

DISPENSATIONAL STUDY GROUP: AN INTRODUCTION

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On November 16, 1989, a number of persons gathered in San Diego, California, for the fourth public meeting of the Dispensational Study Group. The group has met annually immediately prior to the national meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society since 1986.

Approximately two dozen dispensationalists, most of whom were teaching in colleges or seminaries at the time, met informally at Talbot Theological Seminary in 1985 to discuss current trends and ideas relating to the topic of dispensationalism. Dr. Craig Blaising of Dallas Theological Seminary led the discussion. Results of the meeting were that Blaising was chosen coordinator for the group's next activity and Dr. Gerry Breshears of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary accepted the position of secretary.

The initial public meeting was held in Atlanta, Georgia, on November 20, 1986. More than thirty persons met to hear Blaising present a paper entitled "Developing Dispensationalism." Responses were read by Dr. Stanley N. Gundry, Breshears, Dr. Stephen Spencer and Dr. David L. Turner. A discussion involving all participants followed. Blaising's work was published in two parts and continues to serve as an important introduction to dispensational thinking today.¹

Dr. Darrell L. Bock presented a paper called "The Reign of Christ" at the second public meeting which was held at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in 1987. Over fifty persons attended. The 1988 gathering took place at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois, where Mark Bailey of Dallas Theological Seminary read "Dispensational Definitions of the Kingdom." Attendance more than doubled that of previous meetings.

The 1989 meeting of the Dispensational Study Group at the Bethel Theological Seminary West Campus was devoted to a consideration of the book, *Understanding Dispensationalists*, by Dr.

¹Craig A. Blaising, "Doctrinal Development in Orthodoxy," *Bib Sac* 145:578 (April-June 1988) 133-40 and "Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists," *Bib Sac* 145:579 (July-September 1988) 254-80.

Vern S. Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary. This book is a covenant theologian's critique of dispensationalism issued by Zondervan Publishing House in 1987. The papers and minutes that follow this introduction were presented before a large group of evangelicals, including adherents of both dispensational and non-dispensational thought.

The *Grace Theological Journal* is privileged to present these papers to a wider audience than had opportunity to hear them read and discussed. Two precautions need to be shared. The background of the workshop is the aforementioned book by Poythress and greatest benefit of these papers will accrue to the ones who have read that book. Second, these papers were presented as working papers for group discussion and interaction. They were not written for publication. They must be read in that light.² With these two points emphasized, we are pleased to make available papers by Dr. Paul Karleen and Dr. Robert Saucy who present their interactions with *Understanding Dispensationalists*. Poythress' responses to both men follow and the conclusion of the corpus of materials is a summary of the open discussion.

It hardly needs to be said that the views expressed are those of the various participants and do not represent necessarily the position of any group, institution, or this journal.

²Note Dr. Poythress' remarks at the beginning of his responses.