



A BETTER WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

Session 4

THE DISPENSATION OF PROMISE

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
Scripture	Genesis 1-3	Genesis 4-8	Genesis 9-11	Genesis 12 - Exodus 18	Exodus 19 - Acts 1	Acts 1 - Revelation 19	Revelation 20
Duration	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	From the call of Abraham to the giving of the Mosaic Law			
The Responsibility Before God	Fill and steward the earth; do not eat from the tree.	Obey the dictates of conscience.	Replenish the earth; rule righteously	Live in light of the promise			
The Judgment From God	Separation from God	The flood	Confusion of language	Egyptian slavery			

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 12 - Exodus 18 and the dispensation of Promise.

In each dispensation, God is allowing Mankind to have a chance at being righteous, but in each dispensation Man fails. This next dispensation is focused on building a righteous nation (the Jews) from one man, Abram (later Abraham).

Abraham: Was called by God while living in Ur in the Mesopotamian Valley in the southeast region of the modern nation of Iraq (Genesis 12:1; 15:7). How he was actually called the text does not say. Did he hear a voice? Or, did a prophet tell him? We don't know—all we know is God called and He didn't know where he was going (Hebrews 11:8). He left his country by faith and was led by God to the land of Canaan.



The dispensation of Promise takes its name from the fact that God made a number of magnificent promises to Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob. These men are typically referred to as the patriarchs (meaning the male head of a family or tribe).

The promises in this dispensation are commonly referred to as the **Abrahamic Covenant**.

What is the Abrahamic Covenant:

1. First pronounced by God in Genesis 12:1-3.
2. It is repeated and expanded upon several times in Genesis 13:14-17; 15:5-18; 17:1-22; 22:16-18.
3. This covenant provides the basis for understanding God's purposes for both the future nation of Israel as well as all mankind.
4. It is the foundation for all succeeding covenants God made with the nation of Israel.
5. Abraham and his posterity (future generations) are promised three things:
 - A. **First**, God promises Abraham a land for an everlasting possession (Genesis 17:8).
 - This land is what is referred to today as Israel (not Palestine).
 - The boundaries God promised to Abraham go much farther than the national boundaries of Israel both historically and presently (Genesis 15:18-21).
 - B. **Second**, Abraham was promised numerous offspring "as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore." (Genesis 22:17).
 - C. God's **third** promise to Abraham is that he and his posterity will have the privilege of being God's instrument of blessing for all nations (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).
 - The apostle Paul quotes this promise and says that before the gospel was given, God laid out beforehand the good news that Gentile nations would be blessed through Abraham. How are the non-Jewish nations blessed

through Abraham? When they put their faith in Jesus Christ and receive the blessing of justification by faith, but this will not be realized until all the nations are invited into the kingdom at the millennium.

The promises are literal:

Abraham's descendants literally inherited the land of promise under Joshua.

Numerous offspring, as well as kings and nations, literally descended from Abraham.

This implies that God will literally fulfill all the He promised. It also implies that the fulfillment of future covenants, based upon the Abrahamic Covenant, will also take place in a literal fashion.

Neither Abraham, his son Isaac, nor his grandson Jacob personally experienced the fulfillment of these promises. But they were enabled to see the from afar off (Hebrews 11:9, 13).

They were pilgrims just passing through. We are not citizens of this world, rather our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

Failure:

Abrahams, Isaac, and especially Esau and Jacob, as well as his great-grandsons, demonstrated multiple lapses of faith and obedience, which increased in severity as time when on. In fact, the last 400 years of this dispensation find the descendants of Abraham, now the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel, in bondage in Egypt (See Genesis 26:2-3). Man's ability to live righteously in his own world, even with the blessing of God, fails miserably by the third generation.

But...once again, God graciously intervened to reverse the fortunes of Israel and all mankind.

Man was not able to become righteous through, innocence, conscience, government, or the promise. Perhaps if God writes down a Law and mankind can read it for themselves? There must be a solution...maybe the Law will do it! We will see next time.

