

# God's Plan for the Ages

Understanding the Dispensations

## Lesson 2 – What is a Dispensation and Why is it Important?

In our first lesson we established some foundations for understanding God's plan for the Ages through recognizing the dispensations. We have not yet however defined what a dispensation is and why it is important.

Read Ephesians 1:7-11

*"That **in the dispensation of the fulness of times** he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:"*

*Ephesians 1:10*

### 1. The definition of a dispensation

The word "dispensation" is found several times in the pages of our English Bible and is a translation of the Greek word "oikonomia."

This word, strictly speaking, means \_\_\_\_\_

It might be translated "administration," "order," or "stewardship."

Therefore, when we speak of dispensations, we are literally speaking of different administrations or ways of managing.

Example: Two different governments in the USA:

The **Obama** Administration and the **Trump** Administration.

***A dispensation is a method [administration] by which God deals with human beings over a period of time in the outworking of His purpose.***

a. It is \_\_\_\_\_.

You can tell the difference between one dispensation and another.

Each dispensation has its own characteristics, but this does not mean that each dispensation is completely different. Dispensationalists recognize that God gave His truth at different times, in different ways, and in different amounts.

The biblical writers recognized this:

#### Hebrews 1:1-2

- God spoke *in the past (previous dispensation)*
- *to the fathers*
- *through the prophets*
- *at many (sundry) times*
- *and in various ways (divers manners)*
- *has at the end of these days (current dispensation)*
- *spoken to us by his Son*

**Example: Matthew 10:5-10** – Jesus sending out His 12 apostles.

- Where were they not to go?
- What was the message?
- What were they to do?
- What were they not to take?

**Compare with: Mark 16:14-15, Luke 22:35-36**

- Where were they to go?
- What was the message?
- What were they to do?
- What were they to take?

**b. It is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God's purpose.**

God is in charge. He is the one who sets-up new dispensations.

He is the one who creates new administrations. He is the one who is accomplishing the goal of history.

## 2. The description of a dispensation

Luke 16:1-10 – The parable of the unjust steward.

### **Some features of a stewardship (dispensation)**

- Authority – Master and Steward
- Responsibilities - Specific responsibilities revealed to the steward.
- Accountability – of the steward to the master. An evaluation will be made and judgment will follow if there is a failure to fulfil the responsibilities.
- Change – there may be a change at any time the authority find unfaithfulness in the existing administration.

Each dispensation begins with God's blessing and ends with God's judgment because the steward was unfaithful.

Each dispensation proves that only God is sovereign and that man apart from the grace of God is a spiritual failure in all varied circumstances and conditions.

When studying the truths of God's dispensations, we need to pay attention to these kinds of features:

- There is a **ruling** factor
- There are **responsibilities** to carry out.
- There is **new revelation** to respond to.
- There is a **test** to determine man's obedience.
- There is a **time** allotted to comply.

*(Note: A dispensation is not primarily a period or amount of time, but a method of administration. The time frame is there, but a dispensation is not solely about time)*

- There is a **failure of man.**
- There is a **judgment of God.**

### 3. The \_\_\_\_\_ of each dispensation.

As we read and study the Bible, we soon learn that there are certain key events which took place that brought a change in God's dealing with man.

While some aspects remain the same, there were noticeable differences.

#### Some of the major events of the Bible

- The creation of man \_\_\_\_\_
- The fall of man (when Adam sinned) \_\_\_\_\_
- The flood in the days of Noah \_\_\_\_\_
- The judgment of the tower of Babel \_\_\_\_\_
- The call of Abraham (Genesis 12) \_\_\_\_\_
- The giving of the law (Exodus 19-20) \_\_\_\_\_
- The crucifixion of Christ \_\_\_\_\_
- The coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- The second coming of Jesus Christ \_\_\_\_\_
- His Millennial reign on the earth \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. The value of a dispensational understanding of the Scriptures.

- **It recognizes the need for Biblical distinctions.**
  - Law and Grace
  - Israel and the Church
  - The Rapture and the Second Coming
  
- **It recognizes the fact of progressive Biblical revelation**  
 With each revelation comes differing responsibilities. 93% of the Bible deals with 3 dispensations – Law, Grace and Kingdom.
  
- **It recognizes the inspiration of the Scriptures**  
 God is the one who gives the revelation to man, it is not man's own ideas or an 'evolution of theology.'
  
- **It recognizes the Glory of God as the unifying theme of the Bible.**  
 God, is doing something very special in each and every dispensation. There is one thing that God is concerned about more than anything else: His glory! The glory of God is the outward expression of who God is. God is a great God and throughout history He has been making Himself known to men and angels.
  
- **It reminds the believer that he lives in a time of unparalleled blessing.**

#### Conclusion

What is true of every person no matter what dispensation they live in?

Hebrews 11:6 – *"Without \_\_\_\_\_ it is impossible to please God."*

- Dispensationalism does not advocate more than one way of salvation.
- Men of all ages have been saved by grace through faith.
- The amount of revelation changes from one dispensation to the next, but the plan of salvation remains the same.