

DISPENSATIONS

Dispensation defined:

A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. Seven such dispensations are distinguished in Scripture. It is very important to realize that in every dispensation salvation has been by grace alone Acts 10 says, *"To him give all the prophets' witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."* Acts 10:43

The First Dispensation: Innocence. Man was created in innocence, placed in a perfect environment, subjected to an absolutely simple test, and warned of the consequence of disobedience. The woman fell through pride; the man, deliberately 1 Tim. 2:14. God restored His sinning creatures, but the dispensation of innocence ended in the judgment of the Expulsion Gen. 3:24.

The Second Dispensation: Conscience. By disobedience man came to a personal and experimental knowledge of good and evil-of good as obedience, of evil as disobedience to the known will of God. Through that knowledge conscience awoke. Expelled from Eden and placed under the second, or Adamic Covenant, man was responsible to do all known good, to abstain from all known evil, and to approach God through sacrifice. The result of this second testing of man is stated in Genesis 6:5 and the dispensation ended in the judgment of the Flood. Apparently "the east of the garden" verse 24, where the cherubim and the flame, remained the place of worship through this second dispensation.

The Third Dispensation: Human Government. Under Conscience, as in Innocence, man utterly failed, and the judgment of the Flood marks the end of the second dispensation and the beginning of the third. The declaration of the Noahic Covenant subjects humanity to a new test. Its distinctive feature is the institution, for the first time, of human government-the government of man by man. The highest function of government is the judicial taking of life. All other governmental powers are implied in that. It follows that the third dispensation is distinctively that of human government. Man is responsible to govern the world for God. That responsibility rested upon the whole race, Jew and Gentile, until the failure of Israel under the Palestinian Covenant Deut. 28; 30:1-10 brought the judgment of the Captivities, when "the times of the Gentiles" Luke. 21:24; Rev. 16:14 began, and the government of the world passed exclusively into Gentile hands (Dan. 2:36-45; Luke 21:24; Acts 15:14-17. That both Israel and the Gentiles have governed for self, not God is sadly apparent. The judgment of the confusion of tongues ended the racial testing; that of the captivities the Jewish; while the Gentile testing will end in the smiting of the Image Dan. 2 and the judgment of the nations Mt. 25:31-46.

The Fourth Dispensation: Promise. For Abraham and his descendants it is evident that the Abrahamic Covenant Gen. 15:18, made a great change. They became distinctively the heirs of promise. That covenant is wholly gracious and unconditional. The descendants of Abraham had but to abide in their own land to inherit every blessing. In Egypt they lost their blessings, but not their covenant. The Dispensation of Promise ended when Israel rashly accepted the law Ex. 19:4.

Grace had prepared a deliverer, Moses provided a sacrifice for the guilty and by divine power brought them out of bondage Ex. 19:4; but at Sinai they exchanged grace for law. The Dispensation of Promise extends from Gen. 12:1 to Ex. 19:8, and was exclusively Israelitish. The dispensation must be distinguished from the covenant. The former is a mode of testing; the latter is everlasting because unconditional. The law did not abrogate the Abrahamic Covenant Gal. 3:15-18, but was an intermediate disciplinary dealing "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made." Gal. 3:19-29; 4:1-7, only the dispensation as a testing of Israel, ended at the giving of the law.

The Fifth Dispensation: Law. This dispensation extends from Sinai to Calvary—from the Exodus to the Cross. The history of Israel in the wilderness and in the land is one long record of the violation of the law. The testing of the nation by law ended in the judgment of the Captivities, but the dispensation itself ended at the Cross.

- ✚ Man's state at the beginning. Exodus 19:1-4.
- ✚ His responsibility. Exodus 19:5, 6 Romans 10:5.
- ✚ His failure. 2 Kings 17:7-17, Acts 2:22-23.
- ✚ The judgment. 2 Kings 17:1-6; 25:1-11 Luke 21:20-24.

The Sixth Dispensation: Grace. Grace. Summary:

Grace is "the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man, not by works of righteousness which we have done" Tit. 3:4-5. It is, therefore, constantly set in contrast to law, under which God demands righteousness from man, as, under grace, he gives righteousness to man Rom. 3:21-22; 8:4; Phil. 3:9. Law is connected with Moses and works; grace with Christ and faith John 1:17; Rom. 10:4-10. Law blesses the good; grace saves the bad Ex. 19:5; Eph. 2:1-9. Law demands that blessings be earned; grace is a free gift Deut. 28:1-6; Eph. 2: 8-9; Rom. 4: 4-5. As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ Rom. 3: 24-26; 4: 24-25. The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation John 1:12-13; 3:36; Mt. 21:37; 22:42; John 15:22-25; Heb. 1:2; 1 John 5:10-12. The immediate result of this testing was the rejection of Christ by the Jews, and His crucifixion by Jew and Gentile Acts 4:27. The predicted end of the testing of man under grace is the apostasy of the professing church see "Apostasy," 2 Tim. 3:1-8, and the resultant apocalyptic judgments. Grace has a twofold manifestation: in salvation Rom. 3:24, and in the walk and service of the saved Rom. 6:15.

The Seventh Dispensation: Kingdom or Fullness of Times. This, the seventh and last of the ordered ages which condition human life on the earth is identical with the kingdom covenanted to David 2 Sam. 7: 8-17; Zech. 12:8, Summary; Luke. 1:31-33, 1 Cor. 15:24, and gathers into itself under Christ all past "times":

The time of oppression and misrule ends by Christ taking His kingdom Isa. 11:3-4.

The time of testimony and divine forbearance ends in judgment Mt. 25:31-46; Acts 17:30-31; Rev. 20:7-15.

The time of toil ends in rest and reward 2 Thess. 1:6-7.

The time of suffering ends in glory Rom. 8:17-18.

The time of Israel's blindness and chastisement ends in restoration and conversion Rom. 11:25-27; Ezek. 39:25-29.

The times of the Gentiles end in the smiting of the image and the setting up of the kingdom of the heavens Dan. 2:31-35; Revelation Chapters 15-21.

The time of creation's thralldom ends in deliverance at the manifestation of the sons of God Gen. 3:17; Isa. 11: 6-8; Rom. 8: 19-21.

DISPENSATION

Seven dispensations are commonly identified:

Innocence, from Creation to the fall of man and God's sending them out of the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:24

Conscience, God's Covenant with Adam that ending with the judgment of the Flood. Genesis 9

Human government, the Covenant with Noah, extending to the time of Abraham;

Promise, from Abraham's call to Moses. Genesis 12:1

Law, from the giving of the Law to Moses to the death of Jesus Christ. Exodus 19:8; 20:1-31:18)

Grace, from the death and resurrection of Christ to His Second Coming.

Kingdom, the establishment of God's kingdom on earth and the thousand-year reign of Christ over the nations.