

BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS - PART IV -

The Outworking Of God's Plan For The Ages

Dispensationalism is a system of theology which develops the Bible's philosophy of history on the basis of the sovereign rule of God.

Dispensationalism represents the whole of Scripture and history as being covered by several dispensations of God's rule.

Dispensation comes from the Greek word word that literally means "house dispensing" or "house managing." It relates primarily to household administration.

Essential Characteristics Of Each Dispensation

1. A particular way of God's administering His rule.
2. It must involve a particular responsibility for man.
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.
2. Each dispensation demonstrates man's failure.
3. Each dispensation involves divine judgment.

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)

3. The Dispensation Of Human Government

The third dispensation extended from the flood to the call of Abraham. The Scripture portion which covers this dispensation is **Genesis 8:20-11:32**.

Inasmuch as man had failed to obey God on the basis of his conscience and the restraint by the Holy Spirit during the second dispensation, once the flood ended God started a new dispensation by instituting a new ruling factor.

Since the fountainhead of human corruption prior to the flood was the continued existence of the first murderer, Cain, God ordained capital punishment for murderers in **Genesis 9:5-6**.

Capital punishment necessitates human government to administer the sentence of execution. Thus, when God ordained capital punishment, He was thereby instituting human government as a further restraint against the lawless rebellion of man.

In **Romans 13:1-7** the Apostle Paul indicated that governmental authority derives its existence from God, that it was ordained for the purpose of restraining evil, and that it functions as the minister of God when it uses the sword for capital punishment.

Human government, then, with its authority to administer capital punishment, was the new ruling factor which God instituted for their dispensation.

Human conscience and the restraint by the Holy Spirit continue on as ruling factors in this new dispensation (**Rom. 2:14-15; 2 Thes. 2:7**).

Thus, this dispensation had three ruling factors:

1. Conscience
2. Restraint By The Holy Spirit
3. Human Government (new ruling factor)

The special revelation which God gave for this dispensation is recorded in **Genesis 9:1-17**.

Man's responsibility during the third dispensation was to obey God on the basis of human conscience, restraint by the Holy Spirit, and human government. This responsibility subjected man to the following test: *Would man obey God on the basis of these three ruling factors?*

Man also failed this test of the third dispensation. Noah's descendants rebelled against God's command to populate the whole earth by building a city and a tower (**Gen. 11:4**).

This failure brought God's judgment. Up to this time Noah's descendants spoke only one language (**Gen. 11:1**). God brought judgment by confusing their language.

The different languages caused the development of nations. Thus, different languages and nations began as the result of man's rebellion against God's rule and God's judgment of that rebellion.

4. The Dispensation Of Promise

The fourth dispensation extended from God's call of Abraham to the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai. The Scripture portion which covers this dispensation is **Genesis 12 - Exodus 18**.

Since man had failed to obey God on the basis of human conscience, the restraint by the Holy Spirit, and human government, God started a fourth dispensation by instituting promise as a new ruling factor.

The fact that promise began as a significant factor with God's special dealings with Abraham is made evident by such passages as **Galatians 3:15-22**, **Romans 4** and **Hebrews 6:13-15**.

A principle is a ruling factor if it makes a difference in the way people live. **Hebrews 11:8-30** demonstrates the fact that God's promises did make such a difference in the lives of Abraham and his descendants. Thus, promise functioned as a ruling factor.

The fourth dispensation had four ruling factors:

1. Conscience
2. Restraint of the Holy Spirit
3. Human Government
4. Divine Promise (new ruling factor)

The special revelation which God gave to Abraham and his descendants is recorded in **Genesis 12:2-3; 13:14-17; 15, 17:1-22; and 22:16-18**. These passages reveal/develop the Abrahamic Covenant.

In this Covenant God gave personal promises to Abraham, national promises concerning Israel and a universal promise of blessing to all families of the earth through Abraham's line of descent (the Redeemer would come through Israel).

The responsibility of Abraham and his descendants during the fourth dispensation was to obey God on the basis of human conscience, restraint of the Holy Spirit, human government, and promise.

This responsibility subjected Abraham and his descendants to the following test: ***Would they obey God on the basis of these four ruling factors?***

Abraham and his descendants failed the test of the fourth dispensation. On several occasions they disobeyed God as the result of lapses of faith concerning the fulfillment of His promises. Abraham fathered Ishmael through Hagar. The Jews did not return from Egypt to Canaan after the famine of Joseph's time ended.

This failure brought divine judgment. Throughout their history the Jews have continued to have problems with Ishmael's descendants. Eventually they were subjected to slavery and threatened with annihilation in Egypt.

5. The Dispensation Of The Mosaic Law

The fifth dispensation extended from the giving of the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross at Mount Calvary. The tearing of the veil in the Temple in Jerusalem when Christ died indicated that the Law was terminated at that time. The Scripture portion which covers this dispensation is **Exodus 19** through **Matthew 27:56**, **Mark 15:41**, **Luke 23:49** and **John 20:30**.

After failing to obey God on the basis of the four ruling factors, God introduced the Mosaic Law as a new ruling factor. This dispensation had five ruling factors:

1. Conscience
2. Restraint of the Holy Spirit
3. Human Government
4. Promise
5. Mosaic Law

The central core of the Mosaic Law was written on tables of stone. The Law inflicted the death penalty upon those who broke a number of its precepts. Thus, the Mosaic Law was a totally external way of God's administering His rule over Israel.

For this reason, the Apostle Paul declared that the Mosaic Law functioned as a tutor that acts as a moral restrainer (**Gal. 3:23-25**).

Dispensational Theologians have named the fifth dispensation after the new ruling factor because that is the factor which made the fifth dispensation distinct from the fourth.

The special revelation which God gave to Israel for the fifth dispensation is recorded in **Exodus 20 - Deuteronomy**. It consisted of the Mosaic Law with its 613 commandments. These gave in detail God's will for the moral, civil and ceremonial aspects of Israel's life.

Israel's responsibility during the fifth dispensation was to obey God on the basis of human conscience, the restraint of the Holy Spirit, human government, promise, *plus* the Mosaic Law. This responsibility subjected the Jews to the following test: ***Would they obey God on the basis of these five ruling factors?***

The people of Israel failed the test of the fifth dispensation. The Jews broke the Mosaic Law repeatedly (Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16). God was forced to tell them that they had a heart of stone (Ezek. 36:26; Zech. 7:12). This was His way of saying that their inner control center was inflexible. It refused to bend, to conform to the Mosaic Law as an expression of God's rule over them.

Also, during this dispensation Israel rejected its Messiah and had Him crucified.

This failure brought God's judgment upon Israel. The nation suffered many judgments during the fifth dispensation. Among the worse were the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities and Israel's temporary removal from its place of blessing (Rom. 11) and worldwide dispersion as the result of its rejection of Christ (Luke 19:41-44).