

Dispensations, Part 9

Housekeeping

The dictionary defines plague as a contagious bacterial disease marked by fever and delirium. It is typically accompanied by the formation of buboes (swollen or inflamed lymph nodes) and occasionally involves infection of the lungs.

The Hebrew word *maggephah* translated as “plague,” means blow, slaughter, plague, pestilence, strike, smite, and fatal stroke. It originates from the Hebrew root *nagaph*, which means to strike or smite.

All this considered, the term “plague” in the Old Testament is not restricted to our conventional understanding of sickness or disease. Instead, it generally signifies divine judgment—being “stricken” by God, which may encompass sickness or disease but is not limited to that.

Tree of Life — The Tree of Life is referenced in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:22, 24), where it symbolizes the perpetuation of physical life forever. Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat from the fruit of this tree. In Revelation 2:7, the saints are promised the “right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” It also appears in Revelation 22, but it is unclear from the context whether it is depicted as existing during the Millennium or in eternity after — likely the Millennium, but possibly both.

While the literal and symbolic aspects appear to be combined in this tree, there is no reason it couldn't also be an actual tree bearing literal fruit. The practical effect would be the continuation of physical life indefinitely. Although the verse does not explicitly state that the fruit can be eaten, this is presumably the implication.

The tree's **leaves are for the healing of the nations**. Some believe this statement refers to the millennial era when illness and healing will occur. The word “healing” (*therapeian*) can be interpreted as “health-giving.” The English term “therapeutic” is derived from this Greek word.

Book of Works — Revelation 20 mentions only the Book of Life by name.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

The dead who were not found in the Book of Life were judged by what was written in the unnamed book, “according to what they had done.” Works are the stated contents of this book; hence, it is called the “Book of Works.”

Levels of Hell — I do not subscribe to this view, and I believe that all the passages presented as supporting it are misinterpretations. A person ends up in the Lake of Fire for one reason only:

Revelation 20:15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Their names were not in the Book of Life **because they rejected the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ—period.** That alone seals their fate.

But a second book is opened, implying it is a book of recorded works (what they had done). Consider this as an appeal by the condemned after not being found in the Book of Life. “And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.” The term “done” is derived from the Greek word *ergon*, which refers to business, employment, and what anyone is occupied with. There is no implication that these works are particularly evil or sinful.

The general context of the passage suggests that the appeal to works is solely related to qualifying for entrance to Heaven. The use of the “Book of Works” is merely to demonstrate to those condemned that their human endeavors, no matter how “good,” do not meet God’s perfect standard. Works cannot save you.

The Millennium

The Panorama of the Millennium.

- The millennium is promised to Israel in the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:8-17; Psalm 89:20-37).
- The millennium is prophesied in Isaiah 2, 11, 12, 35, and 60- 65.
- The millennium is revealed during the first Advent of Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ outlined the conditions of the perfect environment that will exist during the millennium in the Sermon on the Mount.
- The millennium is delayed due to the rejection of Christ as the Son of David and the legitimate Messiah.
- The millennium is plagiarized by Satan's attempt to create a perfect environment on earth, not only during the Church Age but especially in the Tribulation.
- The millennium is proclaimed by angelic heralds in Revelation 10 and by human heralds in Revelation 11.
- The millennium is established by the Second Advent of Christ, as noted in Revelation 11:15-19 and Revelation 19.

General Characteristics of the Millennium that Provide Perfect Environment.

- Salvation continues to be offered to the new populations of the millennium. There is a significant population explosion, as noted in Ezekiel 20:34-38 and Matthew 25:31-46. Evangelism reaches its peak during this time. The millennium begins with believers only. Yet many of their children turn out to be unbelievers.
- Because Satan and demons are removed, there is no religion in the Millennium. Religion combines the functions of human good with evil.
- All unbelievers are removed from the earth with the judgments before the beginning of the Millennium, Jewish unbelievers Ezekiel 20:34-38. Gentile unbelievers Matthew 25:31-46.
- Jesus Christ will rule the earth, bringing universal peace (Psalm 46:9; Isa 2:4ff; Hosea 2:18; Micah 4:3) and universal prosperity (Psalm 72:7, 16).
- There will be universal knowledge of God, Isa 11:9; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:14, 10:15-17.
- There will be longevity in the human race (Isaiah 65:20). People will enjoy perfect health, allowing them to thrive in an ideal environment. The only reason people will die is capital punishment.
- There will be a perfect world government under the leadership of Christ, with administrative authority delegated to resurrected

believers to rule nations (Isaiah 11:1-2; Zechariah 14:9; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:25-28, 3:21, 5:10, 20:4,6).

- There will be a tremendous population explosion, so that by the end of the millennium, many unbelievers will exist on earth who have rejected the gospel and who will have joined the Gog revolution of Satan against the rule of Jesus Christ, despite the perfect objectivity in the administration of justice (Isaiah 11:3-4; Psalm 72:12-14).
- There will be a perfect environment in nature. Plant and animal life abound (Isaiah 35:1-7). Animals lose their ferocity (Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:25).
- All the unconditional covenants are fulfilled for Israel: Daniel 9:24; Zechariah 8:22-23, 14:9; Jeremiah 31:13-34; 2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 89:20-37; Numbers 31:1-12; Deuteronomy 30:1-9.
- The Levitical priesthood will be restored, Ezekiel 43:18-27.
- Satan is released from prison after one thousand years and immediately starts a revolution to overthrow our Lord's reign.
- The Gog revolution proves that perfect environment is not the solution to man's problem of the sin nature and spiritual death. Only those who are regenerate can appreciate perfect environment and the One who provides it. Regeneration is the only solution to man's problem.
- The universe is destroyed, and a new heaven and earth is created, 2 Peter 3:7-10.

Temple and Sacrifices

Ezekiel 40 to 48 describes the worship system and the Temple during the Millennium. There will be animal sacrifices, Isaiah 56:6-8; Jeremiah 33:15-18; Ezekiel 43:18-46:24. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were prospective, looking forward to Calvary. In contrast, the sacrifices in the millennial temple are retrospective, looking backward at the Cross. They are memorial in nature; as the Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to Christ's death, these serve as tangible expressions illustrating the value of His effective sacrifice once and for all.

The Lord's Table

The Lord's Table will be celebrated in the Millennium, 1 Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 26:29. It will celebrate what Christ did on the Cross for mankind.

Gog / Magog Revolution

Though bound and removed away from man for most of the Millennium, Satan will be released once more at the end of the 1,000 years "for a little while" and allowed to exert his influence once more, resulting in the "Gog and Magog Revolution" (Rev 20:7-10). Satan will lead a rebellion of all those who have been "faking it" and are not really believers. That rebellion will be put down by God.

Last Judgment

Then will come the final judgment of the "wicked" dead, which includes the lost from all human history. None of their names will be found in the Lamb's Book of Life. By refusing to accept the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ, they will be judged according to their works. Their works will not meet God's perfect standard of righteousness, and because of their decision to reject the grace of eternal life through faith in Christ (their names were not written in the Book of Life), they will be cast into the Lake of Fire alongside Satan.

New Heavens and New Earth

The old Heavens and Earth will be destroyed, and a new Heaven and a new Earth will be created (Rev 21:1-8), as born-again mankind in glorified form is taken into the Eternal Kingdom.

Israel envisioned only an eternal earthly Kingdom, and since this eternal Kingdom involves a new earth and new heavens, it is indeed "earthly," precisely as promised to Israel.

From the perspective of New Testament believers, eternity represents the "second part" of the Eternal Kingdom revealed to Israel. Furthermore, all that was lost due to one man's failure in the Garden will be fully restored to its rightful owner by the Son of Man.

Dispensations Review

The concept of dispensations holds that God has divided human history into identifiable periods, often referred to as "ages." These periods can be either lengthy or relatively brief, and their distinction lies not in their duration but in how God engages with humanity during each period.

“Dispensations” is a theological term that describes distinct periods in human history in terms of divine revelation.

The Greek word from which we derive "dispensations" is *oikonomia* (Ephesians 1:10; 3:2), which is the origin of the English word “economy.” In Greek, *oikonomia* refers to the management of a household or domestic affairs and is sometimes translated as stewardship, dispensation, or fullness of time. We should consider dispensations as periods characterized by specific traits that set them apart from other periods of time.

The dispensations represent the progressive and interconnected revelation of God's dealings with humanity. At times, this encompasses the entire human race, while at other times, it specifically pertains to certain groups, such as Israel or the Church. These different dispensations do not represent separate paths to salvation. In each instance, humanity is reconciled to God in only one way: by God's grace through the work of Christ on the Cross.

Dispensations should be understood as periods during which God interacts with humanity according to a specific set of rules applicable to that time. We can view this as an “administration.” There are seven such dispensations, and God uses them to progressively reveal His plan for mankind, with each succeeding dispensation’s truths building upon those that came before it.

Each dispensation follows the same pattern:

1. Each begins with a blessing for man that constitutes a test
2. Man will eventually fail that test
3. Each dispensation ends with judgment from God for that failure

Each dispensation is designed to teach man something about himself as well as about God and His plan for humanity.

Not everyone agrees on the number of dispensations; however, most sources list seven. In Scripture, the number seven symbolizes completeness or perfection, and dispensations outline God’s perfect plan for mankind.

Age of Innocence

The first dispensational period is the Age of Innocence in the Garden of Eden and is found in Genesis 1:28-31. It began with the creation of Adam and the woman and ended with their expulsion from the Garden.

Man was created perfect and innocent, placed in an ideal environment, subjected to one simple test of obedience, and warned of the consequences of disobedience. Although tempted by Satan, man made a free will choice to be disobedient. Under the perfect conditions of the Garden, with one simple rule to follow, man failed. The stewardship of innocence ended in judgment and expulsion from Eden (Gen 3:24).

Age of Conscience

The second dispensation is called the Age of Conscience or Moral Responsibility and began with the fall and ended with the Flood. This dispensation signifies a shift from theoretical to experiential knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:5-7, 22). Man "became as God" through a personal experience of the difference between good and evil; however, unlike God, he obtained this stewardship by doing wrong. God placed him under the stewardship of moral responsibility whereby he is held accountable to perform all known good, abstain from evil, and approach God through blood sacrifices instituted during this dispensation.

It began with a blessing outside the Garden and a renewed relationship with God, but man had to approach God through sacrificial offerings. The deterioration of man's conscience started with Cain murdering his brother Abel because God accepted Abel's blood sacrifice and rejected Cain's works offering. Cain failed to heed his conscience regarding both the sacrifice and the murder of his brother.

Cain was cursed, much like Satan and man in Genesis 3:15 and 17. He lost his farming livelihood and was labeled a "fugitive and vagabond."

Genesis 6 describes the further distortion of life under "conscience" as humans interbreed with angelic beings, leading to a rebellion by this confederacy of angels and humans. "The wickedness of man was great... and every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"

(Genesis 6:5). This provokes divine indignation (6:6-7) towards mankind, who become “corrupt and violent” (6:11).

Similar to what happened with Adam and Eve, a greater act of judgment occurs: the Noahic Flood, which destroyed all human life except for those aboard the ark (Genesis 6:17, 21-23). Just as the LORD provided Adam and Eve with coats of skin for protection, He also offered Noah protection, as he “found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8). Clearly, man’s conscience is inadequate to lead him to obedience and promote moral behavior. Humanity requires an external stimulus or aid to act morally.

The Age of Human Government

The third dispensation is the Age of Human Government, which began when Noah and his family left the ark and ended at the Tower of Babel. In the preceding dispensation, the restraint was internal; now, a new external restraint was introduced: the power of civil government.

Man was subjected to a new test. Although his direct responsibility to God continued (conscience), God delegated certain areas of His authority to man, in which he was to obey God through submission to his fellow man, establishing a corporate relationship among men through human government.

The divine institution of government was established to regulate human behavior. The test endowed with authority from God asks whether man will “govern” his predatory instincts and protect human life. Will this power be used wisely or merely to serve selfish interests? Instead, man has utilized government in an attempt to usurp God's divinity and become independent of Him through astrology.

We see that the goal of government is no longer to provide protection or justice but rather to foster self-empowerment and exert control. This manifests as one language, one speech, and one purpose, which leads to totalitarianism or universalism at the expense of human freedom (Genesis 11:6).

Divine retribution is seen in Genesis 11:7-9 in God’s division of languages and the scattering of mankind across the earth. The breakdown of

communication abruptly ended unified arrogance, leading to competing nationalisms that hinders efforts toward universalism (Revelation 13:3, 12, 14, 17).

However, humanity's responsibility for governance did not cease; it will continue until Christ establishes His Kingdom. At that time, government rule will ultimately be replaced by the glorious reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Age of Promise or the Age of the Patriarchs

The fourth dispensation is the Age of the Promise, sometimes referred to as the "Age of the Patriarchs." It began with the calling of Abram and lasted until the time of Moses and the giving of the Law. In the previous dispensation, human government failed to render justice to fellow humans. God, of course, knew this would fail and decided to elect one man through whom divine provision and justice would be accomplished.

Through the Abrahamic Covenant, a new species was created: the racial Jew, along with the responsibility to remain in a place of blessing, the land God showed to Abraham.

The conditional promises God made with Abraham depended on the obedience of the Israelites to remain in a place of blessing. This dispensation was designed to teach humanity that they must rely on God and the system of grace that God would provide for all their needs. The only condition required was that man must trust in the promises of God for deliverance.

Abram did not initially follow what God instructed him to do. Instead, contrary to God's explicit directions, he took his father with him and did not initially go to the land that God would show him. When God later promised him a son, but the son was not forthcoming, Abram and his wife Sarai took matters into their own hands, and Abram fathered a son through Sarai's slave, believing that would fulfill the promise. Eventually, Abram did trust God, and Sarai bore him his son Isaac.

Overall, Abraham's family struggled to trust God to meet their needs. The lesson here is to believe what God says and to follow His instructions precisely. This illustrates grace in its most fundamental form. Israel did not

succeed in the grace test, and as a result, they ended up in slavery in Egypt.

Age of the Law or Age of Israel

(Exodus 19:1) This fifth dispensation begins with the Giving of the Law and extends to the Day of Pentecost in AD 31, then skipping over the next dispensation, the Dispensation of the Church, and concluding during the Tribulation. In this dispensation, under the leadership of Moses, God led His chosen people out of bondage in Egypt to bring them to a place of blessing in the land promised to their forefathers.

In that process, Israel was placed under a new system known as the Mosaic Covenant or The Law, which was intended to guide their lives. The Law outlined how they were to relate to one another and to other nations, how they should behave morally, and how they were to relate to God. They were promised blessings for adhering to the Law and discipline for failing to do so.

Israel twisted the Law into a system of salvation by works, then rejected and killed their promised Messiah when He arrived. Consequently, the Age of the Law was interrupted, and the Messiah, along with the promised Kingdom, was offered to the Gentiles during the sixth dispensation, the Age of the Church. Israel faced discipline by being removed from their land and entering a lengthy period of dispersion before their ultimate discipline during the time known as the Tribulation.

The Church Age or Age of Grace

The Church Age, also known as the Age of Grace, is an intercalary period that interrupts the Age of the Law. It began at Pentecost in AD 31 after Christ was crucified and will continue until the Church, or Bride of Christ, is removed by the Rapture.

This dispensation is characterized by the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all believers, empowering them to live lives that honor God. Humanity's failure was to use free will to reject the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ, along with the power of the Holy Spirit that accompanies it. Discipline will follow the removal of all believers at the Rapture, which concludes the Age of Grace. The Age of the Law will then

resume for seven years, during which Israel and those lost from the Church Age and left behind in the Rapture will face their final discipline.

The Kingdom Age or Millennium

The seventh dispensation is the Kingdom Age. Israel viewed the Kingdom as eternal and earthly. The Church received further details and an understanding that it would last 1,000 years. Thus, it is also referred to as the Millennium, followed by eternity (Revelation 20). It will begin after the Second Advent and conclusion of the Tribulation.

During this dispensation, the earth will initially be populated by born-again survivors of the Tribulation, both Hebrew and Gentile, with Christ personally reigning on Earth. He will be assisted in His administration by resurrected Old Testament and Church Age saints. Those in human bodies will possess sin natures, and they will procreate and repopulate the Earth, passing down these sin natures. However, Satan will be locked in the abyss and unable to influence mankind. All temptation will arise from within man.

Though the Kingdom begins with a perfect environment like the Garden of Eden and Christ reigning, it ends with a "battle." Near the end, Satan will be released and lead a rebellion against Christ's reign. God will strike down the rebels, and Satan will be sent to the Lake of Fire.

With some final judgments, the Millennium ends, leading to the destruction of the old creation and the establishment of new heavens and a new earth, as all the redeemed enter eternity in glorified form.

Summary

We have witnessed how God has dedicated thousands of years to showing humanity that His way is the only way.

- Man failed in the perfect environment of the Garden
- The Age of Conscience demonstrated that human conscience cannot control man's sin nature and does not produce righteousness.
- The Age of Human Government demonstrates that government is not the solution either.
- The Age of Promise demonstrated that the failure of the promise of future blessings did not lead to obedience in man.

- The Age of Israel and the Law, along with its immediate blessings or discipline based on adherence to the Law, also failed to produce righteousness in mankind.
- The Church Age, characterized by God's gracious provisions for spiritual life, failed to produce righteousness in all men. However, it did produce righteousness in those few who trusted in God's grace, demonstrating that at least a temporary victory over sin was indeed possible for those who placed their trust in God's grace.
- The Church Age, in many ways, serves as a preview of the Kingdom Age, where God will, once and for all, demonstrate that righteousness is not only required but possible. However, even during the Kingdom Age, with the King reigning on Earth with a rod of iron, humanity will still resist the call to righteousness.