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The Dispensations of God

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One of the most important things in understanding the Bible is **rightly dividing the word of truth (Second Timothy 2:15 NJK)**. There are a number of ways we can divide the Bible to understand the different parts of the whole. One of the ways is by the dispensations contained in **God's** Word. To understand what a dispensation is, we need to take a look at two Greek words. The first word is *oikumenei* from which we get our English word ecumenical. It means *to manage, to regulate, to administer, or to plan*. The second word is *aion* and it means *age*. It emphasizes the time element of the dispensation. So the term *dispensation* refers to a specific way by which **God** administers **His** program, **His** will, **His** rule and **His** authority. Each dispensation is an age, because each dispensation covers a period of time. Dispensations are periods of time in which **God** governs in a different way than **He** did previously.

There are seven dispensations described in the Bible: (1) the Dispensation of Innocence or Freedom (**Genesis 1:28 to 3:5**); (2) the Dispensation of Conscience or Self-Determination (**Genesis 3:6 to 8:14**), (3) the Dispensation of Civil Government (**Genesis 8:15 to 11:32**), (4) the Dispensation of Promise or Patriarchal Rule (**Genesis 12:1 to Exodus 18:27**), (5) the Dispensation of Torah (**Exodus 19:1 to Acts 1:26**), (6) the Dispensation of Grace (**Acts 2:1 to Revelation 19:21**), and (7) the Dispensation of the messianic or millennial Kingdom (**Isaiah 4:2-6, 11:1 to 12:6, 54:11-17, 60:1-22**).

There are *six specific elements* involved in each dispensation. First, each dispensation has a **key person** to whom special revelation is given. Secondly, each dispensation provides a **responsibility** to man and woman because each dispensation begins with new revelation that requires a human response. Thirdly, there is a specific **test**. Fourthly, following the test comes a specific **failure**. Fifthly, there is a **judgment** that brings the dispensation to an end. Sixthly, each dispensation has something that characterizes divine **grace**.

The Dispensation of Innocence or Freedom

1:28 to 3:5

The first dispensation has two names: the Dispensation of Innocence or the Dispensation of Freedom. The two names are used to emphasize different aspects of this dispensation. The first name emphasizes the fact that **Adam** and **Eve** were innocent of any sin or sin-nature at this time. **They** were created holy, but their holiness had not yet been confirmed because **they** had not been tested as to whether **they** would stay true to the Word of **God**. The second name emphasizes their freedom from sin (**they** were not slaves to sin).

At the beginning of each dispensation there is one **key person** through whom **God** reveals the new features of that particular dispensation. For the first dispensation, the key person was Adam. **Elohim** revealed **His** will, divine economy, and divine administration through **Adam**.

Each dispensation also had a specific **responsibility**. During the Dispensation of Innocence or Freedom, **man's** responsibility was to work the garden of Eden, to **take care of it**, and guard **it**.



Not only does each dispensation come with a responsibility, but each also comes with a **test**. The specific test here concerned **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**. This was a test of obedience. **They** were commanded **not** to **eat from** that specific **tree**. **They** had complete control over the Garden and the right to eat of every other tree in the Garden, including **the tree of life**. So, the test was very minimal.

There will also be a **failure** during this dispensation. If **they** had passed the test, **they** would have become immortal. But, unfortunately, **they** failed the test. **They** ate of the very tree that **God** had forbidden them to eat from. As a result, **their** sin permeated every part of **their** being, physical and spiritual. And **their** sin nature would be passed down to **their** children and the human race (**Romans 5:12 and 19**).

After the failure there is the **judgment**. In this case, the judgment was to be driven from the Garden and the curse upon the earth. Being driven from the Garden meant **they** were expelled to a place where they would no longer be able to eat from **the tree of life**. Instead of having an easy working relationship with the earth so that **his** labor was easy and light, **Adam** would now have to work the earth by the sweat of **his** brow in order to be able to eat. Work was no longer easy, it was toilsome. In addition, the curse meant that the earth would no longer be **his** friend, but **his** enemy. As **Adam** would try to produce food to eat from the earth, **he** would continually be at war with thorns and thistles.

In every dispensation there is also the display of **God's grace**. In this case, **ADONAI** promised a **Redeemer**. In **3:15 He** promised that a **Messiah** would someday come and do two things. First, **He** would defeat the Adversary, the deceiver, who brought about the fall of man, the curse, and the expulsion from the Garden through his temptation. And secondly, **He** would conquer physical death, which was the result of the Fall, by the resurrection.