

ENDORSEMENTS

Manley's work on the book of Revelation provides a helpful tool in the mold of classical dispensationalism that is destined to service pastors and laymen alike. While not all details on all points will be accepted by all dispensationalists, the simple approach to Manley's commentary with its readable style cuts through the confusion to bring the bright light of clarity to prophetic thinking.

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D O N M A N L E Y

AUTHOR OF WISDOM, THE PRINCIPLE THING

THE END *of*
HUMAN
HISTORY

How to Understand the Book of Revelation



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I dedicate this book to the late Ken Nelson and his faithful wife, Marie. Ken and Marie have been loyal supporters of my writing ministry from the beginning with their gifts, prayers, suggestions, and encouraging words.

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FOREWORD

There have been so many books written on the book of Revelation across the centuries. As a result many views of interpretation have arisen. How literally you take the Bible is always a determinate in biblical interpretation. When dealing with Revelation, you cannot get “on the horse and ride in every direction.” You also cannot make it a “hobby-horse.” The Revelation of Jesus Christ is vital to our missions and evangelism emphasis through the churches.

Dr. Don Manley has taken the direction of classic dispensationalism. It is the approach to Revelation most dependent on the literal interpretation of Scripture. It is also the direction that gives greatest authority to the Word of God.

The author sets forth all of the dispensations by chapter. The material is well developed, thoroughly documented, and easily understood. Being a pastor-preacher, Dr. Manley uses wonderful outlines that assist the reader’s understanding of some complicated passages. His outlines also give great credibility to movement through the dispensations.

This is a wonderful commentary on a complex subject. It breathes the convictions of the author. It is also devotional enough in content to help build a passion for further study.

It is my hope that the commentary will be well received and widely distributed.

Blessings,

Dr. John Sullivan
Executive Director–Treasurer
Florida Baptist Convention

PREFACE

How to Understand the Book of Revelation by Don Manley, M.B. Th.B., M.M., Ph.D.

History is being made every day on our planet. The events that took place last year are now a part of history. The events of last week are now history. The events of yesterday are now history. But there is a day coming when no more history will be made. When that day comes, time will be no more. When that day comes, the long tragic drama of human history will end. Revelation tells us what will happen *before* Christ returns to earth, what will happen *when* Christ returns to earth, and what will happen *after* Christ returns to earth. Understand the book of Revelation and you will understand the horrifying events that are soon to take place in our world, and you will understand how human history will one day end.

INTRODUCTION

How to understand the book of Revelation—the Word that came from God

All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

—2 Tim. 3:16–17

The Bible came to us from God. The Greek word in verse 16 that is translated “inspiration” means “God-breathed.”

“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:20–21). God used holy, or godly, men to write the Scriptures, but He directed those men in a supernatural way as they wrote. The words in the Bible were written by men, but the words in the Bible are not the words of men. They are the words of God.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Here we can plainly see what we call the doctrine of inspiration, which means that this book came to us from the living, all-powerful God.

Rightly dividing God’s Word

Many good pastors, missionaries, and lay people, by their own admission, do not understand the book of Revelation. These dear people love

the Lord, they believe His Word, and they are serious about living lives that are pleasing to Him, but, in their own words, they “can’t make heads or tails out of the book of Revelation.” These precious believers do not understand the book of Revelation because they have not learned how to “rightly divide” the Word. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Examine this scripture carefully and you will have no doubts that (1) we are to study the Word and (2) we are to be workmen in the Word so that we can (3) rightly divide the Word.

If one is to attain a proper understanding of biblical prophecy in general, and the book of Revelation in particular, one must be able to rightly divide the Word of Truth, the Bible. Before we take an in-depth look at the book of Revelation, we will spend a little time examining other scriptures to see how God has, in different ages, dealt with man, and how He said He would deal with man in the future. An understanding of these periods of time known as “dispensations” is crucial, if one is to have the ability to “rightly divide” the Word. Understand the dispensations and you will be on your way to understanding the book of Revelation.

Now that we have opened the subject of the dispensations, three questions need to be answered:

1. What is a dispensation?
2. What is a dispensationalist?
3. How many dispensations are there?

What is a dispensation?

The literal meaning of *dispensation* is a stewardship or administration. A dispensation is a period of time during which God deals in a particular way with man in respect to sin and man’s responsibility. God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. But, although God never changes, His dealings with men do change. Each dispensation is different, but in each dispensation man fails. Then God sends a judgment. Then God gives man another chance and begins a new dispensation.

INTRODUCTION

What is a dispensationalist?

A dispensationalist is one who believes in a literal interpretation of **Scripture**. Dispensationalism is the only system that practices a literal interpretation of Scripture consistently. For example, one who is not a dispensationalist will *allegorize* or *spiritualize* the unfulfilled prophecies in the Bible. But the dispensationalist reads the prophetic Scriptures and takes them literally. Consistent literalism is practiced only by the dispensationalist. In theological circles, a liberal is one who does not believe that the Bible is infallible, that it is without error. Liberals (and there are a lot of them!) believe that the Bible is full of errors. Did you know that dispensationalists are never liberal? It is impossible for a dispensationalist to be liberal because a dispensationalist believes in a literal interpretation of the Bible. Dispensationalists are conservative evangelical Christians.

How many dispensations are there?

There are seven dispensations in the Word of God, eight if that period known as the tribulation is included in the count. In this study, the tribulation will be referred to as a dispensation. It seems logical to this author to preface this commentary on Revelation with a brief overview of the dispensations found in Holy Scripture because it is impossible to understand the book of Revelation unless one first understands the dispensational system that is found in the Bible. So we will begin now with a brief look at each of the dispensations.

SECTION ONE: THE DISPENSATIONS OF MAN

Eternity
Past

Innocence	Conscience	Human Government	Promise	Law	Grace	Tribulation	Kingdom
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Eternity
Future

THE FIRST DISPENSATION: INNOCENCE

CHAPTER 1

Eternity Past

Innocence

Time frame—From the creation of man to the fall of man. Length of time unknown.

Man’s obligation—Man was told not to eat the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:8–9, 16, 17)

Man’s transgression—Man disobeyed God (Gen. 3:6)

The consequences—Judgment on Satan, judgment of the woman, judgment of the man, judgment on the earth, promise of a Redeemer. (Gen. 3:14–19)

Each dispensation is unique. The dispensations are like snowflakes—all different. Let’s consider some of the unique aspects of the first dispensation, innocence.

The first dispensation goes all the way back to the garden of Eden. Theologians refer to that dispensation as “innocence.” Now God is not the author of sin. God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, without sin. They were innocent. Now there is a big difference between innocence and righteousness. Innocence is without sin, but untried. Righteousness is sinlessness going through trials and coming out victoriously sinless. There was only one righteous man in all of history. That man was Jesus Christ. He “. . . was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

In the beginning—no curse, great freedom

God created this world for the human race. He created it for our enjoyment. Later, man's sin would bring God's curse upon this earth, but during the age of innocence there was no curse because man had not yet sinned. Storms of all kinds—hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes—were unknown. In the beginning there was not any curse on this planet, only divine blessings.

Another unique aspect of this first dispensation was the great freedom man had. Adam and Eve had great freedom because they had not yet sinned. They didn't have any worries. All the material things they needed were provided for them. They didn't even have the burden of going to work each day. Oh, they had a few light chores to take care of in the garden, but that was about it!

But, of course, that freedom was lost when sin came into the human race. And man, to this very day, yearns for the freedom he lost when he disobeyed God back in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were also free from such worries as death, old age, and sickness. This time was unique in all of human history. Let's go back in time for a moment to the dispensation of innocence.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every

THE FIRST DISPENSATION: INNOCENCE

thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

—Gen. 1:26–31

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

—Gen. 2:7–17

The Genesis account clearly tells us that God made Adam a steward over Eden. God gave Adam a stewardship. He told Adam to keep the garden. “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

God then told Adam: “Do not eat from this tree.”

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

—Gen. 2:16–17

A tropical paradise

The garden of Eden was a tropical paradise. The scenery topped anything we have ever experienced. Adam and Eve had plenty to eat. They had nothing to worry about. They were “free.” But remember, there was one thing they were not to do, wasn’t there? In essence, God said to Adam, “There is one tree here that you are not to eat from. You can eat the peaches, you can eat the plums, you can eat the coconuts, you can eat the bananas, you can eat the breadfruit, you can eat the mangos, you can eat the avocados, you can eat the starfruit, you can eat the oranges, you can eat the sapotes. But do you see that tree right over there? Do not eat of that tree. If you do, you will die.” That was pretty clear, wasn’t it? God could not have made it any clearer.

Adam understood what God had told him. He “got it.” Then Adam, no doubt, went to Eve and said, “Dear, God said to me we can eat of every tree in the garden except that one there. He said we are not to eat of that tree. God said we can eat the peaches, plums, coconuts, bananas, breadfruit, mangos, avocados, starfruit, oranges, and sapotes. But do you see that tree right there? God said we are not to eat of that tree.” Then Adam probably looked at Eve and said, “Got it?” Eve probably looked at Adam, nodded her head, and said, “Got it.” Then she probably said something like this, “Why, we don’t even need that tree, we’ve got a zillion others.”

Sin entered the human race

A tragic story is recorded in Genesis chapter three. In fact, it is the most tragic story in the Bible. There are a lot of tragic stories in the Bible, but every one of these sad stories has roots that can be traced all the way back to the tragic event that took place in the garden of Eden and is recorded for us in this chapter.

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of

THE FIRST DISPENSATION: INNOCENCE

the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

—Gen. 3:1–6

Here is where sin entered the human race. The devil came to Eve in the form of a serpent. The devil convinced Eve to believe his words, not God's words. Adam and Eve ate the fruit that God had forbidden, and they died spiritually that day. And then everything changed. The consequences for their act of disobedience reach all the way down through history to the day in which we live.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life; and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed

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and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

—Gen. 3:7–19

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

—Gen. 3:22–24

Adam and Eve paid a great price because of their disobedience. The ground was cursed. Adam was judged. Eve was judged. Paradise was lost. Man did not obey God, did he? Man failed. The dispensation of innocence was over. How long was this dispensation? We do not know. The Word of God does not tell us. It was, no doubt, not very long. It might have lasted a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or, at the most, a few years.

Sin always has consequences

This ancient story contains a great lesson about the price we pay when we disobey God—there are awful consequences for disobeying God. When we disobey God we sin, and all of us, without exception, sin

THE FIRST DISPENSATION: INNOCENCE

(Rom. 3:23). But today, thanks to Christ, we can confess that sin, ask God for forgiveness and for victory, and be cleansed (1 John 1:5–9). But many do not do that. They continue “playing” in sin. Playing around with sin is like playing with a rattlesnake. A man might be able to pick up a rattlesnake and handle that thing once or twice, or maybe even several times without getting bitten, but if that man continues to play around with that poisonous viper, sooner or later that thing is going to bite him. The nature of the snake is to bite and to inject its poison into its victim. People who fool around with sin and tell themselves, “We’re okay, we’re getting away with it,” are deceived. If they continue to play around with sin, they will sooner or later feel its ugly bite. That is the nature of sin.

But God didn’t leave Adam and Eve alone in their sin. Now that they had disobeyed God and knew that they were naked, He clothed them. “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21).

Where did God get these coats of skins? Obviously animals had to be killed. Their blood had to be shed so that Adam and Eve could be covered with “coats of skins.”

This is the first picture of salvation in the Bible. This is a picture of Christ, who would one day come and shed His blood for us so that we might be clothed in His righteousness.

THE SECOND DISPENSATION: CONSCIENCE

CHAPTER 2

Eternity Past

Innocence

Conscience

Time Frame—From the fall to the flood (approximately 1,656 years)

Man's Obligation—"Do right" (Gen. 4:6–7)

Man's Transgression—Man became exceedingly wicked. (Gen. 6:5, 11, 12)

The Consequences—God judged the human race through the flood. All flesh (except for fish and water life) outside of the ark died. (Gen. 7:21–23)

The name of the second dispensation is "conscience." In the first dispensation, man was ignorant of good and evil, but he deliberately disobeyed the will of God. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From that point on, they were no longer innocent. They had knowledge of good and evil. Was this because there was something supernatural or magical about the fruit on that tree? No. It was because they had disobeyed God. Since man now knew the difference between good and evil, he was to be governed by his conscience. He was simply to do right.

A blood sacrifice

One of the things that man was to do from time to time was to offer a blood sacrifice to the Lord.

THE SECOND DISPENSATION: CONSCIENCE

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord, and Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

—Gen. 4:1–5

Abel offered a blood sacrifice to the Lord, and the Lord accepted it. Cain, however, offered a sacrifice of vegetables, and perhaps grains and fruit. Obviously Cain's sacrifice was not as God had instructed.

And the Lord said unto Cain, why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

—Gen. 4:6–7

Obviously, Cain had been told by God that he was to give a blood sacrifice. And here is why the blood sacrifice was so important. Man's sin must be paid for; a holy God demands it. One day in the future, Christ would come and shed His blood on the cross for sinners. Christ would do for man what man could not do for himself. He would pay for sin.

When we take communion in the Christian church, we are looking back 2,000 years to the cross where Christ shed His blood for us. In the communion service, the grape juice represents Christ's blood. In the days of Genesis and all through the Old Testament, when an animal was sacrificed, it was symbolic of the Redeemer who would one day come. The blood of the sacrificed animal was symbolic of the

Redeemer's blood, which would one day be shed for the sins of the world. In this, the second dispensation, all that God required of man was that he "do right." But man didn't do right, as we will see. We will pick up the story again now in Genesis chapter four, beginning at verse eight.

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

—Gen. 4:8–15

How different things were from the time of innocence in the garden of Eden before man sinned, to this awful day in Genesis chapter four and verse eight. This is the first murder in human history. The very first offspring of Adam and Eve became a murderer. Already Adam and Eve could see that their disobedience back in the garden of Eden would have lasting negative consequences.

Great wickedness prevailed

In the sixth chapter of Genesis, God describes what man's heart was like in that age. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great

THE SECOND DISPENSATION: CONSCIENCE

in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). This verse clearly tells us that the outstanding characteristic of this dispensation was great wickedness. God had not yet given man any law. Man was simply to “do right.” But man chose not to do right. Man chose to do wrong. Things really got bad. We believe that violence and corruption were evident everywhere. All the thoughts of men were evil in those days and we can suppose that murder was common. Remember, at this time there was no law—no policemen, courts, or prisons. These would all come later, but at this early stage of man’s history, there was no law. The human race slid so far down into sin that eventually God said, “I am going to destroy man.”

And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

—Gen. 6:6–7

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

—Gen. 6:11–12

But in the midst of all this corruption and violence, God had a man that He could count on. The man’s name was Noah. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:8–9).

Noah loved the Lord and showed us that it is possible to live at a wicked time in history and still walk with God.

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark

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of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

—Gen. 6:13–14

Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

—Gen. 6:22

Noah obeyed God. Noah was different from the people of his generation, wasn't he? Noah didn't "fit in" with everybody else, and that was because he was a godly man.

And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.

—Gen. 7:1

And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood. Of clean beasts, and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, there went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah. And it came to pass after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark; they and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort. And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life. And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the Lord shut him in. And the flood was forty days upon

THE SECOND DISPENSATION: CONSCIENCE

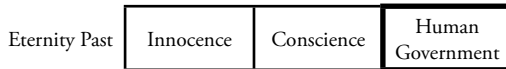
the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man.

—Gen. 7:7–21

God brought the dispensation of “conscience” to an end. And how did this dispensation end? It ended with a judgment from God. In each dispensation, man fails God. In each dispensation, because of man’s failure, God sends a judgment. Then the loving God gives man another chance. Almighty God destroyed the human race because of the great sin of that day. But there were eight exceptions: Noah and his family.

THE THIRD DISPENSATION: HUMAN GOVERNMENT

CHAPTER 3



Time Frame—From the flood to the tower of Babel (approximately 427 years)

Man's Obligation—"Fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1), govern the earth (Gen. 9:5–6)

Man's Transgression—An organized political and religious rebellion against God (Gen. 11:3–4)

The Consequences—Confusion of tongues and the dispersion of people

We come to the third dispensation: human government. As we look at the eighth chapter of Genesis, the great flood is over. All flesh on the earth has perished. The flood waters have now receded and the ark has come to rest on the mountain of Ararat. All of the survivors of the great flood were still on the ark. There was Noah and his wife and their three sons and their wives. The human race, at that time, consisted of just these eight people. A new dispensation was about to begin. Let us look at the Scripture to see what responsibilities God would give to man in this the third dispensation.

THE THIRD DISPENSATION: HUMAN GOVERNMENT

Fill the earth

And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.

—Gen. 8:15–17

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.

—Gen. 9:1

The first thing we discover that man was to do was to “fill the earth.”

Develop a government

The second thing we discover is that God instructed man to develop a government. Up to this time, no human government existed. Over 1,600 years had passed since God created Adam and Eve, but up to this time no man had the right to take another man's life, not even for murder. Life on earth at that time must have been a lot like life in the American “wild west” when our country was young. In those early days of the untamed American west, there was no law. Genesis 9:6 is the order from God for man to develop a government. “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”

Man must obey man

From the beginning of time, man has rebelled from the God who made him and loves him. The human race had become so rebellious and wicked that God decided to destroy them all, with the exception of one family: Noah's. So here we see God instituting something new: human government. If man would not obey God, then God would set up a system whereby man must obey man or suffer the consequences. Here,

for the first time, God gave man the right to take the life of a murderer. This is God giving man the authority to govern others. That would mean that there would have to be some sort of a police force, wouldn't it? If there's a murderer out there somewhere, somebody has to bring him in, right? That would mean some sort of a jail system, wouldn't it? There has to be a place to hold that suspected murderer until his innocence or guilt is proven, which would mean some sort of a court system, wouldn't it? That would mean a trial where testimony is heard and evidence is presented. That would mean that there would probably be a group of men and women who would somehow be selected to decide the man's innocence or guilt. Human government was set up by God.

Man developed a government

As one continues to study the book of Genesis, one discovers that man, indeed, did develop a government and the human race was probably better off because of it, at least for a time. But there was a problem. A big problem. Man had left God, his Creator, out, as we will see. Isn't it interesting how often God is left out of things? That's because man has a rebellious, evil heart. God said that, “. . . the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21).

I want you to meet a man named Nimrod in Genesis chapter ten.

And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.

—Gen. 10:8–10

Verse 10 tells us that Nimrod had a kingdom, Babel (it would later become Babylon). If Nimrod had a kingdom, then he would rule over other people. There was some sort of crude government structure.

A place to worship

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that

THE THIRD DISPENSATION: HUMAN GOVERNMENT

they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

—Gen. 11:1–2

A better translation of the Hebrew text reads, “as they journeyed east. . . .” People in the region of Mt. Ararat would have migrated to the area known as the “Fertile Crescent,” which would be southeast and east, as the Hebrew text suggests. I find it very interesting that *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that civilization had its beginning in this area. So they journeyed east and they came to the land of Shinar, which is in modern day Iraq. Here they found fertile soil in an open plain and they all decided to stay.

And they said one to another, come, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Come, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

—Gen. 11:3–4

The Bible is quoting the words of these men. They were not trying to build a tower that would reach heaven. If they wanted a tower to reach heaven, they would not have built it on a plain. They would have built it on a mountain. They were describing what they wanted to build: a very tall building.

Rebels in the land of Shinar

These men and women were rebels on two accounts. First, they rebelled against the Lord’s clear command in Genesis 9:1 to “fill the earth.” They didn’t want to fill the earth. They wanted to stay together. We learn in verse four that they did not want to be scattered. Second, they weren’t worshipping the true God. The tower was built to worship a deity, but not the true God, not the Creator. The tower they built was known as a ziggurat. Archeologists have excavated several of these ziggurats in Babylon where this took place. One stood 297 feet high! A ziggurat was similar to a pyramid—except that each higher level was recessed so that

you could walk to the top on “steps.” At the top was a special shrine dedicated to a god or goddess.

Man was scattered

As the people worked their way to the top, they hoped that the god or goddess they worshiped would come down from heaven to meet them. But instead of some false god, or some demon coming down to meet them, the true God showed up.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

—Gen. 11:5–9

Dr. Harold Wilmington said, “That night all mankind went to bed using the same language. When they awoke in the morning, their thought patterns, vocabularies, and articulation practices were completely changed. Men and women who had easily communicated a few hours before could not understand one another. And each, of course, thought the other was the one who had changed.”¹ It must have been a funny event.

The people were forced to separate, to scatter. Those who spoke the same language got together and went to a new geographical area. Some groups went north, others went south. Some went east, and some went west. God scattered them because of their rebellion. When you hear another language it should remind you that God created the various languages because of man's rebellion. From that day to this, man has

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not changed. Man is still a rebel from God. Man does not want to serve the Lord God. Man has always had a problem following God.

Look at society today. The culture of our day is ungodly. Look at Christians today. On any given Sunday, a significant number of members are absent from our churches. They miss an opportunity to worship the God of heaven so that they might do something else that, in view of eternity, isn't important at all. That is rebellion against God! Oh, we are all rebels in our hearts, and if we do not submit ourselves to God, confess our rebellion to Him, and dedicate ourselves to Him, that rebellion will continue to grow in our lives like a deadly cancer. Rebellion has sapped the life out of many a Christian man and many a Christian woman. Is there some rebellion in your life? Is there something you are supposed to be doing that you are not doing? If so—that is rebellion. If, after you search your heart, you find some rebellion there, I encourage you to confess it to the Lord and submit yourself anew to Him.

THE FOURTH DISPENSATION: PROMISE

CHAPTER 4

Eternity Past	Innocence	Conscience	Human Government	Promise
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Time Frame—From the call of Abraham to bondage in Egypt (approximately 430 years)

Man's Obligation—Abide in the land (Gen. 12:1–5)

Man's Transgression—Went into Egypt

The Consequences—Slavery in Egypt

In the dispensations we have already discussed, all of the people were involved. But that is about to change. Here in Genesis chapter twelve, God is about to do a new thing. God is about to begin a new dispensation, and as that new dispensation begins, there is only one man involved. God has picked a man named Abram, and He is going to do some special things through him. Later God will change his name to Abraham.

The call of Abraham

Now the Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless

THE FOURTH DISPENSATION: PROMISE

thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

—Gen. 12:1–3

We do not know much about Abraham's life up to this point. But we do know that he lived in a city named Ur. This was a very modern, up-to-date city in Abraham's day. Ur is located in modern day Iraq. God told Abraham to leave a place he knew and go to a place he did not know. That would mean that Abraham and his wife would have to leave all the people they knew and go live in a strange place among people they did not know. That is what missionaries do when they are called, isn't it?

Randy, our son, was called to pastor a struggling congregation on the island of Molokai in Hawaii. Then came the day that we had to say good-bye. The family gathered in our home in Port Richey. We prayed for Randy, Louise, and the children. We asked God to protect them, to provide for all of their needs, and to use them for His glory. We embraced. We cried. Then we watched them go.

“Good-bye Randy, good-bye Louise, good-bye kids.” Oh, how our hearts ached that day. Yet, there was peace because we were sure God had called them.

When the Lord called me to this church, Anne and I had to leave an area we were familiar with (New Port Richey, Florida) to go to an area we did not know anything about. We left hundreds of friends behind to come to Oxford, Florida, where we knew no one. It's called moving “by faith,” and that's what God called Abraham to do. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8).

The fourth dispensation had begun. We refer to this dispensation as “promise.” We get the name of this dispensation from some verses here in Hebrews.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.

—Heb. 11:9

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. (Heb. 6:13–15)

When God called Abraham, He made certain promises to him, as we shall see.

The covenant with Abraham

A covenant is a contract, a legal agreement between two or more parties. Let's look at the covenant. Keep in mind that God spoke these words to Abraham about 4,000 years ago.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

—Gen. 12:2–3

This covenant was between God and Abraham and is, therefore, known as the Abrahamic covenant. Some covenants in Scripture are conditional. Others are unconditional. The Abrahamic covenant is unconditional because God made some unconditional promises to Abraham. If you look carefully in these verses you will see God making references to three distinct groups of people:

- The Jewish nation of Israel
- The Gentiles of the world
- The New Testament church

Look at the first part of verse two: “And I will make of thee a great nation . . .” God was referring to Israel, the land of the Jew, the “promised land.” Next, I want to point out the reference to the Gentiles of the world. Look at verse three: “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee . . .” Here God promises

THE FOURTH DISPENSATION: PROMISE

Abraham that He will bless the Gentiles that bless or support Israel and curse the Gentiles that curse Israel. Check the history books, friend, and you will find that God has kept His Word! I am so grateful that America supports Israel. God has blessed America because America has blessed Israel.

Next, I want to point out the prophetic reference to the New Testament church in verse three. Keep in mind that this conversation between God and Abraham took place approximately 2,000 years before the birth of the Christian church. Look please at the last part of verse three: “. . . and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” And how would all the families of the earth be blessed through Abraham? That is not a hard question to answer. Out of Abraham would come the Jewish nation, including the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ. He would be born of a Jewish woman. He would pay for man’s sins by His death on the cross, and He would give eternal life to all who would believe. Some from all nations would believe. This is a clear reference to New Testament times and the New Testament church.

The charge to Abraham

Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.

—Gen. 12:1

God spoke to Abraham and told him to go and, to Abraham’s credit, he went! God charged Abraham to occupy the land and dwell in the land. In essence, God said, “Abraham, I am going to give you a new place to live. I’ve got plans for you. I’ll take care of you. Just go where I show you, and then abide in the land.”

The compromise of Abraham and his family

And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.

—Gen. 12:10

Abraham was supposed to “abide in the land.” He had obeyed God and moved from Ur to this unknown land, which would be called Israel, but then he left! Abraham was supposed to abide in the land. God ordered him there, but then when things got tough, Abraham left the place of God’s blessing. Yes, there was a famine in the land, but Abraham did not have to go down into Egypt. God would have taken care of him. When God calls, God will provide. Abraham did what most of us do today. We go ahead of God, don’t we? Abraham was looking for a fleshly answer, instead of waiting for an answer from God. Look at verse 10 again, “. . . and Abram went down into Egypt.” Egypt in Scripture is often a picture of a place of sin. The promised land is a picture of a believer being where God wants him or her to be. Being in the promised land = being in the will of God. Going down into Egypt = leaving the will of God, and living in sin.

The high cost of disobedience

There is always a high cost when we disobey God. Yes, Abraham finally left Egypt and came back to the promised land, but he brought back some of Egypt with him, and what a mistake that was.

Now Sarai Abram’s wife bare him no children: and she had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. And Sarai Abram’s wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. And Sarai said unto Abram, my wrong be upon thee; I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee. But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

—Gen. 16:1–6

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And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man, his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

—Gen. 16:11–12

Abraham had a son, Ishmael, by Hagar, the Egyptian woman. Through Ishmael came the greatest enemies Israel has today—the Arabs. The cost for leaving the promised land and going down into Egypt was very high. It would cause trouble in Abraham's life, Abraham's family, and Abraham's descendants—all of Israel! The so-called Palestinians are Arabs. The land that these "Palestinians" occupy today is not their land. God gave that land to the Jews through the Abrahamic covenant! Eventually, all of Abraham's descendants ended up in Egypt because they had turned away from the Lord.

How did this dispensation end? Slavery in Egypt. Friend, when Egypt starts looking good (the carnal life), remember how it ended up here—in slavery! Sin enslaves! Christ liberates! Stay out of Egypt! Abide in the land!