

A STUDY IN DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

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Rev. H. David Nichols

DISPENSATIONALISM

An introduction

Introduction:

To correctly interpret the Scriptures, it is important that we have a clear view of how God organized His book, The Bible. If we try to apply certain passages out of context, we will be doing great violence to the truth of Scripture and add much burden to ourselves. It becomes very hard to defend standards that we hold to be biblical if our proof texts will not allow that interpretation. A few questions to be considered as we rightly divide the Scriptures would be:

- Why did the Holy Spirit “come on” some people in the Old Testament only to leave them later? (i.e. Sampson, Samuel, David, Zachariah, John the Baptist)
- Why do we worship on Sunday and not on Saturday, the Sabbath?
- Why do we not stone disobedient children, adulterers or homosexuals as God’s people they were commanded to do in the Old Testament. (Leviticus 20:10-14)

Explanations – God deals with mankind at different times in different ways. We call the study of these differences Dispensationalism.

I. Dispensationalism – an explanation

A. (a simple explanation) A system of theology which attempts to develop the Bible's philosophy of history. (An explanation of history from God's point of view. It explains why things developed as they have on the basis of God's sovereignty.)

B. Dispensation = "*Oikonomia*" Lit. House management or administration. (How God exercises His rule over the world) (I Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25)

C. (a theological explanation) A dispensation is a particular way of God administrating His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history.

II. In each dispensation there are certain unique characteristics.

A. There is a particular way that God administrates His rule (a unique ruling factor.) Sometimes there is a combination of ruling factors.

B. Particular responsibility for man. The responsibility of man is perfect obedience to God's rule.

C. A new divine revelation (never seen by man before). God must reveal this at the start of the dispensation.

D. Each dispensation applies a test for man. The test is will man obey God's rule perfectly.

- E. Man fails the test in each dispensation.
- F. Each dispensation involves divine judgment because of man's failure.

III. Important considerations

A There are different dispensations but never different ways of salvation. God's plan of salvation has always been Grace, through faith in the Word of God based on the sacrifice of Jesus.

B. A dispensation is not an historical age.

C. A dispensation may involve all of mankind or only a portion of mankind.

D. A dispensation may continue or discontinue the previous ruling factors but will have a ruling factor never seen before.

E. Each dispensation will demand a special revelation from God. Dispensationalism requires the concept of progressive revelation.

THE DISPENSATION OF INNOCENCE

Explanations – God deals with mankind at different times in different ways.

I. The Dispensation of Innocence

(The time of the unconfirmed favorable disposition of man toward God.)

A. The time frame

1. The Creation of Man through the Fall
2. Genesis 1:26 – Genesis 3:24

B. God's ruling factor

1. The unconfirmed favorable disposition of man toward God

a) Before the Fall man and God fellowshiped together in the cool of the evening.

b) They obeyed God's instruction and took care of the Garden of Eden.

2. This favorable disposition of God was unconfirmed.

a) Man was created liking God. He did not have a choice to like or dislike God.

b) Because of the fact that man did not have a choice his attitude toward God was not confirmed (set firmly). Man could change this attitude toward God by choosing not to obey.

c) To confirm this right attitude man had to have a choice. He needed an chance to choose God. [untested virtue is no virtue.]

- C. The special revelation of God to man in this dispensation. The things that God wanted man to understand Cp. Gen.1:28-29; Gen 2:15-17,24
1. Man must not eat of the forbidden fruit.
 2. Man is to cultivate the Garden of Eden
 3. Adam and Eve were to live together in a martial (one flesh) relationship.
 4. They were to reproduce
 5. They were to have dominion (rule over) the earth
- D. Man's responsibility in this dispensation
Man was to obey God on the basis of man's favorable disposition toward God. He was to obey because he loved God. He would be put to a test.
- E. The Test – Would man obey God?
- F. Man's Failure
1. Satan (the enemy of God) persuaded man to choose to rebel against God.
 2. This gave man the alternative to like God and obey Him on that basis.
 3. Man chose to rebel
 4. Satan told them that to disobey would make them to be just like God.
 5. God is the ultimate authority. He is answerable to no one.
 6. Satan made them believe that if they rebelled they would be the ultimate authority in their own lives.

7. When man rebelled, he did two things.
a) He rejected God's rule over them
b) He declared self-rule. (We will be our own gods) [Here is where the fall actually occurred]
The outward evidence of the fall was the eating of the fruit.

G. God's divine judgment

1. At this point man died spiritually.

a) Man lost that favorable disposition toward God.

b) It was replaced by enmity Romans 8:7

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subjected to the law of God, neither indeed can be."

c) Man is now subject to disease, deformity, accidents and death. Genesis 5 - "and he died" is repeated over and over again.

DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE

Text – Romans 2:14 - 15

I. Dispensationalism – an explanation

A. A dispensation is a particular way of God administrating His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history.

II. The Dispensation of Conscience

(The time of the lost favorable disposition of man toward God.)

A. The time frame

1. From the Fall of man till the Flood
2. Genesis 4:1 – Genesis 8:19

B. God's ruling factor (there are two)

1. Human conscience

a) Man lost the favorable disposition toward God at the Fall. They hid from God after they disobeyed and were expelled from the Garden.

b) They needed a new ruling factor.

- 1) Man has a conscience (Rom. 2:14-15)
- 2) This causes pagans to obey the law instinctively.

Every culture understands murder, adultery, stealing to be wrong even though they have never heard of the Law of God.

c) Conscience as a ruling factor teaches right from wrong; good and evil.

d) Man got his conscience by eating the

fruit in the Garden

2) Second ruling factor - "rule" of the Holy Spirit

1) Genesis 6:3 – "strive" means to "rule"
"My spirit will not always "rule" man"

2) Because of sin this ruling factor is necessary. The Holy Spirit must restrain mankind. Before the Fall there was no sin and this restraint was not needed.

C. The special revelation of God to man in this Dispensation - Genesis 4:3-7

1) They must come to God and worship God God's way.

a) Abel's blood sacrifice.

The new revelation from God: "in order for man to approach God he must come through a blood sacrifice." Romans 10:17 "The Word of God" is the new Revelation. We receive this revelation as God communicates it to us through His Word (spoken or written). Compare Hebrews 11:4 "By faith . . . Abel. . ." Cain and Abel must have had a special revelation from God to begin this blood sacrifice. Abel obeyed. Cain wanted to approach God in his own way. Sinful man cannot do this.

D. Man's responsibility in this dispensation

Man was to obey God on the basis of human conscience and the restraint of the Holy Spirit.

- E. The Test – Would man obey God on these bases? - No he would not.
- F. Man's Failure
 - 1) Cain refused to obey God's Ruling factors.
 - 2) The result
 - a) The murder of Abel
 - b) Cain built a Godless civilization
 - c) God's evaluation – Genesis 6:5
 - d) Mankind was thoroughly corrupt. Only one man who was righteous - Noah
- G. God's divine judgment
 - 1) A world wide flood
 - 2) God destroyed the corrupt part of Mankind because of their rebellion against God's rule.

DISPENSATION OF HUMAN GOVERNEMENT

Text – Genesis 9:1 - 17

I. The Dispensation of Human Government

A. The time frame begins at the end of the Flood and lasts till the call of Abraham.

B. Genesis 8:20 – Genesis 11:32

II. God's new ruling factor

1. Human conscience is still in play

2. Second ruling factor is the "rule" of the Holy Spirit

3. Human Government

a) God instituted capital punishment after the flood. (Gen.9:5-6) Before the flood Cain killed Abel. He then started a line of mankind that became so corrupt that God had to destroy them with the flood. To restrain evil in the world He gave man the responsibility to enforce his law of capital punishment. Man cannot do this unless there is the ability to pursue and arrest the murderer. He must be able to adjudicate the charge of murder and then have the right to execute the killer. In instituting capital punishment (Gen. 9:5-6) God was giving man the responsibility of human governance for the purpose of restraining evil in human society. "The highest function of government is the judicial taking of life. All other governmental powers are implied in that." (Scofield note on Gen. 8:21)

b) Paul tells us in Romans 13:1 – 7 that man still has the responsibility to restrain corruption through government.

- 1) Everyone to be subject to higher powers
- 2) God ordained those higher powers
- 3) They are to be a terror to evil doers
- 4) The ruler is the minister of God
- 5) We are to honor them.

c) God did not recall the ruling factor of the Human Conscience. He, also, did not recall the ruling factor of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will continue His role of restraining until “He is taken out of the way” (II Thes. 3:7) Therefore, at this time there were three ruling factors in play.

C. The special revelation of God to man in this Dispensation - Genesis 9:1-17

- 1) Man is to spread and populate the earth.
- 2) Animals would to fear man from now on.
- 3) Animals are now a source of food
- 4) God promises to never destroy the world by flood.
- 5) Man is to execute murders. This means there is now human government.

D. Man’s responsibility was to obey God.

- 1) On the basis of human conscience
- 2) On the basis of the rule of the Holy Spirit.
- 3) On the basis of human government

E. The Test – Would man obey God on these bases? - No he would not.

F. Man's Failure

- 1) Noah was drunk
- 2) One of the sons of Noah disgraced his father and was cursed.
- 3) Noah's descendants refused to populate the entire earth. This gave rise to the Tower of Babel. (Gen. 11:4 "lest we be scattered")

G. God's divine judgment

- 1) Confusion of tongues
- 2) Nationalism (separate states) began.

DISPENSATION OF PROMISE

Text – Genesis 12:1 - 2

I. The Dispensation of Promise

A. The time frame begins at the call of Abraham and lasts till the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt. Sinai.

B. Genesis 12 – Exodus 18

II. God's new ruling factor

A. First 4 ruling factors were not changed

1. Human conscience is still in play
2. Second ruling factor "rule" of the Holy Spirit is still in effect.
3. Human Government is also still at work.

B. The ruling factor is now "Promise" as a significant factor. I.e. Abraham. cp. Galatians 3:16; Hebrews 6:13

1. When a principle makes a difference in peoples lives it becomes a ruling factor.

(Heb.11:8-30)

a) God's promise to Abraham and Sarai in Gen 12:2 changed their location.

b) They moved to Canaan sight unseen

III. The special revelation of God in this dispensation.

A. The promises written by Moses.

1. Genesis 12:1-3

2. Genesis 12:2-3

3. Genesis 15

4. Genesis 17: 1 – 22

5. Genesis 22:16-18

B. There are 3 kinds of promises

1. Personal promises to Abraham

a) To bless Abraham

b) To make Abraham's name great.

1) Israel reveres Abraham

2) Islam reveres Abraham

3) Christians reveres Abraham

c) Abraham would have many descendants.

d) Abraham would be the father of nations.

e) Abraham would have Canaan as an everlasting possession.

f) Those who bless Abraham would be blessed and those who curse him would be cursed.

2. National Promises about Israel

a) Bring Israel into existence and make it great
This was done under David and Solomon.

b) To Give Israel the land of Canaan.

(This has implications - Middle East today.)

- c) Establishes the Abrahamic covenant with Israel as an everlasting covenant.
 - 3. Universal promises - to all mankind
 - a) God would bless the earth through Abraham's line
 - b) One blessing would be the promise of the Redeemer. The Lord Jesus. Salvation for all.
 - c) From Israel we have the Bible
- All three of these groups of promises made a difference in the lives of all people.

IV. Man's responsibility was to obey God on the basis of all four ruling factors.

V. The Test – Would man obey God on these bases? - No he would not.

VI. Man's Failure

- 1) Abraham and Sara had lapses of faith
- 2) Abraham two times lied calling Sara his sister
- 3) The sin was repeated by Isaac later on
- 4) Jacob became the deceiver
- 5) Canaan was their possession yet they went to Egypt in time of drought.

G. God's divine judgment

- 1) The problems with the Arabs, the descendants of Ishmael.
- 2) Through history the Jews have been slaves and threatened with destruction.

DISPENSATION OF MOSAIC LAW

Text – Galatians 3:23 - 25

I. The Dispensation of Mosaic Law

A. The time frame begins at the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mt. Sinai and continues through the death of Jesus at Calvary.

B. Exodus 19:1 – the account of the Crucifixion in the Gospels

- 1) Matthew 27:56 3) Luke 23-49
- 2) Mark 15:41 4) John 20:30

II. God's new ruling factor

A. First 4 ruling factors were not changed

1. Human conscience is still in play
2. Second ruling factor "rule" of the Holy Spirit is still in effect.
3. Human Government is also still at work.
4. The promises were still in effect.

B. The ruling factor is now the Mosaic Law.

1. The heart of the Law was the Ten Commandments. They were written on stone. This means they were external to the Jews.
2. The Mosaic Law was for the Jews
3. The law had penalties for the Jews. If they broke the Mosaic Law there were punishments. (ie. famine, disease, enemies, death – As a Jew, adultery and idol worship was punished by death.)
4. The Mosaic Law was a totally external way of governing the people.
5. Galatians 3:23 -25. Paul gives the purpose

of the Law.

1) Schoolmaster – “Pedagogue”

2) Pedagogue was a trusted servant who was given responsibility for the teaching and coaching of a child in the family. He was to make sure the child obeyed the laws and did not disgrace the family. When the child matured enough to be on his own the pedagogue was removed.

III. The special revelation of God in this dispensation.

A. The Decalogue (10 Commandments)

B. The entire Mosaic Law (613 commands)

1) The 10 Commandments

2) The ceremonial laws (Worship)

3) The civil laws (laws of society)

C. These were a detailed expression of God’s will for Israel.

IV. Man’s responsibility was to obey God on the basis of all five ruling factors.

V. The Test – Would man obey God on these bases? - No he would not. Israel utterly failed.

VI. Israel’s Failure

A. The Jews broke the Mosaic law repeatedly.

Cp. Jeremiah 31:32; Ezekiel 16; Zechariah 7:12

God said that they had hearts of stone. Stone will not conform to the press of the Law. Their hearts were the center of their inner control.

B. The most tragic failure – The rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah.

C. Even the Mosaic Law could not enable humans to serve God perfectly. This brought judgment.

G. God's divine judgment

- 1) The Jews have suffered throughout history.
- 2) The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple
- 3) God has temporally removed Israel their place of blessing. Cp. Romans 11
- 4) The final judgment was dispersal throughout the world.

DISPENSATION OF GRACE

Text – Romans 6:14; Titus 2:11-12

I. The Dispensation of Mosaic Law

A. The time frame begins with the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

B. The dispensation of Grace will end with the 2nd Coming of Jesus at the end of the Tribulation

C. Scripture: Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:50; John 20:31 thru Revelation 19:21

II. God's new ruling factor

A. God carries over

1. Human conscience
2. The Restraint Holy Spirit is still in effect but God will withdraw the Spirit at the

end of the Dispensation of Grace, just before the Tribulation begins. (II Thes. 2:7-8)

3. Human Government is also still at work.

4. The promises were still in effect.

5. The Mosaic Law is not carried over but is replaced by Grace when Jesus died on the cross.

B. The ruling factor is now the Grace of God.

1. Romans 6:14 is written to believers who are in the Dispensation of Grace.

2. The Law is done away with as a ruling factor.

3. The word “under” is used of both “law” and “Grace” and suggests that whatever was the function of Law was is now the function of Grace.

4. The function of the Law was not salvation (Gal.2:16)

5. “under” = under the rule of. You are not under the rule of the Law but under the rule of Grace

6. Titus 2:11-12 shows that Grace brings salvation. Grace teaches us to live righteously in this (world – age). “Teach” means to practice discipline over us to teach us to avoid ungodly and to adopt godliness.

7. Grace is doing this in this present age.

III. The special revelation of God in this dispensation.

A. The new revelation is the New Testament from the end of the Gospels through Revelation 19.

B. Content for the Unbelieving world. They are to receive God’s gift of righteousness through faith in Jesus

C. The content for the church

1. The great commission

2. To maintain a pure membership in the church (only believers in the church)

3. Discipline unruly members

4. Prevent false teaching in the church

5. Contend for the faith

D. Content for the individual believers

1. Live Godly by His Grace.

2. Be associated with a Bible believing church

3. Evangelize – Great commission “as you are going” in your normal lives, preach.

IV. Man’s responsibility was to obey God on the basis of all six ruling factors.

V. The Test – Would man obey God on these bases? - No, we do not.

VI. Failure

A. The majority of people do not accept God’s gift of righteousness. Most have never heard.

B. The Church

1. Is not fulfilling the Great Commission.

2. We do not keep have a pure membership.

3. We do not always discipline properly

4. We allow false teaching

5. We do not contend for the faith.

C. The individual Believers

1. We do not live Godly lives.

2. We forsake the assembling of our selves in church (Hebrews 10:25)

3. We don’t evangelize and disciple others

VII. God’s divine judgment

A. To the believer premature death Acts 5; I John 5:16

B. The church – He will remove their candle
(truth, Leader) Rev. 2:5

DISPENSATION OF THE MILLENNIUM (THE RIGHTEOUS RULE OF CHRIST)

Text – Revelation 20:1-6; Zechariah 14:9

I. The Dispensation of the Millennium

A. The time frame begins with the Second Coming of Christ.

B. The dispensation of the Millennium ends with the release of Satan from the Abyss

D. The dispensation will last 1000 years.

C. Scripture: Revelation 20:1-6

II. God's new ruling factor

A. Previous Ruling Factors

1. Human conscience will continue.

2. The Restraining Holy Spirit is not in effect. (II Thes. 2:7-8 tells us that the Holy Spirit is removed just before the Tribulation at the end of the day of Grace)

3. Human Government is also still at work. Nations will still have their government but they will be subject to Christ's rule.

4. The Promises will not be in effect. Most promises are fulfilled during the Millennium and therefore have ended.

5. The Mosaic Law is not carried over but is replaced by Grace when Jesus died on the cross.

B. Grace for salvation is still in effect. Jesus judges absolutely and punishes rebellion with no grace. Isaiah 11: 1-5

C. The ruling factor is now the righteous rule of Jesus Christ. Zechariah 14:9

III. The special revelation of God in this dispensation.

A. There are numerous Old Testament passages that deal with the Millennium.

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| 1. Isaiah 9:6-7 | 4. Isaiah 35; 44; 49 |
| 2. Isaiah 11:1-5 | 5. Isaiah 65:17-66:14 |
| 3. Isaiah 30: 15-33 | 6. Jeremiah 23:5-6 |

B. There are numerous New Testament passages that deal with the Millennium.

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| 1. Matthew 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount) | |
| 2. Matthew 19:28 | 4. I Corinthians 15: 24-25 |
| 3. Acts 3:19-21 | 5. Revelation 20:1-6 |

C. Jesus will restore God's Kingdom Rule back to earth. It was that way in the Garden but was cut off at the Fall of Adam. Satan will be banished to the pit.

D. When the Kingdom is restored the curse of sin will be removed from the natural world resulting in abundant food, no diseases, no death. Nature is restored to what it was before the fall.

IV. Man's responsibility was to obey God on the basis of Conscience, Human government, and the righteous rule of Christ.

V. The Test – Would man obey God on these bases? - No, we do not.

VI. Failure

A. Some in the Millennium will rebel and be judged immediately by Christ.

B. Other unsaved will realize that it is not wise to rebel and will hide their rebellion until Satan is released. They will go to Satan and try to overthrow Jesus and be defeated and cast in to the Lake of Fire with Satan.

VII. Man's judgment - Rebellious man and Satan are cast into the eternal lake of fire forever.

* The seven dispensations of God graphically demonstrate that man's sin is not the result of outward cultural circumstances but is because of his corrupt, rebellious, sinful nature. Therefore, he deserves the eternal judgment given to him by God.

* The dispensation of God's rule demonstrates two things.

1. The sinfulness of mankind
2. The sovereignty of God over His creation.
He is just and righteous in all that He does.

The 7 Dispensations

1. The dispensation of Innocence
2. The dispensation of Conscience
3. The dispensation of Human Government
4. The dispensation of Promise
5. The dispensation of the Law (Mosaic)
6. The dispensation of Grace
7. The dispensation of the Millennium.