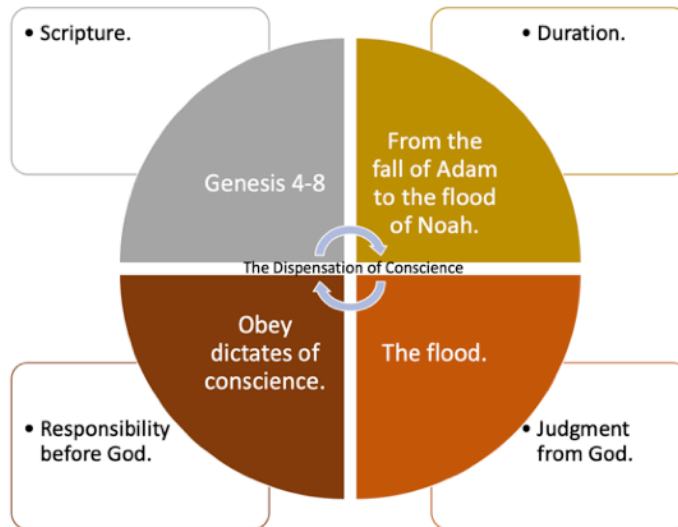


## Session 2

### THE DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE



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.**”*

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*.

In this Session, we turn our attention to Genesis, chapters 4-8 and the dispensation of Conscience.

#### **After the Garden**

Following their expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had many children (Genesis 5:4)

- Two of the children were Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-2).
- Apparently sometime between verse 2 and 3, God began to require regular offerings or sacrifices to Himself (Genesis 4:3-5).

### **The Result of the Offerings**

God accepted Abel's offering but did not accept Cain's. The literal the Hebrew reads, "God looked at Abel's offering, but didn't look at Cain's.

The real reason for God not respecting Cain's offering seems to be the heart (or attitude) with which Cain presented his offering (See Isaiah 1:12-17; Matthew 5:23-24)

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips;  
but their heart is far from me."  
Matthew 15:8

### **Two Kinds of Offerings**

Cain's offering was rather ordinary; he just brought "the fruit of the ground."

Abel's offering seemed to be his best; he brought the "firstborn of his flock and of their fat."

Thousands of years later Abel is commended for his faith in Hebrews 11:4.

### **The Response to God's Rejection**

"And Cain was very wroth." (Genesis 4:5)

God makes an appeal to Cain's conscience by giving him another opportunity to do the right thing but also warning him of the consequences of giving in to his sinful "desire" (Genesis 4:6-7).

For this reason, dispensationalists refer to this stage of human history as the DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE.

- It doesn't appear that God has given any written laws to Adam and his children.
- Therefore the people's relationship with God seems to have been governed by God on the basis of their conscience.
- The responsibility given to mankind in this dispensation is to live righteously before God on the basis of a God-given conscience.

Even today, people seem to intuitively agree about what is right and what is wrong. For example in most all cultures it is wrong to kill another human. In most all cultures it is wrong to steal. Where did this intuition of right and wrong come from? God has placed it in every human heart from the very beginning of human history. It is what sets us apart from the animal kingdom.

- Yet, Cain refused God's invitation to be reconciled.
  - This refusal to do right then led to Cain's murder of his brother, Abel (Genesis 4:8).

- God confronted Cain about his sin but this time pronounced judgment upon Cain (Genesis 4:10-12).
  - Cain knews he was guilty and didn't argue with God about the punishment, in fact he acknowledged that it is punishment (Genesis 4:13).
  - God, in his grace (undeserved favor), did not punish Cain with death, in fact he put some kind of mark on Cain to forbid others from taking his life and as a warning.
  - At least a this point in human history, capital punishment was not an option, but this would soon change.
- Cain's direct descendant Lamech appears to have followed in Cain's footsteps. First, Lamech has departed from God's plan of one man and one woman in marriage and boasts to his two wives a double murder he committed (Genesis 4:23-24).
- In Genesis chapter 6 we see Cain's act of violence comes to characterize the whole earth (Genesis 6:5, 11-13). God's mercy on Cain only served to multiply evil, rather than restrain it.

Our environment or our education will not determine whether or not we do what is right.

People are born with a depraved heart, and as a result, they corrupt every relationship and every action (Romans 1:28-32; 2:14-24)

Over time their consciences become "seared" (1 Timothy 4:2) with the result that they heartily approve of inherently sinful conduct (Romans 1:32).

Only the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit on the basis of Christ's shed blood can "cleanse your conscience" sufficiently in order to enable you "to serve the living God" (Hebrews 9:14).

It is in this dispensation and this account of Cain and Abel that we see the first salvo fired in the battle between the ungodly seed of the serpent and the godly Seed of the woman that the Lord had prophesied in Genesis 3:15

In Cain's succeeding generations, we see a steady downward spiral morally.

### **But There is More to Cain's Dismal Life**

Besides the increase in violence:

- Though God had condemned Cain to wander the earth (Genesis 4:12), Cain defied the Lord once again by settling in the land of Nod and then building a city.
- Instead of honoring God, Cain chose to honor his son by naming the city after him (Genesis 4:17).
- Banished from God presence, people decided to fill their lives with pursuit of the things of this earth (Genesis 4:20-22).
- Although they were very inventive, there is not one mention of the Lord in all their inventiveness.
- Like many today, they decided to enjoy the creation apart from the Creator.

This dispensation ends with the cataclysmic judgment of the flood of Noah (Genesis 7-8).

Clearly, mankind utterly failed the test to live in their lives before God on the basis of conscience.

**HOPE**

Once again God provides hope through the line of another son of Adam, Seth (Genesis 4:25-26). Eventually, one of Seth's descendants, Noah, finds "grace in the eyes of the Lord." (Genesis 6:8)

**This is the first use of the word "grace" in the Bible.**

Through Noah and his family, God once more provides hope for the future, and this hope results in the commencement of the next dispensation, the dispensation of government.