

Lesson 18 – The 7 Dispensations of Bible History

All Christians are familiar with the fact that there are two major time periods in the Bible – The Age of the Law and the Age of Grace. Many people never think about the fact that there were other ages before the giving of the Law, starting in Exodus 20, and that there will be one more age – the Millennium – which will come after the age we are living in now. There are 7 of these time periods in all, starting with the Creation of Man in the Garden of Eden, and ending at the end of the Millennium.

During these 7 Biblical eras, or Dispensations, salvation was always by Grace because man has always been powerless to save himself. During the 5 Dispensations of the Old Testament, people were looking forward to Christ for salvation. Today, during the Dispensation of Grace, we look back to Calvary for salvation.

These 7 eras are called

1. Dispensations – Eph. 3:2
2. Ages – Eph. 2:7

Definition: Dispensation (Gr. οἰκονομία *oikonomía*), the administration of a household. Just as different households in the neighborhood are managed in different ways, God managed – and will manage – His relationship to His people and His creation in different ways from Genesis through Revelation.

1. The Dispensation of Innocence – Gen 1:28-3:13

- a. The condition of Man –
 - i. Had never sinned, so Adam and Eve were innocent. Adam and Eve were the only innocent people in history.
 - ii. Were not even aware of the existence of good and evil
- b. The test – Gen. 2:15-17
 - i. You can eat of any tree in the Garden, but one
 - ii. Do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
- c. The result
 - i. Adam and Eve disobeyed God – Gen. 3:6
 - ii. They acquired a knowledge of evil – Gen. 3:7
 - iii. They experienced guilt – Gen. 3:8
 - iv. Even in the midst of judgment, the Redeemer was promised – Gen. 3:15
 - v. They were expelled from the Garden of Eden – Gen. 3:23
 1. Life in the Garden was easy
 2. Life outside of the Garden was much more difficult
 3. Sin and the devil always promise good times and a better life, but in reality, sin always makes life more difficult, and of course, it brings the judgment of God.
- d. The distinctions of this dispensation
 - i. No other dispensation started with sinless innocence.
 - ii. God's expectation and command was for the people to remain innocent.

2. The Dispensation of Conscience – Gen. 3:22-7:23

- a. In the previous dispensation there was no conscience, because there was no sin and no guilt.

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- b. Conscience gave people a basic knowledge of evil and the responsibility to do right.
 - c. The Failure: The human race did evil continually – Gen. 6:5, 11-12
 - d. The judgment: God destroyed all but 8 people in the Flood – Gen. 7:11-12, 23.
 - i. God chose Noah to continue the human race after the judgment of the Flood– why? Was it an arbitrary function of sovereignty? No. God chose Noah because he was obedient to Him – Gen. 6:9, 12-13.
 - e. The distinctive of this dispensation: There was no institution of government or human law yet, and everyone was personally responsible to God to do right.
- 3. The Dispensation of Human Government – Gen. 8:20-11:9**
- a. God instituted human government – man governing man – for the first time after the Flood
 - i. Note that government was instituted by God Himself – see also Rom. 13:1-2
 - ii. The prohibition of murder – Gen. 9:6
 - iii. The responsibility for those in authority to carry out punishment for the guilty – Gen. 9:6
 - iv. This is the first time in history that God put the responsibility of punishment for crime into the hands of men.
 - b. After the Flood, God gave Noah and his family the responsibility to be fruitful and multiply – Gen. 9:7
 - c. The distinctive of this dispensation: Human Government was established to carry out the will of God.
- 4. The Dispensation of Promise – Gen. 12:1-Ex. 19:8**
- a. It starts with the call of Abram – Gen. 12:1-2
 - b. God promised Abram . . .
 - i. He will make a great nation from Abram’s descendents – Gen. 12:2
 - ii. He will make Abram’s name great – Gen. 12:2
 - iii. He will make Abram a blessing to others – Gen. 12:2
 - iv. He will protect Abram and his descendents – Gen. 12:3
 - v. He will bless those who bless Abram and his descendents – Gen. 12:3
 - vi. He will curse them who treat Abram and his descendents wrong. – en. 12:3
 - c. During this Dispensation, God created the nation of Israel through Abraham’s descendants.
 - d. This is the beginning of God’s dealing with His chosen nation, Israel.
- 5. The Dispensation of Law – Ex. 19:8-Matt. 27:35**
- a. God gave His Law through Moses
 - b. The Law had 3 distinct parts
 - i. Eternal Moral Law of God
 - 1. The things that were always right and wrong, regardless of Dispensation.
 - 2. Love and obey God with all your heart, soul and mind
 - 3. Love your neighbor as yourself
 - ii. Ceremonial Law – developing a relationship of obedience to God.
 - 1. Temple worship
 - 2. Sacrifices
 - 3. Circumcision
 - 4. Sabbath keeping

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- iii. Civil Law – developing a relationship of mutual good with other people.
 - 1. This was the Constitution of the Nation of Israel.
 - 2. It forms the basis for a lot of our laws today in the U.S. and many other countries that have been influenced by Christianity.
- c. During the Dispensation of Law, God’s people had a history of failing Him
 - i. The Israelites rebelled against God while Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law from God – Ex. 32:4
 - ii. They grumbled and complained against God while He was leading them from Egypt to the Promised Land – Ex. 16:3
 - iii. They rebelled against God in the Book of Judges. – Judges 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1, 6:1; 10:6; 13:1
 - iv. They rejected God’s plan of a pure theocracy. They wanted to have a king like the other nations around them – 1 Sam. 8:7
 - v. Many of their kings did evil and led them into evil – 1 Kings 11:6; 15:26, 34; 16:19, 30, etc.
- d. Israel faced severe judgment for rebelling against God
 - i. The kingdom was divided into two kingdoms
 - ii. The Northern Kingdom was taken captive by Assyria in 722 B.C. – 2 Kings 15:29
 - iii. The Southern Kingdom was taken captive into Babylon in 586 B.C. – 2 Kings 24:12-16

6. The Dispensation of Grace

- a. Jesus came with grace to redeem us from sin – John 1:17
- b. The Law was a curse because nobody could keep it. Its ultimate purpose was to show us that we are sinners in need of the Savior – Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:24-25
- c. Characteristics of the Dispensation of Grace
 - i. Does not mean that people were not saved by Grace in the Old Testament. They were
 - 1. Noah – Gen. 6:8
 - 2. Abraham – Gen. 15:6
 - ii. It means that Grace is the dominant theme of the Dispensation.
 - iii. God moved beyond the Jews and reached out to the Gentiles
 - 1. It began with the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman soldier
 - 2. Paul was sent out as an apostle to the Gentiles – Acts 13:46; 15:12; Eph. 3:1
 - iv. The church, which started out Jewish, became dominated by Gentiles over the years, so that today, there are not many Christian Jews.
- d. The testing in the Dispensation of Grace
 - i. Not obedience to the Law
 - ii. Relationship with Christ
 - 1. Acceptance of Him – John 1:12
 - 2. A life of good works – Eph. 2:10
- e. Grace has a twofold manifestation
 - i. Our Salvation – Rom 3:24
 - ii. Our walk with God – Rom. 6:15

7. The Dispensation of the Kingdom (The Millennium)

- a. The people of Israel will return to their Land
- b. They will have peace.
- c. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will rule over them for 1,000 years, - Rev. 20:4

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- d. There will be peace and goodwill toward men
- e. Satan will be bound for the 1,000 years – Rev. 20:2-3
- f. This Dispensation will end in rebellion when Satan is loosed – Rev. 20:7-9
- g. The New Heaven and New Earth will usher in the Eternal State after the Millennium – Rev. 21:1