

Hymns: 11 How Great Thou Art 58 Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me 48 Jesus Loves Me
Psalm 102:11-12; 25-28

Has anyone besides me noticed the days getting shorter? The sun rises a bit later each day and sets a little earlier. The mornings and evenings also seem slightly cooler. Before long, fall will be here, then winter, then spring, and then **summer** again. **To live** is to experience change and to learn to deal with it.

Today, we're going to shift gears a bit and start a brand-new series of messages. The last time we met, we explored a **literary** term called *chiasm* referring to the letter “X” and saw how even a rather **arcane** grammatical construct can be very helpful in giving us insight into the text we're trying to understand.

Today's “50-cent word” (who remembers that idiom?) is a **theological** term. The word is *dispensationalism*. This term is used to specify a point of view of one segment of the vast spectrum of Christendom. We often ask the question whether or not a particular sect or denomination uses the dispensational approach to studying scripture.

You who have been with us for some time should have noticed the objective of our messages is to better understand the Bible and to apply that learning to our lives. In the process, we try to bring encouragement to you and a spirit of worship toward God. This study is consistent with that mission. We have a lot to cover, so let's get started.

One very good way for a logical mind to solve a problem is to divide it into manageable pieces and tackle them one at a time. An example may help here. As mentioned earlier, fall is coming. Do you remember the old booths at the State Fair where the guy has a blender, a set of knives, something to keep steam off of glass, or a cleaning product? The salesman always **works miracles** with the thing he's selling. You just **have to** have it.

I remember a device my parents bought called a Dial-O-Matic or something like that. It sliced, diced, chopped, and shredded – effortlessly. It had multiple blades and a dial to fine tune the thickness. While it worked, it never seemed to do as well as it did for that guy who was selling it.

Anyway, this term *dispensation* refers to a way of slicing and dicing the Bible. It breaks it up into manageable pieces, so we can deal with each one in a logical fashion. This is particularly interesting to me because I love to solve difficult problems. And what greater challenge do we face in this life than to know the height and depths of the Word of God and then live it?

I remember when I was nine years old trying to make sense out of the Bible. My parents had given me a KJV, and I tried to use it to work through a Youth for Christ workbook. King James English was daunting alone, but when you add the size of the book, and the seemingly contradictory sections in it, I was overwhelmed. My church was not the best either at making sense out of scripture. But thanks to the teaching of Billy Graham and Oliver B. Greene, and the direction of the Holy Spirit, I found my way to the truth.

When I was in high school, as I read through the Bible for the first time, I still struggled with the deep divide among various passages. Finally, I threw up my hands and decided to start with the teachings of the Apostle Paul – who was very logical and consistent and claimed to be the apostle to the Gentiles and for this age of grace – and let his doctrine rule when I found apparent contradictions.

That actually worked very well in keeping me from straying off base. Still, there's a whole lot more to the Bible than the Epistles of Paul. We're told *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable....* (II Timothy 3:16), and of course the Apostle Paul is the one who wrote that verse. I had my work cut out for me.

Now there's another fairly common use of the word *dispensation* in a religious context. We don't want to confuse the two. It relates to the Roman Catholic religion. There's a joke I found that employs that usage.

It's from *Beeton's Book of jokes and jests*. It must be fairly old. I'll blow the dust off of it. Here it is:

A **Gascon** [someone from a region in southwest France],
who was endowed with a sufficient amount of **curiosity and knowledge of art**,
making some stay in Rome,
examined **all the rarities** it contains,
and at length said one day to **the Pope, with whom he was acquainted**,
“There is only **one thing** now, which I have not seen in Rome – the death of a Pope.”

“Sir,” said the holy father, “if you have made a vow to **see that**
I will **willingly** grant you **dispensation**.”

That usage, often referred to as a “special dispensation from the Pope” refers to a rather rare exception to the laws of the Catholic Church granted by the Pope. As in the joke, it often involves a vow made or to be made and frequently is associated with a wedding vow. The most famous may have been associated with Henry VIII. This is **not** what we're talking about when we refer to a *dispensation* or *dispensationalism*.

Where did this idea of dispensations come from? The short answer is as we shall see, **it came from the Bible**. Various “church fathers” are credited with having some understanding of it. But the father of modern dispensationalism is considered to be one man in particular.

In 1827 a scholar, preacher, and member of the Plymouth Brethren church by the name of John Nelson Darby formulated the first system of dividing Bible history into eras. His ideas were expanded and included in the widely distributed work by Dr. C.I. Scofield of 1909 called the Scofield Bible. Later, others including Dr. L.S. Chafer (founder of Dallas Theological Seminary), and Doctors C. C. Ryrie and John Walvoord have also written and expanded on that work.

With that, let's get to the definition of *dispensations*. We will lean most heavily on the work of Dr. Scofield from his booklet “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth” and the reference notes in the *Scofield Bible*. as we proceed. Basically, these are “unequal periods” of time referred to in the Bible as *dispensations, ages, or days*.

Here's a direct quote from that booklet:

*These periods are marked off in Scripture by
some change in God's method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind,
In respect of the **two questions**:
of sin,*

and of man's responsibility.
Each of the dispensations may be regarded as
*a **new test** of the natural man,*
*and each **ends in judgment** – marking his*
***utter failure** in every dispensation.*

Dr. Scofield identified **seven** dispensations. Others found from three to eight or even more. We reserve the right to deviate from this as we move into this study, but to start things off, we will list the seven dispensations identified by Scofield. Can anyone help with some of these? You can give me the name, the central figure, the covenant, or – perhaps the most recognizable – the judgment.

Number	Name	Central Figure	Judgment	Covenant
1. Gen 1:28 1-3 1:1-3:7	Innocence	Adam	Curse and banishment from the garden of Eden	Eden, Gen 1:28
2. Gen 3:23 3-8:13 3:8-8:22	Conscience	Noah	Flood	Adamic Gen 3:15
3. Gen 8:20 9-11:9 9:-11:32	Human Government	Noah's offspring or perhaps Nimrod	Language scrambled	Noahic Gen 9:1
4. Gen 12:1 to Exodus 19	Promise	Abraham	Slavery in Egypt	Abram 12:1
5. Ex 19:8 Exodus 20 Acts 1 20:1- Acts 2:4	Law	Moses	Crucifixion of Jesus Christ	Law Ex 19:8
6. Jn 1:17 Acts 2 Rapture Acts 2:4 – Rev 20:3	Grace	Holy Spirit	Great Tribulation	Grace John 1:17
7. Eph 1:10 Millennium Rev 20:4-6	Kingdom	Christ	White Throne Judgment	Kingdom Eph 1:10
(8) Eternal Rev 20-22	Eternal	God		

We will cover each of these in future messages. This is just to get you oriented into how we will be looking at the Bible.

Other features associated with those who hold the dispensational view of Scripture are:

1. Historical-grammatical interpretation
2. Israel and the Church have distinctive and eternal roles in God's plans
3. Pre-tribulation rapture
4. Literal millennial reign of Christ

Other popular related views are:

1. Progressive dispensationalism – “already not yet” with respect to Christ’s reign on his throne
2. Covenant theology – where God's promises to Israel are referred to the Church

In contrast to the **literary** term *chiasm*, the term *dispensation* is a **biblical** one. The Greek word

oi-ko-no-mē'-ä

The word appears in scripture seven times:

- Three times in the book of Luke where it refers to a steward or administrator of a household.
- And four times in the writing of the Apostle Paul where he gives the word a **theological** meaning.

Let's quickly look at those usages by the Apostle Paul.

I Corinthians 9

*[16] For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for **necessity** is laid upon me; yea, **woe** is unto me, if I preach **not** the gospel!*

*[17] For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a **dispensation** of the gospel is committed unto me.*

He's referring here to the sixth dispensation – the age of grace.

Ephesians 1

*[10] That in the **dispensation** of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:*

This is believed to refer to the seventh dispensation – the millennial reign of Christ.

And then

Ephesians 3

[1] For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

*[2] If ye have heard of the **dispensation of the grace of God** which is **given me to youward**:*

*[3] How that by revelation he made known unto me **the mystery**;*

...

*[5] Which **in other ages** was **not made known** unto the sons of men, as it is **now revealed** unto his holy apostles and prophets **by the Spirit**;*

*[6] That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his **promise in Christ by the gospel**:*

*[7] Whereof **I was made a minister**, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

Again he's referring to the dispensation of grace which is this current age – also called the age of grace.

And finally (we won't read it):

[Colossians 1

[24] Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

*[25] Whereof I am made a minister, according to the **dispensation** of God which **is given** to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;*

*[26] Even the **mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest** to his saints:*

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This again is the age of grace. So there we have an overview **from scripture** of what a dispensation is. We will work our way through details of individual dispensations starting next time.

Application

Before we go, let's consider how we may apply this lesson to our own lives.

Betsy and I lived in Virginia just east of the Shenandoah mountains and north of Charlottesville for a few years. One time, we made a trip on the west side of the mountain. There, we toured an old house. It had quarters to house strangers who were traveling through. It was called the Heritage Museum and located in Dayton, Va.

In it there were a number of pictures, but one in particular was most memorable. It showed the various stages of life. The list put together here may not exactly match the picture, but it does convey the idea.

So here we go. Here are the ages, or dispensations if you will, of life:

1. newborn – lying in a crib and nursing
2. a baby – crawling
3. a toddler – first steps
4. a child – running
5. a teen – lean and still learning
6. a mature adult – fully developed and fully capable
7. aging adult – slowing down
8. elderly – needing assistance
9. final days – on a death bed

When we think about that list, it really captures much of life, but something is missing. What is it? Of course, death is not the end. We know this. We have eternity to look forward to, and for us **who** know the Lord, it's a joyous thought.

I Corinthians 2

*[9]...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which **God hath prepared** for them that love him.*

We **who** know the Lord have things to look forward to that we cannot even imagine.

Romans 8

*[37] ...we are **more than conquerors** through him that loved us.*

*[38] For I am persuaded, that neither **death**, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor **things present**, nor **things to come**,*

[39] Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are thankful that through faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ we can know we have eternal life.

Benediction

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,
according to the power that worketh in us,

Unto him be glory

in the church

by Christ Jesus

throughout all ages,

world without end. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21)

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