

GOD'S GLORIOUS PLAN FOR THE AGES

1A. THE DEFINITION OF DISPENSATIONALISM

1b. The definition of "dispensation":

It would be difficult to improve on Ryrie's definition, "A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose" (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 29).

2b. The etymology of the word:

1c. *Dispensatio*, the Latin term

"To weigh or dispense"

2c. *Oikonomia*, the Greek term

Oikos = house; *Nomos* = law

The Greek term, *oikonomia*, thus means "the managing of a household"

3b. The usage of Scripture:

1c. The general usage:

1d. The usage of the word dispensation:

The various forms of the word *dispensation* are used in the New Testament twenty times. The verb *oiknomeo* is used once in Luke 16:2 where it is translated "to be a steward." The noun *oikonomos* is used ten times (Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3 8; Rom. 16:23; I Cor. 4:1, 2; Gal. 4:2; Titus 1:7; I Pet. 4:10), and in all instances it is translated "steward" except "chamberlain" in Romans 16:23. The noun *oikonomia* is used nine times (Luke 16:2, 3, 4). In these instances it is translated variously ("stewardship," "dispensation," "edifying"). The Authorized Version of Ephesians 3:9 has "fellowship" (*koinonia*) whereas the American Standard Version has "dispensation" (Ryrie, 25).

2d. The Lucan passage Luke 16:1ff

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a **steward**; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

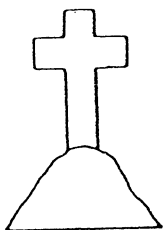
² And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy **stewardship**; for thou mayest be no longer **steward**.

³ Then the **steward** said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the **stewardship**: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

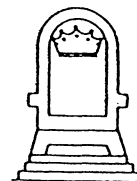
- 3d. The inference from the usage:
- 1e. A stewardship involves two parties.
 - 2e. A stewardship involves an obligation of one party to the other.
 - 3e. A stewardship involves accountability.

- 2c. The specific usage of the word dispensation:

Interestingly, the Bible uses the term dispensation exactly as we would use it in reference to three distinct dispensations.



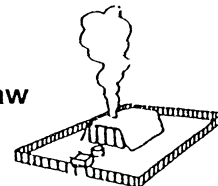
- 1d. Ephesians 1:10—“**Dispensation of the fullness of time**”
That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him:



- 2d. Ephesians 3:2—“**Dispensation of the grace of God**”
If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

- 3d. Colossians 1:25-26—“I am . . . a minister, according to the dispensation of God”
Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;
²⁶ Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:


Paul implies a prior dispensation, i.e., **the dispensation of law**



2A. THE DISTINCTIVES OF A DISPENSATION:

- 1b. The characteristics of a dispensation:
- 1c. Primary characteristics:
- 1d. God’s change in governmental relationship:
God initiates a new stewardship on earth.
 - 2d. A new responsibility for man:
Man receives new obligations as a steward.
 - 3d. God’s revelation to that end:
Before God can expect man to function under his new responsibility, added revelation is necessary.

2c. Secondary characteristics:

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- 1d. Divine test:
Each dispensation is a test to see whether man under whatever circumstances can please God.
 - 2d. Human failure:
Invariably man falls short of God's expectations.
 - 3d. Eventual judgment:
Each dispensation concludes with a divine judgment.
 - 4d. Divine Grace:
God's justice is tempered by His love and despite miserable human failure and inevitable judgment, God manifests His grace.

2b. The *sine qua non* of a dispensationalist:

1c. Negatively: A dispensationalist is not one who

- 1d. Uses the word "dispensation."
- 2d. Subscribes to a certain number of dispensations.
- 3d. Believes in a premillennial return of Christ.

2c. Positively: A dispensationalist is one who

- 1d. Consistently distinguishes Israel and the Church.

A dispensationalist sees two eternal purposes of God, expressed in His dealings with Israel and the Church. Israel is always Israel; the Church is the Church, not spiritual Israel.

- 2d. Uses literal hermeneutics:

Dispensationalism practices consistent literal interpretation of the Bible.

- 3d. Sees the underlying purpose of God as His glory.

God's overall purpose in the universe is to manifest His glory through salvation and other means. (This is Ryrie's *sine qua non*, opposed by the "progressive dispensationalists.")

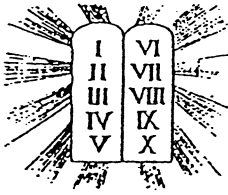
3b. The number of dispensations:

1c. The importance of the number:

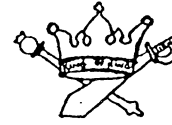
The number and names of dispensations are of relatively minor importance. It is possible to have between 3 to 8 dispensations. Covenant theologians only see the Old and the New dispensation.

2c. The inference from Scripture:

1d. The New Testament refers to three dispensations:



- 1e. The millennium: Eph. 1:10
- 2e. Grace: Eph. 3:2
- 3e. Law: Col. 1:25-26



These three dispensations, Law, Grace and Kingdom are the subject of extensive Scripture.

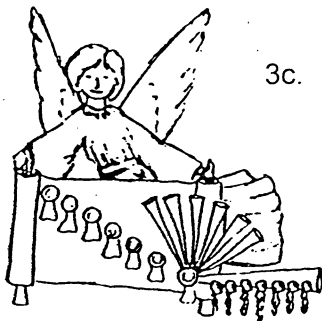
2d. The Old Testament implies five dispensations:

- 1e. A dispensation before the fall: Man's life under innocence.
- 2e. A dispensation after the fall: Man's life under conscience, offering sacrifices.
- 3e. A dispensation after the Flood:

In Gen. 9 four new features are found for man's stewardship:

- 1f. The fear of man upon animals, v. 2.
- 2f. The eating of meat, v. 3.
- 3f. Capital punishment, v. 6
- 4f. A promise of never causing another flood, vv. 8-17.
- 4e. A dispensation beginning with Abraham, involving a covenant of promise.
- 5e. A dispensation commencing at Mt. Sinai with the giving of the Mosaic Law.

3c. The inconclusiveness of some periods:



1d. Should the tribulation be a separate dispensation?

The tribulation is probably not a separate dispensation, but the climactic judgment concluding grace. The 70 weeks of Daniel began about 1,000 years after the law was given and are completed during the tribulation, but are not necessarily the same as the dispensation of the Law.

2d. Should the eternal state be a separate dispensation?

It seems that when temporal history ends, so do God's stewardship arrangements with men.