

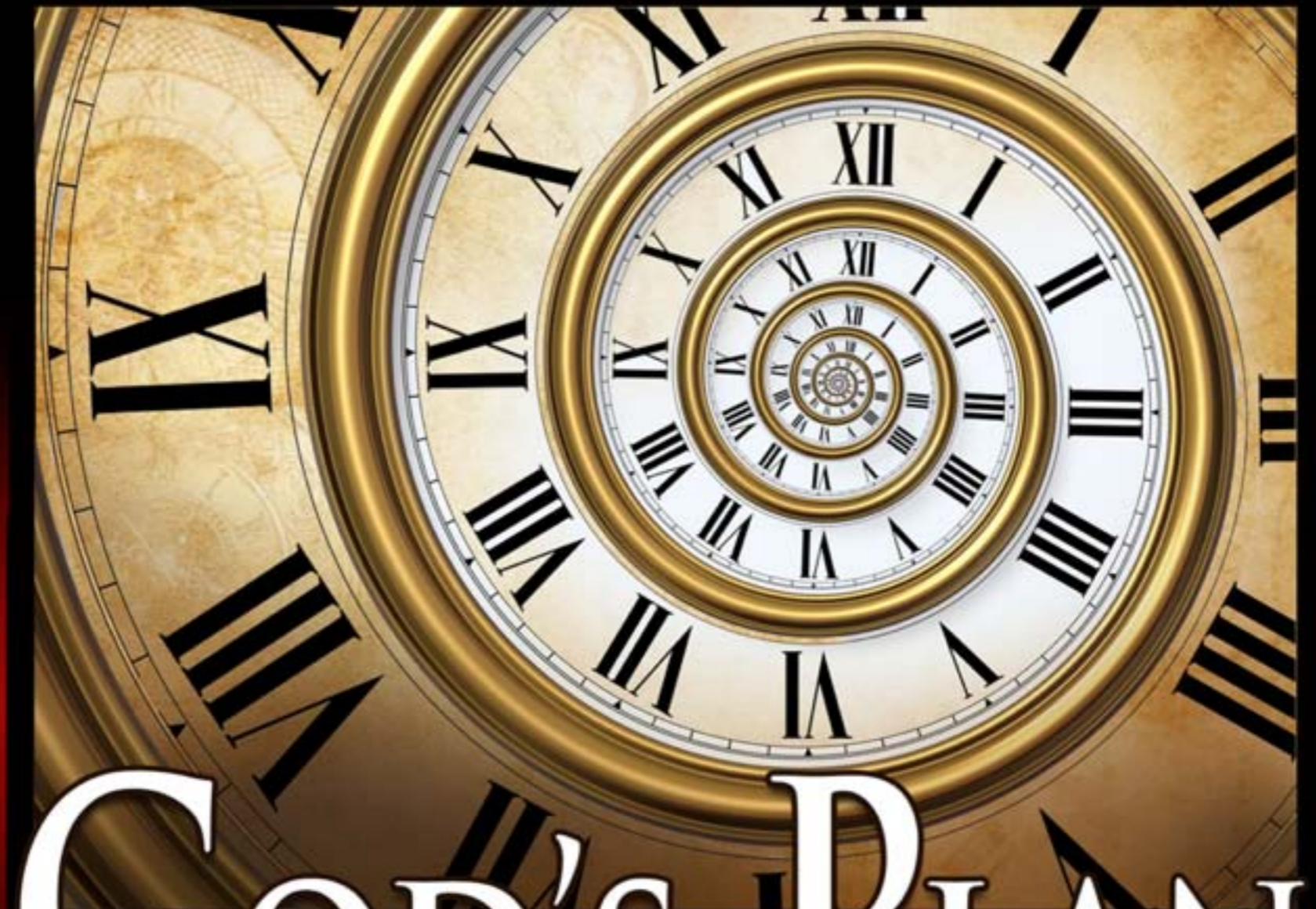
God's Plan for the Ages Series

Lesson #004

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Dean Bible Ministries
www.deanbibleministries.org

Dr. Robert L. Dean, Jr.



GOD'S PLAN
FOR THE **AGES**
DISPENSATIONS

DISPENSATIONS: TRUTH AND FICTION

1. A brief working definition:

Dispensationalism is a theological system, which understands that God sovereignly governs the history of the human race through a sequence of divinely directed administrations marked by distinctive periods of time as He works out His plan to destroy sin and evil.

Three Essential Elements of Dispensationalism:

- 1. A consistent literal, historical, grammatical interpretation of the Bible.**
- 2. A distinction between God's plan for Israel and God's plan for the Church.**
- 3. The overall purpose of God's plan for His creation is His glory.**

What is a Dispensation?

- 1. The action of administering or ordering something; dealing out or distributing something.**
- 2. The act of administering or dispensing with some requirement.**

***Dispensation:* A distinct and identifiable administration in the development of God's plan and purposes for human history (Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25–26).**

1. ***Oikonomeo***: 1 time as a verb (Luke 16:2 “to be a steward”).
2. ***Oikonomos***: Ten times as a noun (Luke 12:42; 16:1, 3, 8; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2; Galatians 4:2, Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 4:10)
3. ***Oikonomia***, “dispensation” (Ephesians 1:10, 3:2, 9; “stewardship” Colossians 1:25; 1 Timothy 1:4; Luke 16:2–4; 1 Corinthians 9:17)
4. **Jesus’ usage**

- a. 2 parties involved, 1 party has authority to delegate responsibilities; the other has the responsibilities to carry the duties out.
(cf., Luke 16)**
- b. There are specific responsibilities for the steward. (Luke 16:1)**
- c. Accountability and responsibility are part of the arrangement. At any point in time the steward can be called upon to explain how he has fulfilled his responsibilities. (Luke 16:2)**
- d. A change can be made at any time if unfaithfulness is found.**

- a. God is the one to whom men are responsible in discharging stewardship. 1 Cor. 4:1–2**

- b. Faithfulness is required of those to whom a dispensational responsibility is committed. 1 Cor. 4:2**

- c. A stewardship may end at some appointed time. Gal. 4:4–7**

**Concepts of dispensations evident from
these usages**

1. God is the one to whom men are responsible in the discharge of their stewardship obligations.

In three instances this relationship to God is mentioned by Paul (1 Corinthians 4:1–2; Titus 1:7; Colossians 1:25).

1 Cor. 4:1, “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards [*oikonomos*] of the mysteries of God.

1 Cor. 4:2, “Moreover it is required in stewards [*oikonomos*] that one be found faithful.”

Titus 1:7, “For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward [*oikonomos*] of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,”

Col. 1:25, “of which I became a minister according to the stewardship [*oikonomia*] from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God,”

2. Faithfulness is required of those to whom a dispensational responsibility is committed (1 Corinthians 4:2). This is illustrated by Erastus, who held the important position of treasurer (steward) of the city (Romans 16:23).

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Rom. 16:2, “Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother.”

3. A stewardship may end at an appointed time (Galatians 4:2). In this reference, the end of the stewardship came because of a different purpose being introduced. This reference also shows that a dispensation is connected with time.

Gal. 4:2, “but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.”

4. Dispensations are connected with the mysteries of God, that is, with specific revelation from God (1 Corinthians 4:1; Ephesians 3:2; Colossians 1:25).

Eph. 3:2, “if indeed you have heard of the dispensation [*oikonomia* – administration, management, plan] of the grace of God which was given to me for you,”

5. Dispensation and age are connected ideas, but the words are not exactly interchangeable.

For instance, Paul declares that the revelation of the present dispensation was hidden “for ages,” meaning simply a long period of time (Ephesians 3:9). The same thing is said in Colossians 1:26. However, since a dispensation operates within a time period, the concepts are related.

6. A dispensation operates within an age.

- a. God has clearly demarcated certain chronological divisions in human history (Ephesians 1:10; 3:8–9).**
- b. Paul mentions ages in three senses.**
 - i. Ages past, i.e., before the Church (Ephesians 3:5, 9)**
 - ii. Present age (Titus 2:12). Dispensation of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:2)**
 - iii. Ages future, i.e., to come after the Church (Eph. 1:21; 2:7) See also Ephesians 1:10: “dispensation of the fullness of the times.”**

Eph. 1:10, “that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

Eph. 3:8, “To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

Eph. 3:9, “and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;”

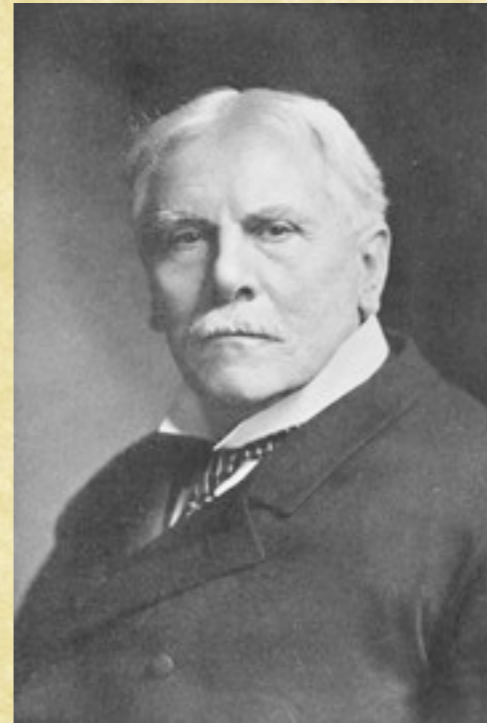
7. Based on the use of the word in Scripture, a dispensation may be defined as *a stewardship, administration, or management of others' property*. This involves responsibility, accountability and faithfulness on the part of the steward.

8. A dispensation is primarily a stewardship arrangement and not a period of time (though obviously the arrangement will exist during a period of time).

9. Times, ages and dispensations are not synonymous in meaning, even though they may exactly coincide in the historical outworking.

A dispensation is basically the *arrangement* involved, not the time involved, and a proper definition will take this into account. However, there is no reason for great alarm if a definition does ascribe time to a dispensation.

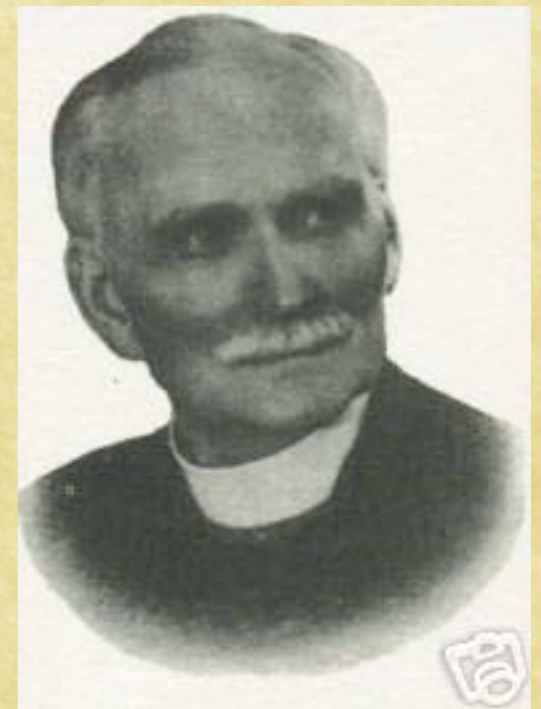
Scotfield: A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.



1843–1921

“The word *oikonomia* bears one significance, and means ‘an administration,’ whether of a house, or property, of a state, or a nation, or as in the present study, the administration of the human race or any part of it, at any given time. Just as a parent would govern his household in different ways, according to varying necessity, yet ever for one good end, so God has at different times dealt with men in different ways, according to the necessity of the case, but throughout for one great, grand end.”

~W. Graham Scroggie



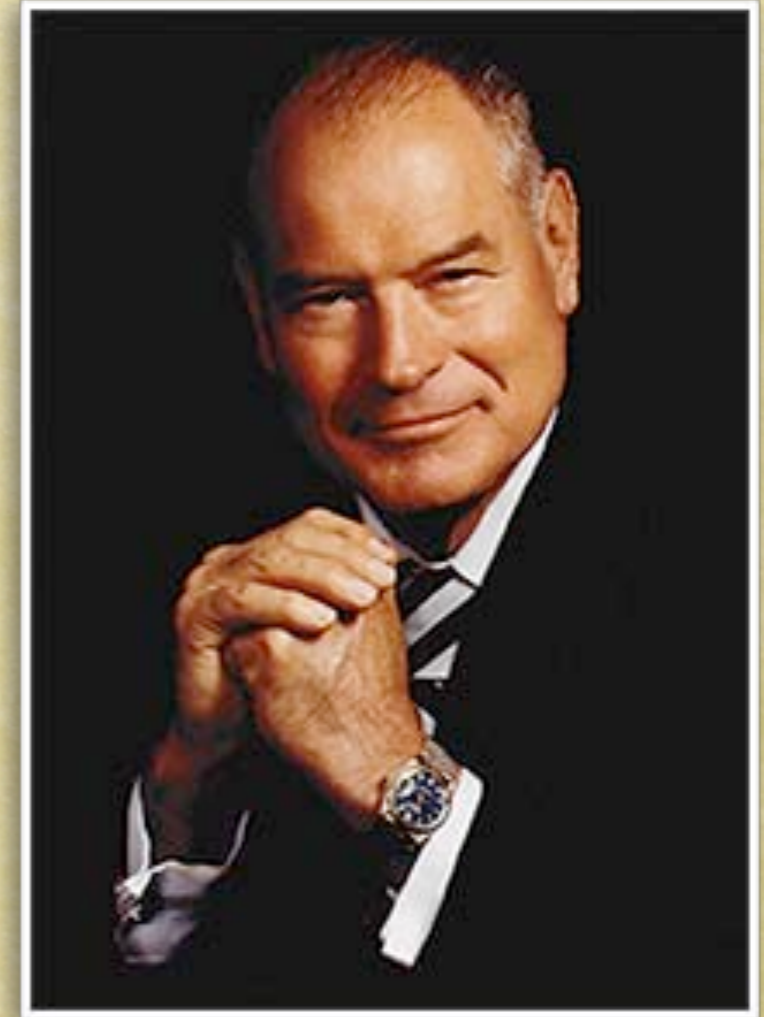
“A dispensation is a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purposes.”

~Charles C. Ryrie



Dispensation: “A period of human history expressed in terms of divine revelation. History is a sequence of divine administrations divided into eras, each having unique characteristics, as well as certain functions in common with the other ages. These consecutive eras reflect the unfolding of God’s plan for mankind; they constitute the divine viewpoint of history and the theological interpretation of history.”

~R. B. Thieme, Jr. *The Divine Outline of History*



“A dispensation therefore is a distinct and identifiable administration in the development of God’s plan and purposes for human history (Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25–26). A closely connected, but not interchangeable, word is age (Greek *aion*), which introduces the time element. God manages the entirety of human history as a household, moving humanity through sequential stages of His administration, determined by the level of revelation He has provided up to that time in history. Each administrative period is characterized by revelation that specifies responsibilities, a test in relation to those responsibilities, failure to pass the test, and God’s gracious provision of a solution when failure occurs.”

~Robert Dean, Jr.

Tim LaHaye *Prophecy Study Bible*

When does a new dispensation begin?

- 1. When God gives new revelation.**
- 2. Some things change, some continue.**
- 3. From God's perspective a dispensation is an administration or management of history.**
- 4. From man's perspective a dispensation is a responsibility to God.**

Three major characteristics of a dispensation

- **God provides new revelation.**
- **God changes the way He administers history.**
- **God changes man's responsibility.**

Minor characteristics of a dispensation

- **A test, usually related to the responsibility**
- **A failure**
- **Minor features aren't always present**
- **A primary steward**

What dispensationalism is *not*:

- **Not a recognition that dispensations exist.**
- **Not related to a specific number of dispensations. To be a dispensationalist you must hold to at least three.**
- **Not equal to premillennialism. While all dispensationalists are premillennial, not all premillennialists are dispensationalists.**

What dispensationalism is:

- ***Consistent* literal interpretation**
- **Distinction between Israel and the Church**
- **The unifying principle of history is the glory of God.**

John 1:17 Grace. Summary: (1) Grace is “the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man ... not by works of righteousness which we have done” (Titus 3:4, 5). It is, therefore, constantly set in contrast to law, under which God demands righteousness from man, as, under grace, he gives righteousness to man (Rom. 3:21, 22; 8:4; Phil. 3:9). Law is connected with Moses and works; grace with Christ and faith (John 1:17; Rom. 10:4–10). Law blesses the good; grace saves the bad (Ex. 19:5; Eph. 2:1–9). Law demands that blessings be earned; grace is a free gift (Deut. 28:1–6; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 4:4, 5).

(2) As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 3:24–26; 4:24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation (John 1:12, 13; 3:36; Mt. 21:37; 22:42; John 15:22, 25; Heb. 1:2; 1 John 5:10–12). The immediate result of this testing was the rejection of Christ by the Jews, and His crucifixion by Jew and Gentile (Acts 4:27). The predicted end of the testing of man under grace is the apostasy of the professing church (see “Apostasy,” 2 Tim. 3:1–8, note), and the resultant apocalyptic judgments.