who has fallen in love with the Left Behind series). Before I read this book I read Keith Mathison's book Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the Word of God? and couldn't help but think that he used huge over-generalizations and was more content to attack dispensationalist than open a dialog with them. Poythress avoids this trap with a fair interpretation. He points out that dispensationalism has a very high degree of internal coherence. While many reformed theologians point out the problems with

dispensationalism, they do so from within the reformed mindset. As Poythress points out, dispensationalism makes complete sense when viewed within a dispensationalist theology. He does, however, point out why the dispensational theology is flawed and, ultimately, incorrect. Finally, he is careful to observe the distinction between classic and progressive dispensationalism. Since there are, as Poythress points out, many areas of agreement between reformed and progressive dispensationalists, he directs most of his critique towards to more radical classic dispensationalism.

For a dispensationalist, reading this well-intentioned book is a bit like hearing someone describe a significant event in your life, in your presence, although the speaker wasn't remotely involved in your life at the time of the event. They don't really get the story right...and you'd really rather tell your own story. I see the wisdom in a prior reviewer's comment that it does seem a bit inappropriate to go to a covenant theologian to form an understanding of dispensational theology. OF COURSE, the exegetical conclusions of dispensationalism will seem inadequate, and that its proponents are hiding from "intellectual challenges and from insight into one's assumptions and limitations"! (p77 second ed. The dispensational believer might well say the same about his/her amillennial fellow believer. I'm dispensationalist, but spend as much time reading covenant theologians and preachers as any to mine the wealth of their understanding of many aspects of the faith. So far, they simply haven't provided me with a compelling argument for their eschatology, and I suspect the same could be said by a covenant/amil student who reads the works of dispensationalist writers. All in all, this is a good book for both covenant and dispensational believers who are interested in reading what covenant theologians think dispensationalists believe, and what, in their opinion, are the impassable contradictions of the dispensational system of exegesis. But honestly, a solid dispy theologian could put the problems with dispensational exegesis that Poythress "exposes" into the third deck on a windy day, or would at least admit that his theology, as ALL theologies, contains numerous antimonies that simply must be lived with.

The book is an excellent discussion of Dispensationalism from the Reformed perspective. It will help people from both sides understand the issues that separate the two camps. Poythress also calls for open discussion between the two camps with regard to areas in which they are close.

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