



## A BETTER WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

### Session 3

#### THE DISPENSATION OF GOVERNMENT

To be Dispensational means to read the Bible using the normal rules of grammar and the universally accepted meaning of words as expressed by the writer. In other words, unless the writer indicates otherwise, we take him at his word.

*“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”*

How is this possible? Only by studying. Studying the Bible takes work.

The apostle Paul makes it clear how we are to approach the Scriptures. In 2 Timothy 2:15 he writes,

*“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**”*

**The Seven Dispensations**

|                                      | Innocence   | Conscience                                  | Government                            | Promise                | Law                | Grace                  | Kingdom       |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Scripture</b>                     | Genesis 1-3   | Genesis 4-8                                 | Genesis 9-11                          | Genesis 12 - Exodus 18 | Exodus 19 - Acts 1 | Acts 1 - Revelation 19 | Revelation 20 |
| <b>Duration</b>                      | From the creation of Adam to his fall.                | From the fall of Adam to the flood of Noah. | From the flood to the call of Abraham |                        |                    |                        |               |
| <b>The Responsibility Before God</b> | Fill and steward the earth; do not eat from the tree. | Obey the dictates of conscience.            | Replenish the earth; rule righteously |                        |                    |                        |               |
| <b>The Judgment From God</b>         | Separation from God                                   | The flood                                   | Confusion of language                 |                        |                    |                        |               |

A dispensation is a period of time. What this means is that while God never changes, over the course of time, the way he relates to humanity has changed. Therefore, dispensationalism is the belief that God has related to people in the course of human history in unique ways. Each of these unique historical relationships between God and people is called a *dispensation*.

Today we turn our attention to Genesis, chapters 9-11 and the dispensation of Government.

### **Starting over**

The world and mankind started out in the garden in completely innocence. Yet, man made a choice to sin. That sin caused separation from God. God banished man from the garden and from the sweet fellowship that was enjoyed. Since there was no written Law, God allowed man to govern himself by the dictates of his conscience. Man, however did not listen to his conscience and continued to spiral into greater and more debased sin. Therefore God was "grieved" that he had made man.

The word "grieved" is translated "repented" in the King James, but the word probably more literally means "He was displeased." Of course God is God and He anticipated what happened. It didn't catch him off guard. So what we have here is a common figure of speech to help us as humans comprehend God's response to human sin—it underscores the utter depravity of the human race. We see that depravity growing greater today.

What did God do? He started over. God sent a world-wide flood that wiped all of mankind off the earth, except Noah and his family. Why did God save only eight people? Good question!

Despite the complete depravity of mankind, God waited patiently, for 120 years for people to believe and change their ways. That's how long it took Noah to build the Ark, and all the while he was building it he was preaching to the lost. (2 Peter 2:5).

The blame for refusing to believe by faith lies at the feet of those who make a choice to not believe. (Matthew 23:37).

### **The Old and New Plan**

Following the flood, God restated to Noah and his family the command He originally gave to Adam and Eve (Genesis 9:1). Therefore, the original responsibility given to humanity was still in effect, and nowhere in the Bible do we ever see it rescinded.

God also informed Noah (and everyone following him, including us):

1. They may now eat meat (Genesis 9:3).
  - a. The one prohibition is that such meat should not be eaten with "blood" meaning alive.(Genesis 9:4).
    - i. God's restriction was to instill a respect for the sacredness of all life.
2. The Lord specifically declares that anyone who takes another human's life shall forfeit his own (Genesis 9:5-6).
  - a. God gave this command because man is made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6).
    - i. Sanctity of human life is invoked as the basis for the ultimate punishment, known today as capital punishment. Capital punishment actually affirms human dignity.
    - ii. God does not say how the punishment is to be exacted, except to say that human beings collectively will be the agents of that punishment.

For this reason, this third dispensation is called the *dispensation of government*. It is generally agreed that the government is to be the agent of the punishment. Romans 13: 1-4 confirms this.

The government is God's minister. The apostle Peter states it the same as Paul in 1 Peter 2:13-14.

Therefore, human government is authorized to act in God's stead. When a human government fails in its mandate to act in the place of God, that government will suffer the consequences.

### **Human Sin Alive and Well After the Flood**

The reality of the ugliness of human sin is seen after the flood. What is surprising is that it appears first by righteous Noah! No sooner does Noah conclude one of the greatest physical, emotional and spiritual feats in human history than he gets drunk (Genesis 9:21).

There is also great moral failure on the part of his son Ham that leads Noah to prophesy about the moral failure of his descendants...beginning with Ham's son, Canaan, the forefather of the Canaanites (Genesis 9:25).

### **Government Dispensation Ends in Failure**

Like the first two dispensations which ended in utter failure, this one does too at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

What happened at the Tower of Babel?

- Humanity sought to defy God's mandate to "fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28) by joining together through one common language in order to "make a name for" themselves and "build...a tower whose top is in the heavens" (Genesis 11:4).
- There is an inner desire in mankind to achieve something, to be something. We can do that in two ways: either through obedience to God or in rebellion against Him.
- The sin was not so much in building a city, but the prideful, self-exalting way they went about it.
- God judged them and scattered them (Genesis 11:8-9).

God is anti one-world government. In the future the world is going to actually achieve that which this Genesis generation sought to do. There will be a one-world government on earth, promising to unite everyone religiously, and politically. This system will be wholly opposed to Christ and His followers, and will be headed up by the "Beast" that is, the anti-christ who is empowered by the "dragon" that is, Satan (Revelation 13:3-8).

### **Can Government Save Us?**

There are many who believe our world's problems can be solved politically or through a certain form of government (e.g. socialism/communism). Yet history shows that governments can only *restrain* evil

However, because God ordained government, it should be viewed as fundamentally a good institution. Godly Joseph and Daniel both served within secular government for pagan rulers. In fact, the Scriptures make it clear that God was the one who orchestrated their positions of service (Genesis 50:5-7;20; Daniel 1:9, 17-21, 6:1-3, 28). This doesn't mean their experience was always easy.

While we are not living in the dispensation of government today, the changes God instituted at the beginning of that dispensation are still in effect today. In fact, certain aspects of previous dispensations are sometimes carried over to succeeding dispensations.

See Romans 13:1-7, and Romans 2:15.