

The Dispensation of Innocence

This dispensation covers the time from the creation of man to the fall of man ([Genesis 1:28-30](#) and [2:15-17](#)). All of God's creatures lived at peace with themselves and with each other, and the world was without sin or death. Man was to procreate, rule the earth and the animals, and take care of the garden. He was given one command to obey: not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve and Adam disobeyed this rule, and were expelled from the garden as punishment, ending the dispensation of innocence.

The Dispensation of Conscience

The expulsion from the garden began the dispensation of conscience—a time when man was left to rule himself by his own will and conscience, both of which had been tainted by sin. It was a disaster, and ended in disaster—the worldwide flood ([Genesis 3:8—8:22](#)). During this dispensation, man became so wicked that "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" and God regretted making man and was "grieved to his heart" ([Genesis 6:5-6](#)). This was also the time when fallen angels married human women and produced giant, evil offspring called Nephilim ([Genesis 6:1-4](#)). God chose to end humanity with a flood and begin again with Noah and his family ([Genesis 6:11-18](#)).

The Dispensation of Human Government

The dispensation of human government began just after the flood. God made promises and gave commands to Noah and his family. God promised not to curse the earth again, and never to flood it again. He commanded Noah and his sons to repopulate the world and scatter across the earth, and He allowed them to use animals for food. God also established the law of capital punishment ([Genesis 8:1-9:7](#)). Noah's descendants failed to "fill the earth" as was commanded, and instead they worked together to build the tower of Babel ([Genesis 11:1-9](#)). God countered this action by confusing their languages, creating different nations and cultures that later spread to different areas. This was the beginning of human government.

The Dispensation of Promise

The dispensation of human government lasted until the call of Abraham. The call of Abraham, the lives of the patriarchs, and the enslavement of the Jewish people to Egypt all fall under the dispensation of promise. This was the time when Abraham's descendants waited for the promise that was given to Abraham: that God would make Abraham's descendants a great nation and give them their own land ([Genesis 12:1-7](#)). This dispensation ended with the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Once they left Egypt they were officially a nation, led by God into the wilderness toward the Promised Land.

The Dispensation of Law

The dispensation of law lasted almost 1,500 years, beginning with the Exodus and ending with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The delivery of the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law, found in [Exodus 19—23](#), outlined the standard of perfection that God required from His people, and included the instructions about temple worship and sacrifices. This was the age of priests, prophets and kings, both good and evil. The people of Yahweh repeatedly broke His commands, and wandered off after other gods. It is important to note that strict following of commandments was never as important to God as mercy and faithfulness ([Hosea 6:6](#)). The law was given to show the people that they needed to depend on God and trust Him to save them, rather than trusting themselves, their own goodness, or other gods for salvation. He has never expected perfection—if He did, He would not have provided the sacrificial system as a way for man to say "yes, I have sinned; here is a symbol of my need for forgiveness and atonement." The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin—they are a symbol, looking forward to the One whose blood could take away sin ([Hebrews 9:11-14](#); [Hebrews 10:3-10](#)).

The Dispensation of Grace

The dispensation of grace started at the resurrection of Jesus Christ and continues today. It is the new covenant in Christ's blood ([Luke 22:20](#)). This is also called the "age of grace" or the "church age," and scholars believe that the entire dispensation—more than 2,000 years—occurs between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's prophecy in [Daniel 9:24](#). Atonement was provided on the cross, once for all, for any who would believe: Abraham's children are all those who have faith, including Gentiles (or non-Jews) ([Hebrews 10:10, 14](#); [Romans 5:1](#); [Romans 3:29-30](#); [Galatians 3:7, 29](#)). During this dispensation, we also have a Comforter with us, the Holy Spirit of God, who indwells believers ([John 14:16-26](#)).

Dispensationalists believe that the Church Age will end with the rapture of the Church ([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#); [Revelation 3:10](#)) and then the tribulation, the seven years when those who dwell on the earth will experience God's judgment, will begin ([Daniel 12:1-4](#); [Matthew 24:21-27](#)). The exact timing of the rapture is a subject of great debate, but dispensationalists believe it will happen at the beginning of the seven years. We do know that some people will be saved during the tribulation ([Revelation 7:14-17](#)) and that it will end with the battle of Armageddon, when Jesus Christ will return and defeat Satan and any who would follow him into battle ([Revelation 19:11—20:3](#)).

The Millennial Kingdom of Christ

The Millennial Kingdom begins with the defeat of Satan ([Revelation 20:1-3](#)) and ushers in 1,000 years of peace, where Christ will reign on the earth ([Revelation 20:4](#)). This is the fulfillment of many prophecies, declaring that Christ will return and be King. After the 1,000 years are ended, Satan will be released. People will again follow him in a battle against God, and they will be defeated again ([Revelation 20:7-10](#)). There will be a final judgment of all people, great and small ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)), the old earth and heaven will be destroyed by fire, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire, and this will begin the Eternal Kingdom, the new heaven and the new earth ([Revelation 21](#) and [22](#)). "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" ([Revelation 21:4](#)).