

THE DISPENSATIONAL PRINCIPLE IN THE STUDY OF YOUR BIBLE:

DECLARATION: It is this writer's opinion that it is absolutely necessary to understand the dispensations to properly understand and interpret God's Word correctly. We believe the dispensational approach to Bible study is implied in Paul's command in 2 Tim. 2:15 to "rightly (divide) the word of truth." This verse implies that although the Bible is one book there are obvious divisions that include not only books of the Bible, and chapters and verses, but also divisions or "dispensations" where God deals differently with mankind in different times. Without the dispensational approach to the Scriptures the Bible becomes a Book of confusion and contradictions.

I. DEFINITION:

A Dispensation is a period during which God deals in a particular way with man in respect to sin and man's responsibility. The word "dispensation" means "administration" and is first found in 1 Cor. 9:17.

II. DIVISIONS:

QUOTE: "Time is an island in the sea of eternity, which is divided into different dispensations or periods of time." - author unknown

NOTE: There are at least seven clearly identifiable divisions in God's dealings with mankind in the Bible. Some may count fewer and others add one or two more. Only when unnecessary divisions are made does one expose himself to being labeled a "hyper-dispensationalist." Nearly everyone believes in at least two: the Old Testament and the New Testament.

1. **Innocence:** (From the Creation to the Fall of Man) Time period: unknown
 - a. This is a clearly discernable division or dispensation; there has never been another time when man was innocent, i.e. without sin.
 - b. The man associated with this dispensation is Adam.
 - c. The responsibility or test for man was to see if he would choose God's word and will or to exert his own will and sin against his Creator – he failed the test!
2. **Conscience:** (From the Fall of Man to the Flood of Noah) Time period: 1656 years
 - a. Man is now outside the Garden of Eden in a fallen condition, having knowledge of good and evil and guided by his conscience.
 - b. The man associated with this dispensation is Cain.
 - c. The responsibility or test for man was to see if he will choose good or evil – he fails the test.
3. **Human Government:** (From the Flood to the Confusion of Tongues at Babel) Time period: 427 years
 - a. Man is judged for his sinful choices during the previous dispensation.
 - b. The man associated with this dispensation is Noah.
 - c. The responsibility or test for man was the same as that given to Adam, i.e., to see if he will govern for God and have "dominion over the earth" – he fails the test.
4. **Promise:** (From the Call of Abraham to the Exodus from Egypt) Time period: 430 years
 - a. Abraham is called by God out of Ur of the Chaldees and probably out of idolatry; but his journey of faith began when he heard God's call and obeyed Him.
 - b. The man associated with this dispensation is Abraham.
 - c. The responsibility or test for man was to stay in the land which God gave to him, and not go down into Egypt (a type of the world) – he fails the test.
5. **Law:** (From Mt. Sinai to Mt. Calvary) Time period: 1491 years
 - a. Man is now given God's Law (including the moral [10 Commandments], civil and social law).

- b. The man associated with this dispensation is Moses.
- c. The responsibility or test for man was to keep God's Law – he fails the test. (Jesus was the only One to keep the Law and they crucified Him!)

NOTE: This age closes with God's judgment on Israel for rejecting and crucifying His Son, in the 7 year Tribulation Period; the "time of Jacob's (Israel's) trouble." We do not see the Tribulation as a separate dispensation – some do.

6. Church: (From Pentecost to the Rapture) Time period: 2000 + years ???

- a. Mankind is charged with believing on and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.
- b. The man associated with this dispensation is the God-Man, Christ Jesus as Savior.
- c. The responsibility or test for man is to quit trying to achieve God's favor by works or Law and simply accept what he doesn't deserve, God's grace and salvation – he fails the test.

7. Millennium or Kingdom Age: (From Christ's descent to earth to the Great White Throne Judgment) Time period: 1000 years

- a. This age begins with only saved people who make it through the Tribulation Period.
- b. The man associated with this dispensation is Jesus Christ as King.
- c. The responsibility or test for man is to see if he will willingly submit himself to the King's authority while He is visibly present on earth and reigning in righteousness, and Satan is bound – he fails the test.

FINAL NOTE: The Dispensational approach to the study of the Bible is the primary study tool to keep you on track and to keep you from doctrinal error. Remember Church Age doctrine comes from Paul's epistles (any epistle where the first word is "Paul"). Applications can be made from anywhere in the Bible, but to avoid false doctrine and aberrations, stay in those books to determine doctrine for this dispensation.

There are statements in the Bible which are apparently contradictory, and the reason is that God deals with man in different ways in different dispensations. Certain rules need to be followed steadfastly:

1. One must never take truth that belongs to a past dispensation and apply it to the present, e.g., we do not sacrifice animals today.

(However, it must be noted that usually principles established in one dispensation may spill over into succeeding dispensations. For example: capital punishment was instituted in the dispensation of Human Government and continues today and is reiterated in the N.T. epistles. Principles in the Moral Law (10 Commandments) are also reinforced in the N.T. epistles, e.g. prohibitions against lying, adultery, and admonitions concerning honoring parents, etc.) The only one of the 10 Commandments not repeated in the N.T. is the one specifically given to Israel, i.e., the Sabbath Day.

2. Never take truth from a future dispensation and try to force it to fit the present, e.g., Kingdom Age truth cannot be applied to the Church Age.

3. Do not put the present into the future, e.g., the Church is not going into the Tribulation – it is the "time of Jacob's (Israel's) trouble.)

