

The Dispensation of Law

Open your Bibles, please, to the book of Exodus, chapter 19, because that will be our point of departure in our study of dispensations. We have suggested that you cannot rightly divide the Word of Truth unless you have a clear understanding of dispensations.

There are any number of definitions of dispensations which have been presented, but we have said to you that the one given in the notes of your Scofield Reference Bible cannot be improved upon. We have been emphasizing that to you, keeping in mind that a dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in relation to obedience to some special revelation to the will of God.

We have discovered in our study that there are seven dispensations, seven such periods of time when God tests man along certain lines. We have studied four of them: the Dispensation of Innocence, the Dispensation of Conscience, the Dispensation of Human Government, the Dispensation of Promise. In this lesson, we are ready to consider with you the Dispensation of Law, the fifth dispensation.

Misunderstood And Misapplied

I would like to suggest to you that this dispensation is more misunderstood and more misapplied than any other dispensation. We have seen in our study of the dispensations that each one came to a definite conclusion, and yet, certain conditions, certain promises of those dispensations have continued on down through the ages to the present hour. For example, the Dispensation of Conscience continues in the sense that men still have a conscience. If that conscience is rightly related to the Word of God, it becomes a lamp whereby God is able to light the entire inner life of man. There is a sense in which the Dispensation of Promise continues because the promises were made to Abraham in relation to Abraham's seed, and all those promises have not yet been fulfilled.

It is strange that no one seems to want to continue the things that are related to these other dispensations; but when it comes to the Dispensation of Law, which is the only dispensation outside the Dispensation of Innocence which was never intended to continue down through the ages, men insist on continuing it. They insist on continuing things related to the Dispensation of Law to such an extent that men are bound down by legalism in this particular hour in a way that they never have been.

Six Words

I think this will become clearer to you as we go along. You remember that we gave you six words that we have used as an outline for the discussion of these dispensations. Let me give them to you again, and then we will think about them individually. The words are: circumstances, characters, covenant, course, climax, and compassion.

Circumstances Of The Dispensation

As we consider the circumstances of the Dispensation of Law, the circumstances under which it began, and the circumstances under which it was lived, it will be necessary for us to remember that the climax of the previous dispensation - the Dispensation of Promise - resulted in Egyptian bondage. Because the nation of Israel was not willing to walk according to the promise of God, God permitted her to go into four hundred bitter years of slavery in the land of Egypt. The compassion which God manifested in the Dispensation of Promise was emphasized in the deliverance from the land of Egypt in the wilderness of Sinai, and the Dispensation of Law begins. The circumstances under which this dispensation begins is best illustrated by what we find in Exodus, chapter 19:

Notice, please, in Exodus 19, verse 1, these words:

Exodus 19:

- 1 *In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai.*
- 2 *For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount.*
- 3 *And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;*
- 4 *Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.*
- 5 *Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:*
- 6 *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. [Now notice carefully. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Is this what your Bible says? That's not what it says, is it? That's the reason you need to read the Scriptures. The reason I read it that way is because that is the emphasis that is usually placed upon it. My Bible reads, and yours does, too, as follows:

Exodus 19:

- 6 *...These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*

The Dispensation of Law is not related to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Dispensation of Law is related to the children of Israel. Continue reading in verse 7:

Exodus 19:

- 7 *And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.*
- 8 *And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken*

we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.

9 *And the Lord said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the Lord.*

These are the circumstances under which the Dispensation of Law began. God said, through Moses, to the children of Israel. "I am going to make a covenant with you. If you will obey this covenant, everything will be fine; but if you don't obey this covenant, disaster will be the result."

The Mosaic Covenant

This leads me to the discussion of the next word - the word *covenant*. We have learned that in each one of these dispensations, there has been a covenant. In the Garden of Eden, there was the Adamic Covenant. After the Flood, there was the Noahaic Covenant. In the Dispensation of Promise, there was the Abrahamic Covenant. Notice the covenant which is referred to in verse 5 again:

Exodus 19:

5 *Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant,...*

This covenant is referred to in the Scriptures as *the Mosaic Covenant*. In John, chapter 1, verse 17, we are reminded that the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Mosaic Covenant is the covenant under which the Dispensation of Law was to operate. Many people are taking the Mosaic Covenant, which was meant for this particular dispensation, and applying it not only to the nation of Israel, but to the present dispensation in which we now live and to the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. In so doing, they create all manner of confusion.

613 Commandments

What do I mean by the Mosaic Covenant? Let me suggest to you, so that you will realize the enormity of it, that the Mosaic Covenant represents a code of some 613 commandments covering all phases of life and conduct. Someone may say, "I thought when we talk about the Mosaic Covenant, we are talking about the Ten Commandments." That's only part of it. That's only ten of the 613.

I want to emphasize that today because, if you are going to move the Mosaic Covenant into this Dispensation of Grace, you cannot move only ten points of it and live by them. The Bible very plainly says in James' epistle that if we break one provision of the 613, then we are guilty of breaking all of them. There are some brave souls who say they are quite willing to abide by the Ten Commandments. If such be the case, and you just want to forget about the other 603, which you have no right to do, you are biting off a big piece if you think you can keep the Ten Commandments.

Recognize what the Lord Jesus Christ had to say about the Ten Commandments, remembering that it is one thing to commit the act of adultery, but it's the same thing to wish you could in your heart. It is one thing to pick up a gun and blow someone's brains out, but it's the same thing if you want to, but you don't actually do it. You see how utterly foolish it is to try to take these commandments and apply them to this Dispensation of Grace.

Three Major Divisions

For the record, we might say that these 613 commandments are divided into three major divisions. Some of them are related to the moral code, such as the Ten Commandments. Some of them are related to civil law in connection with the society of the nation of Israel, and some of them are related to ceremonial law. This was the covenant which the children of Israel readily agreed to observe when they said to Moses, "You tell the Lord that all He hath said, we will do." They were about as unacquainted with the wickedness of their sinful hearts as men are today who declare that they can keep the Ten Commandments without any problem whatsoever.

Palestinian Covenant

It would be well for us to emphasize that closely related to the Mosaic Covenant, so closely as a matter of fact that it could be considered a division of it, is the Palestinian Covenant, and you need to be familiar with it. The Palestinian Covenant is described for us in the book of Deuteronomy, chapters 29-30. The reason it is called the Palestinian Covenant is that it is related to God's agreement with the nation of Israel concerning the land of Palestine. This is of real interest in the light of present day events. You indicate an ignorance of the Scriptures if you go around saying, "I think the Arabs ought to have part of Palestine. They have lived there for a while." God said, "They ought not to have it." Not only should they not have it, they are not going to get it because God's Word is true.

Return of the Jews To Palestine

The Palestinian Covenant is of interest in our discussion because in chapter 30, in the first nine verses, which represent an introduction to the covenant, the entire history of the nation of Israel, from the time they entered the land until the time that the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, is portrayed. I would like for you to turn in your Bibles, to the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 30, and notice the first nine verses:

Deuteronomy 30:

1 *And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee,*

The first thing that is brought to our mind from this verse is that the nation of Israel will not keep the Mosaic Covenant. The nation of Israel will not observe the Palestinian Covenant, and there is nothing left for God to do but to scatter them to the four corners of the world, which He began to do back in the Babylonian captivity and which was completed in 70 A.D. when Titus marched into the city of Jerusalem. Because God scattered the nation of Israel, and for a time the nation of

Israel was not known as a nation, people felt that God was through with them. But not so, says Moses, in verse 2, because he says the nation of Israel will recognize their failure, acknowledge it, and return to the Lord. We read in verse 2:

Deuteronomy 30:

2 *And shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul;*

Not only will they return to the Lord, but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself will return to this earth in response to their plea when they have come to the realization of their rejection of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah of Israel.

Now, notice verse 3:

Deuteronomy 30:

3 *That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.*

There is a sense in which the nation of Israel has been returning to the land of Palestine in tremendous numbers since 1941 until this very day. There is a nation with the flag of David flying over it, a nation that must be reckoned with. The return has already begun, but the final, conclusive return of the nation of Israel to the land of Palestine will be completed when the Lord Jesus Christ Himself returns. Then the Palestinian Covenant in itself will be fulfilled because the land out of which they have been cheated all through these centuries will be restored to them. True, they do have some of it now. True, they will have all the land that God promised them in the Palestinian Covenant. We read in verse 4 that they will have it:

Deuteronomy 30:

4 *If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee:*

5 *And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.*

Conversion Of The Nation Of Israel

In verse 6, perhaps the greatest truth related to the Palestinian Covenant is the promise of the conversion of the nation of Israel. Today a veil is over the eyes of the Jews. When you talk with them about Jesus of Nazareth, they become indignant; they are not interested in hearing about Him. But there will be a day when their eyes will be opened, and they will acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah.

You see, that's why I'm betwixt and between in this present age in which we live. I can't imagine sitting on a platform in a church with a Jewish rabbi and acting like he's my brother in Christ. He couldn't be! He doesn't even know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. And certainly it would be foolish of me to act as though I believe everything is all right when I believe he is lost. And he is lost unless he knows the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. In order to have an ecumenical meeting with him, I must not say anything to offend him, so I'm betwixt and between.

When it became popular not to say the Jews crucified Christ, when it became very unpopular to insist they did, it left me out in the cold. I believe the Bible, and I believe the Jews did crucify Jesus Christ. And I believe the Lord Jesus Christ is going to stay at the right hand of the throne of God until the Jews acknowledge they did and ask Him to return. That will happen, if you will look at verse 6:

Deuteronomy 30:

6 *And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

God has promised that Israel will return unto Himself one day, according to the provision of the Palestinian Covenant.

Signs Of The Mosaic Covenant

I suggest something to you that is very important - the signs of the Mosaic Covenant, of which the Palestinian Covenant is a part. The signs of the covenant are two. The reason I want to mention them is that even though some folk are not too insistent upon the observance of the Mosaic Covenant in this Dispensation of Grace, they are insistent upon the observance of the signs. Of the two signs of the Mosaic Covenant, one is related to the flesh, and one is related to the Spirit.

Circumcision Related To Covenant

The one related to the flesh is circumcision. You are not bothered too much by this today, but the early church was. Everywhere the Apostle Paul went in his journeys and took any Christians with him, if there were any Jews there, they stood up and said, "Have these fellows been circumcised? If they haven't, we're not going to have anything to do with them because it's all right for them to believe in Jesus Christ, but they ought to be circumcised, too."

I don't know that anyone is going around insisting on circumcision, per se, but I want to say to you that if anyone tells you that you have to do anything else except believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for eternal life, the Judaising teachers have arisen again. They are trying to take the provisions of the Mosaic Covenant and place them over in this Dispensation of Grace, and it couldn't possibly please the Lord.

Sabbath Related To Covenant

The other sign of the Mosaic Covenant is the Sabbath. This usually disturbs people when I say it, but the Sabbath, being the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, has absolutely no bearing on anyone in this Dispensation of Grace. I don't like to quibble about the words that people use. Oftentimes, I don't think about the words I use, and when someone calls my attention to them, I say, "That is what I mean. I just didn't use the right word." But I wish that we could be more careful about our vocabulary in this Age of Grace.

For example, I don't believe that in this Age of Grace, you ought to talk about going to church on the Sabbath. You have no business keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath is related to the nation of Israel. I don't like for people to be told that they should remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy; that's related to the Mosaic Covenant. That's not related to this Dispensation of Grace.

Nearly every time I make a statement like this, someone comes to me and says, "I wish you wouldn't talk like that! I don't like to see people cut their grass on Sunday." When I'm talking about the Sabbath; I'm not talking about Sunday. They say, "I wish you wouldn't talk like that. I think people ought to close their business on the Sabbath, and I think they ought to keep the Sabbath."

You have probably noticed in our newspapers any number of advertisements suggesting that the merchants of the city close their businesses on the Sabbath. You often see the names of ministers there. You've never seen my name there. I'm not the least bit interested in merchants' closing their businesses on the Sabbath day. That's law; that's related to the Mosaic Covenant. It is not related to this Age of Grace.

Someone may say, "When was the Sabbath changed to Sunday? It was, you know. Why don't we just call the first day of the week the Sabbath and not worry about it?" I'll tell you one big reason you'd better not. If you have any Seventh-Day Adventist friends who are trying to teach you error, they will tell you that there is no place in the Scriptures when the Sabbath was ever changed to Sunday, and they are exactly right. There is no such Scripture. The Sabbath was related to the Mosaic Covenant.

Observance Of Easter

Since the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead on a Sunday, every Sunday is resurrection day. Of course, we're so needful of signs and props to encourage our faith that some of the church fathers got together about the third century and said, "We need a day that we can remind people that Jesus Christ arose from the dead, and what day shall we decide on?" They scratched their heads and looked around and said, "Well, the goddess of fertility reminds us of the resurrection. Why don't we take the day that is dedicated to the goddess Ishtar and call it the day when Christ arose from the dead?" So men have been observing Easter, the resurrection of Christ, with their Easter bunnies and their eggs and their Easter baskets. Someone asks, "When your children were little, didn't they color eggs and have Easter baskets?" Yes, but never related to the resurrection of Christ. We made a distinction and gave a reason for it.

Confusing Law And Grace

Beloved, the reason I want you to see this is that this dispensation, more than any other, has been used to confuse the plain teaching of the Word of God. Because men - and I think it must be of Satan - insist on taking the things related to the Dispensation of Law and bringing them into this Dispensation of Grace.

For instance, if you are going to live according to the Dispensation of Law, then you must observe the Sabbath. But quit doing it on Sunday; do it on Saturday, for that is the Sabbath. And quit doing it by walking to church, because if you walk to church you'll be breaking the law. And if you have a gear shift on your automobile, if you don't happen to have automatic shift, you'll break the law if you drive to church and shift gears. I'm not being ridiculous; I'm emphasizing how ridiculous men can be when they want to turn the simple story of the grace of God into something that involves the work of men.

Characters Of The Dispensation

Another word, the word *characters*. Who are the main characters in this Dispensation of Law? Moses was the chief character. Then came all of the people who followed Moses, who lived in that period of time that is described in our Old Testament, and all of the people who lived up through the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles.

Course Of The Dispensation

The Dispensation of Law didn't end with the Old Testament. The Dispensation of Law lasted 1524 years and is covered by those passages of Scripture which begin with Exodus, chapter 19, and includes all the Old Testament, the four Gospels, and the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. John the Baptist lived under the Dispensation of Law. The Lord Jesus Christ came under the Dispensation of Law.

The Dispensation of Law followed the same course that other dispensations followed. Like all the other dispensations, it was downward. Before the clay was dry upon which the Ten Commandments was written, the nation of Israel had made themselves a golden calf and were bowing down and worshiping it. And God knew it would be that way.

Reason For The Law

Turn with me in your Bibles, please, to the book of Romans, chapter 3, and notice what God says about the law and man's reaction to it. In verse 19, God says:

Romans 3:

19 *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

When the law was given, the response of man to it was such that the whole world stood guilty before God, so that, in verse 20, God could make the observation:

Romans 3:

20 *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

God says, "It's impossible for man to keep the law. It's impossible for man to obey it." Someone who is thinking will say, "If that's true, why did God give the law?" That question is often asked. Why did God permit sin? Why doesn't God kill the Devil? These are normal, natural questions.

Knowledge Of Sin

Why did God give the law? Well, there are several reasons. If you will look at the last statement of verse 20, you'll find one of them:

Romans 3:

20 *... for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

God gave the law to make man conscious of sin. I like the way Paul expresses it in chapter 7 of his letter to the Romans, where he says in verse 7:

Romans 7:

7 *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

What is Paul saying? He is saying, "I just wouldn't have been conscious of what a sinner I was if the Ten Commandments had not driven home to me the fact that I was a sinner." Look at verse 9:

Romans 7:

9 *For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

"I felt pretty good until the commandments made me realize what a sinner I was." Why was the law given? To make men conscious of sin. Why was that necessary? Turn with me to the book of Galatians, chapter 3, and notice verse 19:

Galatians 3:

19 *Wherefore then serveth the law? [What's the reason for the law?] It was added because of transgressions, [notice carefully now] till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.*

Law Ended

The law was given because of sin. It was given only for a stated period of time. How long? “Till the seed should come.” The seed is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Why was it necessary to give men the law in view of their sin if Jesus Christ was going to come anyway? Look at verse 24 of this same chapter, where we read:

Galatians 3:

24 *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [a teacher] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*

What was the purpose of the law? The purpose of the law was to make men realize that they needed a Savior. The purpose of the law was to make men realize that they themselves could never be just before God. And in God's own time, when the human race had ample opportunity to learn the lesson, Christ came.

In Galatians, chapter 4, verse 4, we read:

Galatians 4:

4 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*

5 [Notice now] *To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

Climax Of The Dispensation

That brings me to the fifth word of the six, the word *climax*. To what climax did this dispensation come? It came to that climax where God looked upon the human race and saw them, not only wicked as He did at the end of the Dispensation of Human Government, but saw them utterly condemned, saw them hopelessly lost and saw them without one ounce of ability to save themselves. The Dispensation of Law ended in failure.

Compassion Of God

But, remember, I told you there was a note of compassion in relation to each one of these dispensations. That note of compassion is expressed many places, but I like the way that the Apostle Paul expresses it in chapter 8 of the book of Romans. Turn there, please, for I believe this to be a most interesting presentation of the compassion of God as the Dispensation of Law is brought to an end. We read:

Romans 8:

1 *There is therefore now no condemnation, [judgment] to them which are in Christ Jesus,...*

We will stop our reading there because what we find in the King James translation in this verse is not in the original text. The phrase, “who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” is not in

the original text. Whether you're walking after the flesh or after the Spirit has nothing to do with it. It's your location that makes the difference. If you are in the Lord Jesus Christ, then there is no condemnation. Now why does God say that? Look at verse 2:

Romans 8:

2 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

You see, the Mosaic Covenant was the law of sin and death. "This do, and thou shalt live. This do not, and thou shalt die." Men could not do it, so it became a covenant of death. Now look at verse 3, for here is the compassion of God:

Romans 8:

3 *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,...*

This doesn't suggest that the law was weak. It suggests that the flesh was weak. "What the law could not do because the flesh was weak." You know what I am talking about, don't you, when I say the flesh is weak? How many times have you said that about yourself?" The flesh is so weak that it could not keep the demands of the law. So what happened? Did God throw the law out the window? Did He say, "Well, I tried it and it didn't work, so I'll just forget it?" He couldn't do that. He is a just God. The demands of the law had to be met. Man couldn't do it, and so we read:

Romans 8:

3 *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, [notice carefully] God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

That's God's compassion. God knew that the Ten Commandments (I'm using that term as we usually think of it.) could never be kept perfectly by man. And He knew that if their perfect keeping was necessary for salvation, then man would be eternally lost. There was a great big debt chalked up against the human race because man failed so in keeping the law. So what did God do? He sent His Son. He sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and He paid all the debts that were chalked up against man. In so doing, He redeemed us from the curse of the law. That is what God means when He says, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

The Dispensation of Law came to an end. Like all the others, it ended in failure; but a raindrop of hope was painted across it when the Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all the righteous demands of the law, paid the debt in full, and offers you free, without charge, a pardon, a paid-up bill, the note discharged. All you have to do is to take it.

Tell me why we are so perverse that we would much rather hold on to this promise with one hand and work like mad with the other hand to be approved of God? Why are we so perverse? Why can't we receive with open hearts that which God has offered so freely?

Conclusion

If this truth is somewhat new to you, I know what you are thinking. You're thinking, "How can you get people to live right if you tell them the law isn't binding? What big stick are you going to use to make people do what they ought to do?" Beloved, you don't need a big stick. You will find out when we discuss the Dispensation of Grace, the dispensation in which we are living now, that there is something that will work better than the big stick of the law, and that is the power of the Holy Spirit