

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONS

In this set of notes we will be studying "DISPENSATIONS." This is a big word and we want to try to understand what it means. But before we take a look at the word itself, there is something that we must first understand.

### Recognizing Differences

God never changes. He is always the same. In Malachi 3:6 we read these important words spoken by God Himself: "I am the \_\_\_\_\_, I \_\_\_\_\_; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." We can always count on God being God. We never have to worry about God suddenly becoming different from what He is.

But this unchanging God has different ways of dealing with different men throughout the course of history. God deals with different men at different times in different ways! God did not deal with the Apostle Paul in the same way that He dealt with Abraham. God was merciful to both of these men and God saved both of these men and God will spend eternity with both of these men, but God did not deal with these two men in the same way. These two men lived at different times in history and they had different responsibilities and obligations before God. The same could be said about Noah and Solomon. God dealt differently with these two men. Noah's responsibility was to build an ark. Solomon lived hundreds of years later and his responsibility was to build a temple.

### Difference in the Amount of Truth Revealed

Throughout the thousands of years of human history God has been revealing His truth to men. We must understand that God reveals His truth to men gradually and not all at once. God revealed certain things to Adam, but there were many things that God did not reveal to him. Later God revealed even more things to Abraham. Later in history God revealed even more things to Moses and to David. When Jesus walked this earth He revealed certain things to His disciples which had never been revealed to Old Testament believers:

"For verily I say unto you, that many \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to \_\_\_\_\_ those things which ye hear, and have \_\_\_\_\_ heard them." (Matthew 13:17)

But even these disciples were not given all of the truth. There were many things that Jesus did not tell them because they were not ready to hear them:

"I have yet \_\_\_\_\_ things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12)

Later after the death and resurrection of Christ God revealed even more things to the Apostle Paul (see Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3-5). Finally after Paul and the other apostles had died, God revealed even more of His truth to the Apostle John, the man who penned the book of Revelation (Revelation 1:1-3,9-12,etc.).

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God uses the same kind of method with individuals as well. When you were saved, did God suddenly teach you everything that you need to know? \_\_\_\_\_ Does God reveal His truth to believers all at once or does He reveal His truth to believers gradually? \_\_\_\_\_ God gives "baby" Christians "milk" and He wants to give more mature Christians "meat" (1 Peter 2:2; 1 Corinthians 3:1-2). If God were to give us all of His deep truths when we first get saved, we would never be able to "digest" it all! We would not be ready for it! [It would be like serving steak and potatoes to a newborn!] A first grader is not ready to do geometry! Geometry, algebra, calculus, etc. will come at a later stage and at an older age, but the young student must first learn to add and subtract!

**What Bible Do You Have?**

God has revealed Himself in a Book which we call THE BIBLE. Did you know that the Bible did not come all at once? Did you know that Noah never had a Bible? Did you know that when the Church first began (on the day of Pentecost, Acts chapter 2), the believers did not have any of the books of the New Testament?

God has been revealing His truth progressively and gradually through the centuries. He did not give man the Bible all at once. Let's think about some of the famous and godly men of history and let's ask them what kind of Bible they had:

Adam:	"I had no Bible at all, but I walked with God in the cool of the garden."
Abraham:	"I had no Bible at all, but at different times God would appear to me and speak to me" (see Genesis 17:1; 18:1; etc.)
Moses:	"My Bible contained 5 books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy"
David:	"My Bible contained the same 5 books that Moses had as well as Joshua and Judges and many of the Psalms which I wrote, etc."
Ezra:	"My Bible contained most of the Old Testament books but not all of them"
John the Baptist:	"My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books but none of the New Testament books"
Paul:	"My Bible contained the Old Testament books and most of the New Testament books but not all of them"
John:	"My Bible contained all of the Old Testament books and all of the New Testament books. Shortly before I died God used me to write the last New Testament book."
(write your own name)	"My Bible contains all of the Old and New Testament books – _____ books (how many?) in all!"

The Bible you have in your hands is much thicker than the Bible that David had!

### Some Obvious Differences

Throughout history God has been merciful and gracious to man and He has made it possible for men and women to have a wonderful, personal relationship with Himself. Throughout the centuries God has been saving people "by G\_\_\_\_\_ through faith" (see Ephesians 2:8). Was Abraham saved this way (Genesis 15:6)? \_\_\_\_\_ This is how Abraham was saved (Romans 4:3); this is how David was saved (Romans 4:6); and this is how we are saved also (Romans 4:5)! Those who are eternally saved (whether Noah, Isaiah or Peter) will all be able to say the same thing: "I AM SAVED ONLY BY THE GRACE OF GOD (God's kindness and love to me which I did not even deserve). THANK YOU LORD FOR SAVING MY SOUL!"

Throughout the years of history this GRACIOUS GOD has been saving SINFUL MEN, but we must remember that God deals with different men at different times in different ways. We need to carefully think about some of these differences.

Consider this: When you came to church, did you bring a lamb with you? \_\_\_\_\_ Have you ever brought a lamb to be offered as a sacrifice for sin? \_\_\_\_\_ Did Old Testament believers do this (1 Samuel 7:9; Leviticus 3:7; 4:32)? \_\_\_\_\_ Do believers living today still offer animal sacrifices? \_\_\_\_\_ Moses and Joshua and David and Solomon offered animal sacrifices but we no longer do this today. This is an important difference.

Here is something else to think about: What do we do today if we find someone working on Saturday (the seventh day of the week)? Do we put this person to death? \_\_\_\_\_ Was there once a law which said that those who work on Saturday must be put to death (Exodus 35:2)? \_\_\_\_\_ Compare also Numbers 15:32-36 where we learn that a man was actually put to death for "gathering sticks" (violating the Sabbath law) on Saturday! Certainly we do not do this today, do we?

Today when we want to worship God do we go to a TEMPLE in Jerusalem? \_\_\_\_\_ The Jews in the Old Testament were told to worship God in this way. In Bible believing churches today you will find Pastors and Elders and Deacons, but will you find a special group of men called PRIESTS? \_\_\_\_\_ In Old Testament times the sons of Aaron were PRIESTS and no one else could be a priest. Today *every believer* is a PRIEST (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6), which means that we can come directly to God through Christ and we do not need to go through any other man. Today parents are not required to circumcise their baby boys. Parents can choose to have this done or not to have this done. In Old Testament times did Jewish parents have a choice or was it required (Genesis 17:10-14)?

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Long ago Adam was told that there was one fruit tree that he was not to eat from (Genesis 2:16-17). Is this true today? Is there a fruit tree today that people are commanded not to eat from? \_\_\_\_\_ Is there a "forbidden tree" in the world today? \_\_\_\_\_ Did God deal with Adam in the same way that He deals with us today? \_\_\_\_\_

Think about this: Did Abraham assemble together with other believers every Sunday? \_\_\_\_\_ Did David ever baptize people in water? \_\_\_\_\_ Did Moses ever gather all of the children of Israel together so that they could have a Communion service? \_\_\_\_\_ Was Solomon ever told to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (compare Mark 16:15)? \_\_\_\_\_ These are obvious differences that we need to recognize. God did not require the same thing from these men as He does from us and God does not require the same thing from us as He did from these men. God deals with different men in different ways at different times.

Here is another difference: Read Matthew 10:5-7. Who did Jesus tell His disciples to preach to? \_\_\_\_\_ Who did Jesus tell His disciples *not* to preach to? \_\_\_\_\_ Now read Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15. Who did Jesus tell His disciples to preach to? \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus told these men different things at different times and as we read the Bible we need to learn to recognize these differences.

## Differences Before and After

As we read and study the Bible we soon learn that there are certain key events which took place that made a big difference! These events brought about some amazing changes and differences. Some of the major events of the Bible are these:

- The fall of man (when Adam sinned)
- The flood in the days of Noah
- The judgment of the tower of Babel
- The call of Abraham (Genesis 12)
- The giving of the law (Exodus 19-20)
- The crucifixion of Christ
- The coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2)
- The coming of Jesus Christ to the earth (His second coming)

Let us briefly consider some of these events and think about the difference that they made:

First, let us consider the fall of man:

### THE FALL

<b>Before the Fall</b>	<b>After the Fall</b>	+
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Can you think of how things were different before the fall and how things changed after the fall? Is there a difference between Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:7? \_\_\_\_\_ Is the FALL OF MAN an event which affects people even today (Romans 5:12)? \_\_\_\_\_

### THE FLOOD

<b>Before the Flood</b>	<b>After the Flood</b>	+
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Before the Flood, what was man's diet to consist of (Gen. 1:29)?

\_\_\_\_\_ After the Flood, what was man's diet to consist of (Gen. 9:2-3)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 Before the Flood, were murderers put to death by capital punishment (Gen. 4:15)? \_\_\_\_\_  
 After the Flood, were murderers to be put to death by capital punishment (Gen. 9:6)? \_\_\_\_\_

**THE TOWER OF BABEL**

<b>Before Babel</b>	<b>After Babel</b>	<b>†</b>
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Before the Babel judgment, how many languages were there on the earth (Gen. 11:1)?

\_\_\_\_\_ After this judgment, how many languages were there (Gen. 11:7-9)?

\_\_\_\_\_ Before Babel the peoples of the world were together in one place; after Babel the peoples of the world were divided into nations in many places (see Genesis 10, the table of nations, which chronologically follows Genesis 11).

**ABRAHAM**

<b>Before Abraham</b>	<b>After Abraham</b>	<b>†</b>
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Prior to Abraham there was only one group of people in the world, commonly referred to as "GENTILES." After Abraham there were two groups of people in the world, JEWS AND GENTILES. Before Abraham circumcision was never commanded by God to be a sign for anything, but in Abraham's time and after it was (Romans 4:9-12).

**MOSES**

<b>Before Moses</b>	<b>After Moses</b>	<b>†</b>
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Prior to Moses there were no written commandments, but after Moses received the law from God then there were written commandments. Prior to Moses there was no Sabbath observance. Such was instituted during the days of Moses. Prior to Moses there were no detailed dietary laws (Leviticus 11), but such laws were incorporated in the law which God gave to Moses and to the children of Israel.

## INTRODUCTION TO DISPENSATIONS

## THE CROSS OF CHRIST

**Before the Cross**
+
**After the Cross**

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We have already mentioned some of these differences. As we move from before the cross to after the cross we notice these changes: from the Sabbath to Sunday, from animal sacrifices to the perfect sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:1-14), from the sons of Aaron as priests to every believer being a priest, etc. Before the cross, under the law of Moses there were dietary regulations (Leviticus 11--things they could eat and things they were told not to eat). After the cross, notice the difference in 1 Timothy 4:3-5. Can you think of other changes or differences?

## PENTECOST

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**Before Pentecost**
**After Pentecost**

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Before Pentecost the Holy Spirit was W\_\_\_\_\_ the disciples but after Pentecost the Holy Spirit was I\_\_\_\_\_ the disciples (see John 14:17). Before Pentecost there were two groups of people in the world (Jews and Gentiles). After Pentecost there were three groups of people in the world (Jews, Gentiles and God's Church--see 1 Corinthians 10:32). After Pentecost there was a unique organism on earth---the CHURCH which is Christ's BODY, but prior to Pentecost this was not the case [see our study, When Did The Church Begin?].

**THE RAPTURE ("CATCHING UP OF TRUE BELIEVERS")**  
**JOHN 14:1-3; 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18**

+
**(Church Age)**
**(Tribulation Period)**  
**Before the Rapture**
**After the Rapture**

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Before the rapture there are three groups of people in the world: J\_\_\_\_\_, Gentiles and the \_\_\_\_\_ of God (1 Cor. 10:32). After the rapture there are only two groups in the world (Jews and Gentiles). Before the rapture the Holy Spirit is dwelling in a unique TEMPLE (1 Cor. 3:16-17; and compare 1 Cor. 6:19-20). After the rapture the Holy Spirit is still active in the world but He no longer indwells this TEMPLE. The next temple we read of is a temple of God located in Jerusalem (2 Thess. 2:4) which is a temple not consisting of believers but consisting of a literal building.

**SECOND COMING OF CHRIST**

	<p><b>The World As We Know it Today</b></p>	<p><b>The World As It Will Be in the Kingdom</b></p>
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Jesus spoke about a day when the KINGDOM would come (Matthew 6:10), but this kingdom has not yet come. We are not living in the kingdom age yet! But when this kingdom does come (ushered in by the second coming of Christ), then the world will be very different than it is today. The careful Bible student will recognize these differences.

For example, consider the animals that will live in the kingdom (see Isaiah 11:6-9). Will the animals living then behave differently than the animals living today? \_\_\_\_\_ In the world as we know it today there are WARS and fighting among men (compare Matthew 24:6-7). Will things be different in the kingdom age (Micah 4:3)? \_\_\_\_\_ Today we need to spread the gospel and tell people about the Lord so that they will come to know Him (Mark 16:15; etc.). Will this be necessary in the Kingdom Age (Jeremiah 31:34 and Isaiah 11:9)? \_\_\_\_\_ These are important differences and we need to learn to recognize them!

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A dispensationalist is a person who believes the Bible [that God means what He says and says what He means] and who has learned to recognize these important differences that are found throughout history. Now we are ready to think again of this word "DISPENSATION" and find out what it means!

**The Word "DISPENSATION"**

This word is found 4 times in the New Testament. Look up the following chapters and find the verse where the word "dispensation" is found:

1. Ephesians Chapter 1, Verse \_\_\_\_\_
2. Ephesians Chapter 3, Verse \_\_\_\_\_
3. 1 Corinthians Chapter 9, Verse \_\_\_\_\_
4. Colossians Chapter 1, Verse \_\_\_\_\_

The Greek word for "DISPENSATION" is the word *oikonomia* (compare the English word "ECONOMY"). This Greek word is actually made up of two words: 1. *oikos*=house 2. *nomos*=law. Thus the word means, "the law of the house, house-law." Think about the family in which you live. Are there any "laws of the house"? Are there any "house rules" for you to follow? Has the "head of the house" given you any responsibilities or obligations to fulfill? Do you get into trouble if you "break the rules"?

This same Greek word is translated by the word STEWARDSHIP in Luke 16:2,3,4. Therefore, if we are to learn what a dispensation is then we must learn something about STEWARDSHIP!

## Stewardship

What is a STEWARD? A steward is a "household manager." He is one who looks after the goods and property of another. He is one who takes care of that which belongs to another. Most of us do not need stewards because we are not rich enough! We can take care of the few things we have by ourselves! But if a man has 10 houses, 8 boats, 2000 acres of land, 500 head of cattle, 3 swimming pools, 25 cars, 8 trucks and one oil field, then certainly he would not be able to take care of all of these things by himself. He would need men to help him to manage all of these things. A steward is a MANAGER – one who is responsible to take care of those things that belong to someone else.

There is one essential requirement for a STEWARD. He must be . . . (see 1 Corinthians 4:2 and circle the correct answer)

- a. good looking
- b. a brilliant thinker
- c. very talented
- d. faithful (takes care of the responsibilities that have been given to him)

Consider the steward described in Luke 16:1-4. Was this man a faithful or unfaithful steward?

\_\_\_\_\_ We learn about a faithful steward in Genesis chapter 39. Read Genesis 39:1-6. Who was Potiphar's steward? \_\_\_\_\_ All that Potiphar had was put into this man's H \_\_\_\_\_ (Genesis 39:4,6). Joseph took care of everything that belonged to his master and his master (Potiphar) knew that his house and his possessions were "in good hands."

Remember, a steward is the MANAGER of the house but he is not the OWNER of the house. Who was the MANAGER of the house – Potiphar or Joseph? \_\_\_\_\_ Who was the OWNER of the house – Potiphar or Joseph? \_\_\_\_\_ It was Potiphar's house! It did not belong to Joseph! In Luke 16:1, who was the OWNER of the house?

## Privileges and Responsibilities

Joseph had the responsibility and privilege of handling whatever Potiphar put into his hand or into his care. So it is with man's stewardship before God. The believer, in whatever age he lives, has the responsibility and privilege of handling whatever God has put into his hand. God put into Abraham's hand some great and wonderful promises (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:1-8). God put into Moses' hand a set of holy laws and commandments (Exodus 19-21). God put into Paul's hand a new understanding of the matchless grace of God (Ephesians chapter 3). Each believer has the joy and duty of handling whatever God has put into his hand. This is what stewardship is all about.

Stewardship may be compared to a person who has been given a job. Suppose the owner of a very nice store in town were to come to you and offer you a job in this place of business. This is a job which has not been given to everyone but it has been given to you.

This job carries with it *certain privileges*. There are probably many who would like to have this kind of a job, but it has not been given to them. It has been given to you. You are the one who receives the benefits that come from working in this store. You will learn many things, you will gain valuable experience, you will profit from working with other people, you will receive hourly wages and someday if you are faithful you may even get promoted!



This job carries with it *certain responsibilities*. The owner of the store is going to expect certain things out of you. If you are lazy and often late to work and if you are rude to the customers, do you think your boss will be very happy? The owner of the store will expect you to faithfully carry out your duties and to handle rightly whatever has been placed in your hands. If you handle the job well you will be rewarded. If you fail to handle the job well, you may even be fired.

Stewardship means that God has put something into man's hand, and it is *man's responsibility* and *privilege* to handle it in the right way.

### What is a Dispensation?

Let us now come back to the word we are trying to understand. The word "DISPENSATION" means the same as the word "STEWARDSHIP." A DISPENSATION is a stewardship and this stewardship involves three things:

#### 1. THE LORD OF THE HOUSE

If there is a stewardship then there must be a LORD or OWNER of the house! There must be One who lays down the "laws of the house." There must be One who sets forth the obligations and responsibilities and privileges. As we read the Bible we discover that the LORD OF THE HOUSE is the LIVING GOD (compare Hebrews 3:4). He is the MOST HIGH GOD, the LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH (Genesis 14:19, 22). God is the OWNER and He is the BOSS!

#### 2. THE HOUSE

Not only must there be a Lord or an Owner, but there also must be a domain over which the Lord executes His rule and shows His authority. God's house is the WORLD: "The earth is the \_\_\_\_\_ and the fullness thereof; the \_\_\_\_\_, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1 and see also Exodus 9:29 and Genesis 18:25). The world belongs to Him and He rules over it and He governs it according to His will and according to His wisdom.

#### 3. THE STEWARD

There must be a Lord (Owner) and there must be a House and there must also be a steward. The steward is the one who has been made responsible. He is to be faithful and obedient to the known will of the Lord of the house. The steward is assigned certain duties or directed to be in charge over certain things or responsible to do certain things (compare Acts 17:30 and 1 John 3:23 where we see that all men today have a responsibility before God). The steward must follow the "house rules" that the Lord has given him. If the steward fails to follow these "house rules" then he will be in trouble. MANKIND is God's steward (see Titus 1:7; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and 1 Peter 4:10).

Let us summarize these three points:

The Lord of the house is THE LIVING GOD.  
 The house is THE WORLD.  
 The steward of the house is MANKIND.

### **Not Just One Dispensation**

God has ruled His house in different ways at different times. This means that God's HOUSE RULES have not always been the same. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and the Apostle Paul all lived in the same world under the same God but they all lived under DIFFERENT HOUSE RULES. The house rules that Abraham lived under were not the same house rules that Peter lived under. If there have been different HOUSE RULES then this means that there have been different DISPENSATIONS.

We should be careful to note that a dispensation is more than just "HOUSE RULES." In every dispensation God has given to man not just rules but also a certain amount of TRUTH which man is to believe and obey and handle in the right way. Along with the rules and laws there are also privileges and opportunities and responsibilities that are involved because God has put His truth into man's hand.

Also, when we talk about "different house rules" we do not mean that in every dispensation there is a completely different set of rules and responsibilities and privileges. Some of the rules and privileges remain the same, but some change.

Consider the following illustration: Mr. Jones is a father who has 3 different sets of "house rules and privileges." This is because he has three different boys, each of a different age. This father has put more into the hand of his oldest boy because he is better able to handle it. The older son has more privileges but he also has more responsibilities. Here are the three sets of "house rules and privileges":

This illustration involves the *same Father* who has *different sons born at different times*:

#### **For 10 year old boy**

- He must not disobey his parents.
- He must honor and respect his parents.
- He must not lie, steal, etc.
- He may stay up until 8:30p.m.
- He is given a small weekly allowance (money).
- He has some homework rules. He does not have the privilege of driving a car.
- ETC.

#### **For 15 year old boy**

- He must not disobey his parents.
- He must honor and respect his parents.
- He must not lie, steal, etc.
- He may stay up until 10:00 p.m.
- He is given a larger weekly allowance.
- He is given more rules about homework.
- He does not have the privilege of driving a car.
- ETC.

### For 20 year old boy

- He must not disobey his parents.
- He must honor and respect his parents.
- He must not lie, steal, etc.
- He has a different bedtime rule.
- He is not given any allowance -- he must earn his own money by working.
- He has no homework rules because he is no longer in school.
- He has the privilege and responsibility of driving a car.
- ETC.

Do you see some things that are the same for all three of these boys? Why is this so? Do you see some things that change as a person gets older? Why is this so?

The same is true with the different dispensations. Just as we considered the same father (Mr. Jones) with different Sons born at different times, so we have *the same God* but different believers born at different times. There are some rules and privileges which remain the same and there are some rules and privileges that are new or different. Consider these three men who were born at different times and who all lived during different dispensations:

#### *Noah (after the flood)*

- He had the privilege and responsibility of believing what God had said.
- He had the privilege of walking with God (Gen. 6:9).
- He had the responsibility of obeying God (compare Heb. 11:7).
- The murderer should be put to death (Genesis 9:6).
- Animals should be sacrificed to God (Genesis 8:20).
- God did *not* tell him to keep the Sabbath or to circumcise male children or to baptize believers in water.

#### *David (under the law of Moses)*

- He had the privilege and responsibility of believing what God had said (and he knew more about what God said than Noah did).
- He had the privilege of walking with God.
- He had the responsibility of obeying God (Deut. 8:1).
- The murderer should be put to death (Exodus 21:12).
- Animals should be sacrificed to God (Leviticus 1-5).
- God told him to keep the Sabbath and to circumcise male children (Deut. 5:12-14 and Leviticus 12:3).
- God did not tell him to baptize believers in water.

*Paul (a New Testament believer under grace)*

- He had the privilege and responsibility of believing what God had said (and he knew more about what God said than Noah or David).
- He had the privilege of walking with God.
- He had the responsibility of obeying God (1 John 2:3-5).
- The murderer should be put to death (Romans 13:1-4).
- Animal sacrifices are no longer necessary (Hebrews 10).
- God did not tell him to keep the Sabbath or circumcise male children.
- God did tell him to baptize believers in water (Matthew 28:19-20).

Do you see certain things that remain the same for each of these men? Why is this so? Do you see certain things that change or are different? Why is this so?

When one enters into a new dispensation or stewardship, this does not mean that all of the rules and conditions change. Some things remain *the same*. For example, in every dispensation it has been wrong to lie and murder and steal. Also in every dispensation it has been right to believe what God has said (see Hebrews chapter 11). There are certain things that the different dispensations *share in common*. But as we have seen in this chapter, there are also important differences that must be recognized. We need to pay close attention to the things that are *different* and the things that *have changed*.

Here is another illustration that may help. What if you lived 200 years ago? Would you have a TV? a car? electricity? Conditions were very different in those days. Instead of washing the car you might need to take care of the horse! Instead of washing clothes in a washing machine, you would use a hand scrub board, soap and water, etc. On cold winter days you might have to go out and bring in some logs instead of simply turning up the thermostat (although many heat with wood even today). Your responsibilities would be different if you lived then instead of today. Some things would remain the same. You would need to eat then just as people need to eat today. Etc.

The same would be true if you were to live 100 years from now (if the Lord has not come by then). Conditions would be very different. Instead of cars there might be some other means of transportation. It's hard to imagine what kind of computers they would have then! Some things would remain the same but many things would be different.

Joshua, David and Isaiah all lived under the SAME SET OF HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES. This means that they all lived during the same dispensation. The house rules and privileges that belonged to them were spelled out in the law of Moses. Peter, Paul, John and Timothy all lived under the same HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES. The house rules and privileges that belonged to these men are found in the New Testament letters (from Romans to Revelation chapters 1-3). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph all lived under the same set of HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES and thus these men lived during the same dispensation. These men were responsible to believe the promises that God had given to them.

**“Distinguish the ages and the Scriptures agree”**

**—Augustine**

**The Different Dispensations**

*Consider the seven dispensations:*

↑    ↑    ↑  
*ETERNITY PAST*

(1) INNOCENCE (Adam)	Innocence ends with man's fall into sin.
(2) CONSCIENCE (Enoch)	In future dispensations, men continue to live under conscience.
(3) HUMAN GOVERNMENT (Noah, after the flood)	In future dispensations, men continue to live under human government (until the kingdom age when men will live under God's direct and absolute rule)..
(4) PROMISE (Abraham)	In future dispensations, the promise is not put aside nor is it annulled (see Galatians 3).
(5) LAW (David, John the Baptist)	The law is temporary, "until the Seed should come" (Gal. 3:19). The dispensation of law ended at Calvary's cross.
(6) GRACE (Paul)	While the grace of God was evident in other ages, it receives its fullest manifestation and demonstration during this present age (Ephesians 2-3).
(7) KINGDOM	The rule of God has been operative throughout all dispensations, but supremely manifested when Christ Himself rules over the nations from the throne of David in Jerusalem. God's rule will continue in the eternal state.

*ETERNITY FUTURE: THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH (THE ETERNAL STATE)*  
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In the above chart, under the name of each dispensation is also given the name of a man who lived during this time (except for the KINGDOM dispensation which is yet future).

Each dispensation is a period in which God had different HOUSE RULES AND PRIVILEGES and men were given different responsibilities according to the light and truth which God had given to them. In each new dispensation God gives more truth and more light than was given in the previous dispensation. Thus throughout history there is a PROGRESS OF REVELATION (God's truth is gradually and progressively revealed to man).

Each of these dispensations will be studied in detail in later chapters (beginning with Chapter 3). At that time some of the statements made in the above chart will be further explained and clarified.

### **Four Things To Look For**

When we study each of these dispensations we will be looking for four things:

#### **1. MAN'S STATE AT THE BEGINNING.**

What were things like at the beginning of the dispensation? What was man responsible to do? What did God reveal to man? What truth did God put into man's hand?

#### **2. MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY.**

God has given man certain responsibilities and man is required to be a faithful steward of what God has placed in his hand. What responsibilities and obligations has God given to man? What was man told to do or not to do?

#### **3. MAN'S FAILURE.**

How has man succeeded or failed to meet his responsibilities? In what ways did man obey or disobey the HOUSE RULES? In every dispensation we will see the terrible failure of man. This reminds us again and again that man is a great sinner who is in need of a great Saviour!

#### **4. GOD'S JUDGMENT.**

When God puts something into man's hand and man fails to handle it properly, then judgment must follow. We will learn that each dispensation ends in man's failure and God's judgment.

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**A dispensationalist is one who believes that God means what He says and says what He means, and that it is the responsibility of every believer to humbly take God at His Word (Isaiah 66:1-2).**