

Dispensations

There is a word which appears in the Bible, not often used, but is very helpful in Bible study

It is the word – Dispensation.

The original word is found 7 times, 4 times it's translated dispensation and 3 times stewardship

The original Greek word – 'oikonomia' is literally our word 'economy'

Meaning – 'the way things work and are administered' often in financial or monetary terms

But in relation to the Bible – **it is how God works and administers things in this World**

We read:

The dispensation of the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 9v17

The dispensation of the fullness of times: Ephesians 1v10

The dispensation of the grace of God: Ephesians 3v2

The dispensation of God: Colossians 1v25

Referring to how God works in the Gospel, in the ages of time and in grace etc.

The other references translated stewardship give us a better understanding of what it means

Luke 16v2,3 & 4 we have this same Greek work translated stewardship

"Give account of your stewardship" How have you been running and administering things?

This is a good explanation of the word dispensation:

A dispensation is how someone orders and runs things!

In relation to the Bible, it is God's way of ordering and running things during a period of time

In the Bible God acts, works and responds in different ways at different times ie dispensations.

Bible scholars have noted 7 distinct periods when God acted toward mankind in different ways

These are called dispensations and they follow one upon another

5 of these dispensations are in the past, we are living in the 6th and there is one more to come!

How God is working today in the 6th dispensation is different to how he worked in the others

There are those who say they like the God of the NT but don't like the God of the Old

This is of course nonsense!

He is the same God: his nature, attributes and character never change,

But he does act in different ways depending on which dispensation he is governing

Today we are living in the dispensation of Grace when God is acting in grace towards all

People like this very much because God being love and acting in love is very acceptable

But when God responded in judgement to sin in the dispensation of Law, people don't like that

Yet God is love and God is holy and this never changes wither he blesses or judges!

Knowing the dispensations can be a great help to us in Bible study

It also helps us give answers to questions which may be raised

We want to consider the different dispensations; they add structure to our grasp of the Bible

We can identify 7 distinct dispensations in the Bible

It is interesting that they all follow a pattern:

- They all **begin with a major event** and they all contain:
 - **Revelation:**
God revealing something.
 - **Responsibility:**
Mankind being responsible for something.
 - **Resources:**
Help being made available for man in the dispensation
 - **Rules:**
Principles that carry on through subsequent dispensations.
 - **Results:**
A result that ends the dispensation.

Dispensations all begin with a major event:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Creation of the world | - Innocence |
| 2. Adam & Eve's sin | - Conscience |
| 3. The Flood | - Human Government |
| 4. The call of Abraham | - Promise |
| 5. Moses and the Exodus | - Law |
| 6. The 1st coming of Christ | - Grace |
| 7. The 2nd coming of Christ | - The Kingdom |

Taking us from the beginning of the world until the end.

Quick reference in NT:

John 1.17: For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

The dispensation of law began with Moses (God holding man responsible under law)

The dispensation of Grace began with Jesus Christ (God acting in Grace towards men)

The 7 Dispensations are not equally divided over the 66 books in the Bible

Of the 39 books in the Old Testament, 38 books cover 1 dispensation

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, 26 books cover 1 dispensation

The 1st and the last books in the Bible cover the other 5 dispensations!

Innocence		
Conscience		
Human Government		
Promise		(Genesis) - 1 book

Law (Exodus to Malachi) - 38 books

Grace (Matthew to Jude) - 26 books

The Kingdom (Revelation) - 1 book

Dispensations begin with a major event:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Creation | Genesis 1v1 – 3v6 |
| 2. The Fall | Genesis 3v7 – ch.6 |
| 3. The Flood | Genesis 7v1 – ch.11 |
| 4. Abraham | Genesis 12v1 – Exodus |
| 5. Moses | Exodus – Malachi |
| 6. The 1 st Coming | Matthew – Jude |
| 7. The 2 nd Coming | Revelation |

Dispensations are named as:

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Innocence | Genesis 1v1 – 3v6 |
| 2. Conscience | Genesis 3v7 – ch.6 |
| 3. Human Government | Genesis 7v1 – ch.11 |
| 4. Promise | Genesis 12v1 – Exodus |
| 5. Law | Exodus – Malachi |
| 6. Grace | Matthew – Jude |
| 7. The Kingdom | Revelation |

The purpose of dispensations:

1. God testing man.

It is suggested that:

1. **Innocence:** God tests man in the garden in ideal conditions – **man fails**
2. **Conscience:** God tests man as to whether he will follow his conscience – **man fails**
3. **Government:** God tests man to follow the rules of human government – **man fails**
4. **Promise:** God tests man to believe and trust in his promises – **man fails**
5. **Law:** God tests man to keep the law – **man fails**
6. **Grace:** God tests man to accept his grace in Christ – **man fails**
7. **The Kingdom:** God tests man when Satan is bound for 1000 years – **man fails**

2. God showing his ability to use man to fulfil his purposes:

Dispensations are periods of time in which
God shows that he is able to raise up a man
to overcome all the difficulties of the age in which he lives
even when all others fail!

Ultimately God's purpose will be fulfilled when
the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of man,
reigns supreme over all creation
from the Kingdom out into eternity.

God's initial purpose was to place a man as the head and ruler of all creation:

All dispensations move toward fulfilling this purpose!

1. God reveals chosen men to fulfil his purposes.

1. **Innocence:** God chooses Adam
2. **Conscience:** God chooses Enoch
3. **Government:** God chooses Noah
4. **Promise:** God chooses Abraham
5. **Law:** God chooses Moses
6. **Grace:** God reveals Jesus Christ as his Son
7. **The Kingdom:** It is Jesus Christ who reigns over all
Fulfilling God's initial purpose.

The dispensation of Innocence

- **Begins with the Creation of the world and contains:**
 - **Revelation:**

God is revealed as the Creator of the world.
He is the Creator of life and of man
 - **Responsibility:**

Man is responsible to rule for God, to represent him.
He was to till the ground and guard the garden
Adam and Eve were to love each other,
to marry, have children and fill the earth
They were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
 - **Resources:**

They had a perfect environment
Adam was not alone, he had a helpmeet, they had each other.
They had access to God in communion
 - **Rules:**

Obedying God ends in blessing, disobeying God ends in judgement
A universal principle throughout all generations
 - **Results:**

Adam & Eve disobeyed God.
They sinned and were put out of the garden