

Lesson Eight

DISPENSATIONAL TRUTH

A dispensation is a period of time during which God deals in a particular way with man in respect to sin and man's responsibility. Unless a person understands the dispensation he cannot understand the Bible and it becomes a book of confusion.

The word "dispensation" means "administration."

"For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (I Corinthians 9:17).

During a dispensation, man is tested to respect of obedience and to some specific revelation of the will of God.

If we consider the tribulation as a separate dispensation there are eight dispensations. In this study we shall consider eight dispensations although some may disagree and place the tribulation period in the church age or dispensation of grace.

A. DISPENSATION OF INNOCENCE:

1. Period of Time: The length of time is not known. It began with the creation of man and ended with the fall of man (Genesis 1:26 through Genesis 2:23).
2. Man's Responsibility: Man must choose whether he will believe God's Word or the statements of Satan.
3. Man's Failure and the Consequences: Man chose to believe Satan rather than God. Judgment came upon mankind, the earth and Satan. The necessity of the Savior is seen and the promise of a Savior is given.

B. DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE:

1. Period of Time: This period lasted from the fall of man to the flood—1656 years (Genesis 3 through 7).

2. Man's Responsibility: Man is to choose between doing good and doing evil. He insists on evil.
3. Man's Failure and Consequences: Man proves to be exceedingly wicked and judgment through the flood comes as a result. God's mercy is seen by saving eight people to begin a new dispensation.

C. DISPENSATION OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT:

1. Period of Time: This dispensation lasted from the flood to the confusion of tongues at Babel (427 years).
2. Man's Responsibility: Noah was given the responsibility to govern for God.
3. Man's Failure and Consequences: Noah revealed that man is unable to govern himself and therefore unable to govern others. The building of the Tower of Babel was an organized political and religious rebellion against God. The consequence of man's failure was the confusion of tongues and the dispersion of the people.

D. DISPENSATION OF PROMISE:

1. Period of Time: This period lasted from the call of Abraham to the Exodus—430 years (Genesis 11:10 through Genesis 15:21).
2. Man's Responsibility: Abraham was to stay in the land that God had given to him, and not to go down to Egypt, a type of the world.
3. Man's Failure and the Consequences: Abram doubts God's Word and goes down to Egypt for food. Finally Jacob's entire house went down to Egypt. The result was slavery in Egypt, sin and idolatry. Divine mercy is seen in the deliverance and preservation of Israel.

E. DISPENSATION OF LAW:

1. Period of Time: This dispensation lasted from Sinai to Calvary; from the Exodus to the Cross (1491 years).
2. Man's Responsibility: Israel was to keep the law that included the Ten Commandments and all social and civil law.
3. Man's Failure and the Consequences: They failed to keep the law, and they crucified the only one who did keep the law.

F. DISPENSATION OF GRACE (Holy Ghost and Church Dispensation):

1. Period of Time: From the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture of the Church.

2. Man's Responsibility: Man is to believe in and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and to obey the Gospel.
3. Man's Failure and the Consequences: Man became a lover of himself, of money, of pleasure and a rejecter of Jesus Christ. The result is that God gives them up to unbelief and eternal judgment.

G. DISPENSATION OF JUDGMENT OF TRIBULATION:

1. Period of Time: This period will last from the rapture of the church to the millennium.
2. Man's Responsibility: Man is to recognize and worship God; he is to refuse to take the mark of the beast.
3. Man's Failure and the Consequences: Man refuses to repent. The result is utter destruction and Armageddon.

H. THE KINGDOM DISPENSATION:

1. Period of Time: From the return of Christ to the Great White Throne Judgment (1,000 years).
2. Man's Responsibility: Man is to obey God and submit to the King and also to worship Him.
3. Man's Failure and the Consequences: Man gives feigned obedience but when given a choice he follows Satan. The result is complete destruction by fire.

I. EACH DISPENSATION ENDS IN A WORLD CRISIS:

Innocence—Expulsion of man from the Garden.

Conscience—The flood.

Human Government—Confusion of tongues.

Promise—Bondage of the chosen race.

Law—The Cross of Christ.

Grace—The rapture of the Church.

Tribulation—The binding of Satan.

Kingdom—Fire from Heaven.

J. IN EACH DISPENSATION GOD COMES DOWN:

Innocence—God came down to the Garden.

Conscience—God talked to Noah.

Human Government—God said, "Let us go down."

Promise—"I am come down" (burning bush).

Law—Incarnation of Christ.

Grace—The Lord shall descend.

Tribulation—Coming to earth.

Kingdom—Still upon earth.

K. DISPENSATIONAL TRUTH IS IMPORTANT:

Dispensational truth is very important in rightly dividing the Word of Truth. One must never take truth that belongs to a past dispensation and apply it to neither the present, nor a truth that belongs to a future dispensation and try to apply it to the present.

We shall be content in giving only one example of this: The 144,000 belong in the Tribulation Dispensation, not in the Church Dispensation.

