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## Week 5: The Dispensations of God

**Dispensations are periods of time, in which God governs in a different way than He did previously.**

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 reveal the progressive revelation of **YHVH**.

The major opposition to **Dispensationalism** today is **Covenant Theology**, which teaches Replacement Theology. In 2002, Know Theological Seminary issued a document clearly stating the Covenant Theology position, "The inheritance promises that God gave Abraham . . . do not apply to any particular ethnic group, but to the Church of Jesus Christ, the true Isra'el, and "A future day should not be anticipated in which Christ's Kingdom will manifest Jewish distinctives, whether by its location in the Land; by its constituency, or by its ceremonial institutions and practices. Accordingly, Covenant Theology believes that the Church has either replaced or superseded "ethnic Isra'el." The promises made to "ethnic Isra'el" are considered as metaphorically fulfilled by the Church, as they believe that "Isra'el" and the "Church" are all one "people of God," a group that may or may not include people of Jewish ancestry. Covenant theologians deny any connection between "ethnic Isra'el" and the current or future land of Isra'el. They believe that as neighborhoods, cities, states, and nations "take dominion" and kick Satan out, the world will become a better and better place; and eventually, this process will lead to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.



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 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 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

### Genesis 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 aspect 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.