

# BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS - PART I -

The Outworking Of God's Plan For The Ages

# INTRODUCTION

Two planes are parked at adjoining gates ... does it matter which one you get on?

One headed for Hawaii ... the other to Alaska ...

Just like the two planes, there are two main systems of theology that have different destinations:

1. Covenant Theology
2. Dispensational Theology

The Biblical Covenants largely determines our understanding of God's program for the future.

Covenant Theology DOES NOT get its name from the Biblical Covenants. The title comes from theological covenants ... proposed by theologians.

These theological covenants are known as:

1. The Covenant Of Works
2. The Covenant Of Grace
3. The Covenant Of Redemption (before creation)

**The Covenant Of Works** (made with Adam) brought the promise of life for obedience and death for disobedience.

**The Covenant Of Grace** (made with Adam or Abraham) is the gracious agreement between God and sinners in which He promises salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Covenant Of Grace is often seen as based on **The Covenant Of Redemption** in eternity past between the Father and the Son.

## Problems With Covenant Theology:

1. Uses the spiritualizing approach to Scripture, especially in regards to the Biblical Covenants and other prophetic passages.
2. Does not adequately deal with the distinctions found in the Bible ... blurs distinctions between the church and Israel, etc.
3. The Biblical Covenants are not simply progressive revelations of The Covenant Of Grace ... many other elements beyond salvation.

## Problems With Covenant Theology:

4. The goal of history is not broad enough. God does have varying purposes for the church, Israel, Gentiles, the saved, the unsaved, holy angels, fallen angels, and the universe itself.

Dispensational Theology approaches Scripture differently ...

**Dispensationalism** is a system of theology which develops the Bible's philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God. It represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God's rule.

The term **dispensation** refers to as a particular way of God's administering His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history.

The word which is translated dispensation in the New Testament is oikonomia, from which the English word economy is derived.

The New Testament word is a combination of two words -- oikos, which means "house", and nemo, which means "to dispense, manage, or hold sway".

Thus, the word literally means "house dispensing" or "house managing." It relates primarily to household administration.



The word *oikonomia* appears nine times in the New Testament. In six of these appearances (**Luke 16:2-4; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25**) it refers to a responsible office or ministry entrusted to one's care by a higher authority.

In the other appearances (**Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4**) it refers to a particular way of God's administering His rule over the world.

**Ephesians 1:10** is of special interest, for it appears to refer to the particular way that God will administer His rule in the coming Millennium.

**Ephesians 1:9–10 (NKJV)** — <sup>9</sup> having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, <sup>10</sup> that in the dispensation (*oikonomia*) of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

**Ephesians 3:9** and **1 Timothy 1:4** refer to the particular way that God administers His rule now.

**Ephesians 3:8–9 (NASB95)** — <sup>8</sup> To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light what is the administration (*oikonomia*) of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things;

**1 Timothy 1:3–4 (ESV) —** <sup>3</sup> As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, <sup>4</sup> nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship (*oikonomia*) from God that is by faith.

The basic concept of a dispensation is that of a stewardship, where one with authority delegates duties to a subordinate, who must carry them out.

## Three indispensable factors to Dispensationalism:

1. The recognition of the distinction between the nation of Israel and the Church.
2. The consistent use of a single hermeneutic (i.e. a single method of interpreting the Bible) -- namely, the historical-grammatical-contextual method.
3. The recognition that the ultimate purpose of history is the glory of God through the demonstration that He alone is the sovereign God.

This stands in contrast to Covenant Theology:

Covenant Theology believes that the Church existed in Old Testament times and that Israel was a major part of the Church in the Old Testament.

Covenant Theology employs a double hermeneutic -- the historical-grammatical-contextual method for many passages but also the allegorical or spiritualizing method for a number of prophetic passages dealing with the future of Israel and the future Kingdom of God.

**Covenant Theology** advocates that the ultimate purpose of history is the glory of God through the redemption of the elect.

**Dispensational Theology** recognizes that the redemption of elect human beings is a very important part of God's purpose for history, it is convinced that it is only one part of that purpose.

During the course of history God is working out many other programs in addition to the program of redeeming people.

# Essential Characteristics Of Each Dispensation

1. A particular way of God's administering His rule.

Each dispensation is characterized by a unique ruling factor or combination of ruling factors.

2. It must involve a particular responsibility for man. Each dispensation makes man responsible to obey God in accordance with its unique ruling factor or combination of factors.

3. It must be characterized by divine revelation which had not been given before.



## Secondary Characteristics Of Each Dispensation

1. Each dispensation applies a test to man. The nature of the test is whether or not man will perfectly obey God's rule by fulfilling the responsibility which is characteristic of that dispensation.

2. Each dispensation demonstrates the failure of man to obey the particular rule of God which characterizes that dispensation.

3. Each dispensation involves divine judgment because of man's failure.

# What are the Biblical Dispensations?

1. Favorable Disposition (Innocence)
2. Conscience
3. Human Government
4. Promise
5. Mosaic Law
6. Grace
7. Righteous Reign & Rule Of Christ (Millennium)