

Session 3

THE DISPENSATION OF GOVERNMENT

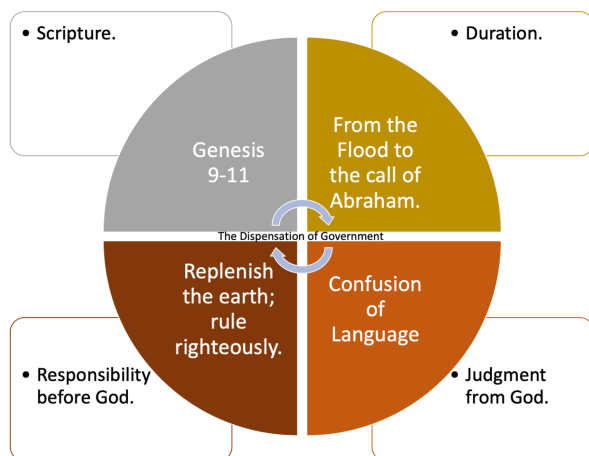
To be Dispensational means to read the Bible using the standard rules of grammar and the universally accepted meaning of words as expressed by the writer. Unless the writer indicates otherwise, we take him at his word.

“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, the way he relates to humanity has changed during various times. 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 in the garden in complete innocence. Yet, man chose 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 more significant and more debase sin. Therefore, God was *grieved* that he had made man.

The word “grieved” is translated “repented” in the KJV (Genesis 6:6), but the term literally means “He was displeased.” Of course, God is God; the depravity of man didn’t catch him off guard. What we have here is a typical 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 evil is still in our world today.

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

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

The Old and New Plan

Following the flood, God restated to Noah and his family the command He initially gave to Adam and Eve (Genesis 9:1). Therefore, the primary responsibility assigned to humanity was and is 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 expressly declared 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 affirms human dignity.
 - ii. God does not say how the penalty 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.

Romans 13 is a passage often cited by those who say we must obey the government, no matter what they tell us to do. After all, verse one says, “Let every soul be subject...” The word subject is *hupotasso*; it does not mean “to obey.” There is a word in the New Testament for “obey,” it is *hupakouo* as in “Children obey your parents” (Ephesians 6:1). Paul could have used that word in Romans 13:1, but he did not.

What does the word “subject” mean? There is debate, but in essence, it means to accept the consequences. In the U.S., we do not have “higher powers.” We elect representatives--the people are the “higher power.” We are a government of the people, by the people and for the people. Nevertheless, we have laws, and we need order; we want order in our society, but we

also have the right to disobey when we believe it goes against our God-given freedoms--For example, The right to worship together without government interference.

But, along with that right may come consequences for opposing the government. In Acts, the disciples were ordered not to preach in the "name" of Jesus. They were "put in the common prison" (Acts 5:18), but an angel let them out! What did they do when they got out? They disobeyed the order of the high priest and went right back into the temple and began preaching in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:25). The officers arrested the disciples again, and this time they were "beaten." (Acts 5:40). Nevertheless, they were released and went right back to the temple to "teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42).

Paul disobeyed local magistrates and Jewish leaders by continuing to preach the gospel, and yet he suffered for it.

Romans 13 is about "order" in society, not obedience. I am a law-abiding citizen, but that is not the meaning of the passage. We "ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29). With disobedience, there may be consequences that Christians must be "subject" to and must endure.

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 a significant moral failure on the part of his son Ham that leads Noah to prophesy about the moral collapse 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).

This dispensation proves to show us that man's Government cannot and will not save us ultimately.

God is *anti-one-world* Government. In the future, the world (During the Tribulation) is going actually to 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 the nation of Israel and will be headed up by the “Beast,” that is, the antichrist 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 particular form of Government (e.g., socialism/communism). Yet history shows that governments can only *restrain* evil, and some even *loose* harm on their people.

However, because God ordained Government, it should be viewed as fundamentally a good institution. Godly Joseph and Daniel both served within the 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 comfortable.

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.