

DOCTRINE OF DISPENSATIONS

I. Introduction.

- A. The term dispensation is a term coined to explain the administration of God's plan at different times in history.
- B. Though the word is not found in the bible, like the terms rapture or trinity, it is used to communicate a Biblical truth.
- C. This doctrine deals with the fact that God has an orderly plan for the ages.
- D. While God Himself does not change, He has chosen to administer His plan in varying ways at various times of history.
- E. This is done in harmony with, and for the purpose of, His self-revelation:
 - 1. The principle of progressive revelation is consistent with the principle of dispensations.
 - 2. Each dispensation adds to our understanding of God.

II. Vocabulary.

- A. Hebrew/Chaldee (Chaldee/Aramaic is a sister language of Hebrew and was picked up by OT authors via the Babylonian dispersion).
 - 1. זְמַן /z^eman; Chal.; m., noun: A time, a set period or portion of time, an epoch.
 - 2. עוֹלָם /^olam; Heb.; m., noun: Root meaning, "what is hidden"; in relation to time, hidden time, eternity past, eternity future.
- B. Greek.
 - 1. οἰκονομία/oikonomia; f., noun: used 9x; a derivative of "οἶκος/oikos/house or household"; the management of a household, the oversight or administration of a house; when used of time a dispensation or administration of history, cp. Eph.3:9.
 - 2. αἰών/aion; m., noun: eternity, a portion of time out of eternity, an age.
 - 3. καιρός/kairos; m., noun: a measure of time both large and small; a strategic period of time; a season or appointed time.
 - 4. χρόνος/chronos; m., noun: a point of time; time as a linear reality; chronological time.

III. Definition and description.

- A. Webster defines dispensation as the act of dispensing, or dealing out, the administration or management of something.
- B. Its meaning theologically denotes a system of principles, rules, promises, etc., which are ordained and administered by God.
- C. The Greek word used Biblically and most often to denote this principle is a "steward/stewardship"; the managing or supervising the affairs of another, or of a household.
- D. A dispensation then, is a period of human history in which God conducts Himself in a certain fashion and is governed by a particular administration.

- E.** A dispensation is, by definition, an extended period of time and while there may be marked distinctions in a dispensation, there is no reason to endlessly subdivide dispensations into smaller and smaller units.
 - F.** We adhere to the general division that recognizes 5 dispensations, while some see as few as zero and some see as many as 8 or more.
 - G.** Dispensations are periods generally characterized by some new developments:
 - 1.** The beginning of a dispensation is usually observed to have a marked period of Divine activity and revelation.
 - 2.** This tapers off and the period moves into the status quo stage.
 - 3.** Towards the end of any dispensation, we observe an increase in evil that culminates in a Divine judgment.
 - 4.** As the chosen administrator of a particular period fails and moves into reversionism, God eventually replaces that steward with another one.
 - 5.** At that time, progressive revelation and additional insight into the POG is revealed.
- IV. The Age of the Gentiles.**
- A.** The first dispensation is called the Age of the Gentiles and covers the period of time from restoration to Abraham. Gen.1-11
 - B.** Characteristics of this dispensation include:
 - 1.** One race: Gentiles.
 - 2.** One language to be divided into many: Unknown
 - 3.** Two lineages: Cain (unregenerate) and Seth (regenerate).
 - 4.** There was no written canon: the truth was taught by God in supernatural ways including theophany, direct revelation and the heavenly bodies.
 - 5.** The priesthood: Family.
 - C.** Major events in this dispensation include:
 - 1.** Creation of man. Gen.1:26-31; 2:7-8
 - 2.** Implementation of Divine institutions #1 (volition), #2 (RM/RW) and #3 (family). Gen.1:26ff; 2:23-25; 4:1ff
 - 3.** The fall. Gen.3
 - 4.** The flood. Gen.6-8
 - 5.** Divine institution #4: human government/capital punishment. Gen.9:5-7
 - 6.** The Noahic covenant. Gen.9:9-17
 - 7.** The apostasy and division of languages. Gen.11:1ff
- V. The Age of Israel.**
- A.** The next dispensation is called the Age of Israel and extends from Abraham to the Second Advent, interrupted by the Church Age.
 - B.** Characteristics include:
 - 1.** Many races.
 - 2.** Many languages.

3. The formation and establishment of the Hebrew nation.
 4. The formation of the OT canon was begun by Moses and completed by Malachi.
 5. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were the concluding record of this time.
 6. The priesthood: Levitical, one family, the Aaronic.
 7. Centralized worship: The temple.
- C. Major events of this period include:
1. The call of Abraham. Gen.12:1ff
 2. The patriarchal period, from Abraham to Egypt. Gen.12-46
 3. The institution of the Law, from Moses to Christ.
 4. Israel's birth, ascent to prominence, their decline and the setting aside of the nation.
 5. The incarnation, the birth, life and death of Jesus Christ.
 6. The apostasy, rejection of the Messiah and Divine judgment.
 7. The final 7 years of Daniel's seventy weeks. Dan.9:24; Rev.6-19

VI. The Church Age.

- A. The Church age is actually an interruption in the age of Israel and extends from Pentecost 33AD to the rapture.
- B. This dispensation was a mystery, hidden from those in the age of Israel. Col.1:26; 1Pet.1:10ff
 1. It is a mystery dispensation. Rom.16:25ff; Col.1:27; Eph.3:1-6
 2. Its tenets or doctrines are called mysteries. 1Cor.4:1; Col.1:25b,26a
- C. Characteristics include:
 1. One nation made up of many peoples of all nations called the Church Universal.
 2. Many languages.
 3. The setting aside of Israel. Mat.21:43
 4. The completion of the NT canon, the mind of Jesus Christ. 1Cor.2:16
 5. The priesthood: universal for all believers. Rev.1:6
 6. Worldwide worship via the local church. Joh.4:21-24
 7. Universal indwelling of each believer by God the Holy Spirit. Joh.14:17
- D. Major events of this dispensation include:
 1. Pentecost: the coming of the Spirit. Act.2:1ff
 2. The infancy period of the Church during which temporary gifts were given to carry the Church until the completion of the NT canon from 33-96 AD. 1Cor.13:8
 3. The evangelization of the planet. Rom.10:14ff
 4. The period of apostasy and a lukewarm approach to the POG by the Church Universal, culminating in the appearance of the Antichrist. Rev.3:14-17; 2Tim.3:1ff; 2The.2:1ff
 5. Explosion of knowledge/technology and travel. Dan.12:4

- 6. The rapture. 1The.4:13-18
- E. A general overview of the Church and its spiritual condition during this age is found in Rev.2-3.

VII. The Millennial Age.

- A. This dispensation consists of 1000 years of peace ending with some extended years beginning with the Second Advent. Rev.20
- B. Characteristics of the Millennium include:
 - 1. Many nations with Israel as the chief nation. Isa.60
 - 2. Christ exercises worldwide rule from Jerusalem. Zec.8:3; 14:16; Isa.2:2ff
 - 3. The curse is largely lifted producing a radical change in the environment and natural order. Isa.65:25
 - 4. It is characterized by universal peace and the absence of warfare. Isa.2:4
 - 5. Inhabitants of the Millennium include:
 - a. Church Age believers in resurrection bodies.
 - b. All OT believers in resurrection bodies.
 - c. Believers that die during the tribulation concluding the Age of Israel in resurrection bodies.
 - d. Believers that survive Daniel's seventieth week, in mortal bodies.
 - e. Eventually this time will include negative unbelievers in mortal bodies.
 - 6. Satan and his demons are confined to the abyss. Rev.20:1-3
 - 7. Life expectancy is increased. Isa.65:20
 - 8. Prosperity, not poverty, will be the norm. Isa.65:21-23
 - 9. All Divine institutions will be in evidence i.e., nations, marriage, families and volition.
 - 10. Jesus will rule with law and order under operation rod of iron. Psal.2:7-9; Rev.2:27
- C. Major events include:
 - 1. The resurrection of all OT and tribulational saints. Rev.20:4
 - 2. The binding and imprisonment of Satan. Rev.20:1-3
 - 3. The growth of negative volition. Rev.20:7-8
 - 4. The release of Satan and the final rebellion. Rev.20:7-8
 - 5. The destruction of negative volition. Rev.20:9-10
- D. This dispensation is called the Day of Christ/Day of the Lord. Phi.1:6; 2:16; 2The.2:2ff; 2Pet.3:10

VIII. The Eternal Age.

- A. This dispensation is referred to as the final dispensation.
- B. It begins with the end of the Millennium and extends into eternity future.
- C. It is called the Day of God. 2Pet.3:12
- D. Characteristics include:

1. The destruction of the present physical universe. 2Pet.3:10-12; Rev.20:11
2. The formation of a new heavens and a new earth. Rev.21:1ff
3. The New Jerusalem will come down from Heaven to planet earth. Rev.21:2
4. The New Jerusalem is inhabited only by believers in resurrection bodies. Rev.21:3-4,7-8; 22:14-15
5. Nationalism continues to exist. Rev.21:24; 22:2
6. Universal knowledge of God. Rev.22:3-4
7. No evil or prospect of evil. Rev.21:26
8. No darkness, only light. Rev.22:5
9. All unbelievers, demons and Satan are tormented forever in the lake of fire. Rev.20:10,15; 21:8
10. Time ceases to exist.

IX. The 3 adjustments to the justice of God are the same in all dispensations:

- A. The SAJG is faith in the Person of Christ, apart from works. Rom.4:1-3
- B. The R_BAJG is prayer of confession. Psa.32:5 cp. 1Joh.1:9
- C. The MAJG is the assimilation and application of BD, fulfilling God's will for one's life. Jam.2:21-24