

# ***BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE FELLOWSHIP***

## **UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE**



### **LESSON 5**

#### **RECOGNIZING THE DISPENSATIONS**

##### **Memory verse Romans 15:4**

In our last lesson we dealt with an important principle of Bible study “rightly dividing the Word of truth.” This is sometimes also called the principle of the dispensations.

GOD NEVER CHANGES.  
THE MORAL REQUIREMENTS OF GOD NEVER CHANGE.  
BUT...  
THE SYSTEM BY WHICH GOD GOVERNS THE WORLD HAS CHANGED  
AT VARIOUS TIMES OVER THE COURSE OF HISTORY.

To recognize this principle and to understand it is crucial to understanding the Bible. The following quotation well sums up this need:

For many people the Bible just doesn't seem to make sense. It seems to be filled with contradictions. In one place it states that man should eat only fruits and vegetables; in another it says that every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for people; and in still another a long list of animals, birds and fish are classified as unclean and forbidden as food. Then Paul comes on the scene and announces that every creature is good and nothing is to be refused (See Genesis 1:29; 9:3; Leviticus 11; 1 Timothy 4:4). In one place the Bible states that if a man is not circumcised he shall be cut off from God's people, and in another that Christ will be of no profit to a man who is circumcised (See Genesis 17:12-14 and Galatians 5:2). In one place Christ tells His disciples to preach only to Israelites and not to Gentiles; in another place He tells them to go to all men (See Matthew 10:5,6 and 28:19).

What is the explanation for these and many other seeming contradictions? The Bible itself instructs us to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15). This means that we must distinguish between the various dispensations of God's dealings with mankind. In the first dispensation, before man fell into sin, God limited his food to fruits and vegetables. After the flood, He permitted man to eat all kinds of animal flesh besides. Later He placed Israel under the Law and limited their diet to certain clean animals. When Israel rejected Christ, He cast that nation aside and turned to the Gentiles (See Acts 13:46). He gave to the Apostle Paul the revelation of truth for this present dispensation in which we now live, called the “dispensation of the grace of God” (See Ephesians 3:2-9). Many things are different in this dispensation. When we distinguish the dispensations, everything falls into place and the Bible makes sense.

(Taken from What We Believe Concerning Dispensationalism, Grace Publications Inc., Grand Rapids, MI)

## THE DISPENSATIONS OF SCRIPTURE

A dispensation is a system of management by which God governs His household, the world. In this lesson we will consider the various dispensations, which appear in scripture, especially, the dispensation of the grace of God (Eph. 3:2).

1. Please re-read the booklet, "KEY TO THE BIBLE", which was sent with lessons 2 & 3. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check)

### THE DISPENSATION OF INNOCENCE: The Garden of Eden

2. Please carefully read Genesis 1:26-31. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check)

(v. 28) What instructions did God give to Adam? \_\_\_\_\_

3. (v. 31) How did God describe His creation? \_\_\_\_\_

4. (Genesis 2:15-17) What command did God give to Adam? \_\_\_\_\_

We know from previous study that Adam and Eve disobeyed God. As a result they were no longer innocent; sin and death had entered the world. The woman, the man, and the earth all bear a curse because of this sin.

5. (Romans 5:12) What happened because of Adam's sin? \_\_\_\_\_

The first dispensation ended with the failure of man. The curse came into effect because of Adam's sin. We now live in a groaning creation, where death, pain and adversity are allowed to exist (Rom. 8:2).

### THE DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE: Adam to the Flood

6. (Genesis 3:22-24) What final action did God take after Adam's sin? \_\_\_\_\_

Man was forced to live outside of the garden in a sinful, hostile world. Fellowship with God was still possible as man sought to please God by living according to the dictates of his conscience.

7. The story of Cain and Abel demonstrated the sinfulness which had entered the world. Please read carefully Genesis 4:1-26. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check)

8. Look up Genesis 6:1-8. This passage summarizes what happened on the earth during the dispensation of conscience.

(Gen. 6:5) What had happened to mankind? \_\_\_\_\_

(v. 7) What did God determine to do because of this? \_\_\_\_\_

Please read Genesis 7:10-24. This portion tells the story of the Great Flood which destroyed the entire surface of the earth and ended the dispensation of conscience. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check)

### **THE DISPENSATION OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT: - Noah to Babel**

Noah and his wife, his three sons, Ham, Shem and Japeth along with their wives were delivered through the flood. From these eight people the earth was repopulated. With Noah, after the flood, begins another dispensation, that of Human Government.

9. One of the ways we recognize a dispensational change is by an abrupt change in a command and/or the addition of new instructions. According to Genesis 9:3, what was Noah's dietary command? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- (v. 3; also Gen. 1:29) What had the previous command been? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. When Cain murdered Abel, God did not allow man to punish Cain by taking his life (See Gen. 4:15). Read Genesis 9:5-6. What new command does God give regarding those who commit murder ("sheds man's blood.")? \_\_\_\_\_  
Under the dispensation of conscience, man was ruled directly by God who retained the right of life and death. This new command concerning capital punishment implied that God was now giving men authority to govern other men.
11. God's command to Noah was "be fruitful and multiply; populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it" (Gen. 9:7). Refer to Gen. 11: 1-4 What did man choose to do instead of obeying God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The Tower of Babel represented man's rebellion against God. The scattering of the people and confusion of languages represented the judgment of God which closed the dispensation of human government (Gen. 11:89)

### **THE DISPENSATION OF PROMISE: Abraham to Moses**

Under the dispensation of human government, man was given authority to govern man and God was dealing directly with all the world. Under the dispensation of promise, the principle of government continued but God began to narrow the focus of His direct interaction with man.

God was still concerned for the entire world but to reach that world and to speak to it, He selected a nation, a

Chosen People, through whom He would work. The dispensation of Promise began with the call of Abram in Genesis 12:1-3.

12. Please carefully read Gen. 12:1-3. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check)
13. (v. 1) What did God call Abram to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. (vv. 2-3) List any two of the promises made to Abram.  
1) \_\_\_\_\_  
2) \_\_\_\_\_
15. (Gen. 15:5) How does God describe the number of Abram's descendants? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. (Gen. 15:18) Describe the boundaries of the land promised to Abram? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 16a. (Gen. 17:9-18) What was Abraham to do with every male in his household and what did this ceremony mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. Please carefully read Genesis 26: 1-5. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check) Abraham and Sarah had a son named Isaac.  
(v. 2) What did God tell Isaac to do? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(vv. 3-4) What promise did God make to Isaac? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
18. Please read carefully Gen. 28:10-15. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check) Isaac and Rebekah had a son named Jacob.  
(v. 13-15) This portion tells the story of Jacob's dream about a ladder. What promise did God make to Jacob? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Please read carefully Gen. 32: 22-32. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check) This is the story of Jacob's wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord. (v. 21,28) What new name was given to Jacob? \_\_\_\_\_  
The nation of Israel began here as Jacob's name was changed. The twelve tribes of Israel descend from ten of Jacob's sons and two of his grandsons. The dispensation of Promise continued through the book of Genesis and into Exodus when Israel was delivered from bondage in Egypt.

### THE DISPENSATION OF THE LAW: Moses to Christ

In our last lesson we studied the man Moses. It was Moses whom God used to deliver Israel out of bondage in Egypt. Through Moses God gave the Law to Israel on Mt. Sinai and turned them from a disorganized mob into an orderly nation with a civil, military and religious structure. It was God's intention to bless the nation of Israel and through them, reach the world.

20. (Exodus 19:5-6) What did God promise Israel if they would obey Him? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

21. (Deuteronomy 28:1-2) What did God promise Israel in these verses if they would obey Him?  
(v. 1) \_\_\_\_\_  
(v. 2) \_\_\_\_\_  
(See vs. 3-14 for further details of the blessings.)

22. (Deuteronomy 28:15) What warning did God give if they did not obey? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

(See v. 16) and the following verses for details of the cursing.) Under the dispensation of law, Israel was God's chosen people. If they had obeyed, God would have blessed them and the nations of the earth would have been drawn to God by what they saw happening in Israel. Sometimes this happened as we see in the following examples.

23. Jethro was a Midianite priest and the father-in-law of Moses. Carefully read Exodus 18:8-12. What did Jethro do when he heard about all that, God had done for Israel? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

24. Please carefully read Joshua 2:8-11. \_\_\_\_ (Check) Rahab is the woman who helped the Israelite spies when they came to Jericho.  
(v. 11) What had happened in Jericho when the people there heard about all that God had done for Israel?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(v. 11b) What had the people of Jericho come to understand about God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The incidents with Jethro and the people of Jericho demonstrated the way in which God wanted to use Israel in the Old Testament. The record shows, however, that under the dispensation of law, Israel generally failed to obey. While there are bright spots in the history of the nation and times when God did use them, the overall witness is that Israel sinned and was judged by God. The book of Malachi shows the condition of the nation as the Old Testament came to a close.

The Old Testament prophets arose and called Israel to repent and return to God. They prophesied judgment if the nation would not repent. The prophets also spoke of a Messiah, one who would restore and redeem the nation. They also spoke of a Kingdom which the Messiah would establish upon the earth, an earthly Kingdom of the Jews over which Christ the Messiah would rule.

### THE COMING MESSIAH AND KING

25. (Isaiah 9:6-7) List some of the terms used to refer to the Messiah. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
26. (Micah 5:2) Where would the Messiah be born? \_\_\_\_\_
27. (Isaiah 42:1) The word “messiah” means “anointed one,” i.e. one marked out for a special purpose. The reference here is to the coming Messiah. What is one thing the Messiah would accomplish? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
28. Please read carefully Jeremiah 23:5-6. \_\_\_\_ (Check) List two things which the Messiah will accomplish according to these verses.  
1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_
29. Malachi 3:1-3 also describes the coming of the Messiah. According to verse 3, what will the Messiah do when He comes? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
30. (2 Samuel 7:16) What promise did God make to David? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The “house” (family), the “kingdom” and “throne” of David were to continue eternally. Thus, the Messiah would be a descendant of David. The Messianic Kingdom would be an extension of David’s kingdom.

- 31 Please read carefully Jeremiah 33:14-18. \_\_\_\_ (Check) Answer the following questions from this Passage.  
(vs. 14) What does God promise to do ? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(v. 15) Who will come forth at that time and what will he accomplish? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(v. 16). What will happen to Judah and Jerusalem? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

32. Isaiah 11 also describes the Messiah and his Kingdom.  
(Isaiah 11:6-8) List several things, which will happen in the Messianic Kingdom. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

33. (Isaiah 35:1-2) Note one further thing, which will be true in the Messianic Kingdom. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The Old Testament closed with the book of Malachi about 400 BC. For 400 years there was no new word from God in Israel. Then, with the ministry of John the Baptist, God began to speak. John's work was to prepare the way for the Messiah. He preached to Israel, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The Messiah was about to appear, but the dispensation of the law was still in effect.

### **THE DISPENSATION OF THE KINGDOM IS ANNOUNCED TO ISRAEL**

When John the Baptist and Jesus Christ appeared, they came to the nation of Israel. Their message: the Messiah and his Kingdom are at hand.

34. Luke 1:26-38 records the announcement by the Angel Gabriel to Mary concerning the birth of Jesus Christ.  
(vv. 32-33) What position would Jesus Christ occupy? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

35. (Matthew 3:1-3) What message did John the Baptist preach to Israel? (v. 2) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

36. (Matthew 4:17) What message did Jesus preach? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

37. (John 4:25-26) Who did Jesus claim to be? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

38. (Mark 1:14-15) What message did Jesus preach in Galilee? \_\_\_\_\_

39. Please carefully read Matthew 26:63-64. \_\_\_\_\_ (Check)

The high priest in verse 63 asked Jesus if he were the Christ (Messiah) the Son of God.

(v. 64) What answer did Jesus give him? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

In the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the dispensation of the law was still in effect. The Messiah appeared and the Messianic Kingdom was announced, however, in the gospels we see the nation of Israel reject both her Messiah and the Kingdom.

40. Please carefully read Acts 3:12-15. To whom is Peter speaking?  
 (v. 12) \_\_\_\_\_  
 (vv. 13-15) What had Israel done? \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
41. (John 1:11) What happened when Christ came unto his own (Israel)? \_\_\_\_\_

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

A dispensation is a system of management by which God rules His household, the world. There have been several dispensations according to scripture.

**INNOCENCE** Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

**CONSCIENCE** From the fall of man to the flood

**HUMAN GOVERNMENT** From Noah to Babel

**PROMISE** From Abraham to the giving of the Law

**LAW** Moses to Israel's final rejection of Christ  
*During the dispensation of Law, the dispensation of the Kingdom was announced to Israel and rejected.*

**GRACE** The dispensation of the Grace of God in which we now live from the Apostle Paul to the rapture of the Body of Christ.

**KINGDOM** After the tribulation period and the battle of Armageddon, Christ will return to the earth a second time and establish the Messianic Kingdom.

**In our next lesson we will give special attention to the dispensation of the grace of God in which we now live.**

42. Memory verse. Please write out the memory verse for this lesson in the space below.

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Use the space below for any questions or comments:

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