

DISPENSATIONS

A “Dispensation” is not some external outline that John Darby thrust upon the Scriptures back in the early 19th century. “Dispensation” (Oikonomia) is a Bible word used seven times in the NT, which helps organize time. Hebrews 11:3 states, “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed (literally: ages were framed) by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” J. Sayles writes critically and unfairly concerning John Darby’s teaching of “Dispensations,” “...the indoctrination of many in the church with corrupt dispensational theology.” “Dispensation” means house order, house rule, and administration. In order to understand the scriptures, we need to understand the Lord has dealt differently with different people at different times. We do that in our homes. When you are single versus when you are married versus when you are married with small children versus when you are married with teenagers, etc. Each house order becomes different as time and circumstances change.

It should be obvious that the Lord dealt with Adam differently before he sinned versus after he sinned. New commands and changes occurred with Noah after the flood. Abraham became the ‘house of God’ as he was called out from the gentiles. The Mosaic law brought changes to Israel from what existed before. The ‘church which is His body’ was a mystery (disclosed in the epistle to the Ephesians) that brought new changes. The ‘day of the Lord’ (yet future) will bring changes as once again the Lord will deal with the nation of Israel as the house of God (See Romans 11).

The dispensation of the church which is His body is alluded to in Hosea 6:1-2: “Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will He revive us; in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight.” This mystery is disclosed in the NT in 2Peter 3:8, “...that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” A mystery in the Bible is something hidden in the OT but is revealed in the NT. The book of Hosea is an allegory about the history of Israel’s unfaithfulness and their reinstatement as God’s people. Israel will be Lo Ammi (not My people) for two days (two thousand Years). Paul refers to this mystery in Romans 16:25-26, “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:”

The word, “dispensation” is introduced in 1Corinthians 9:17, “For if I do this (preach the gospel) willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, a **dispensation** of the gospel is committed unto me.” The epistle to the Ephesians specifically writes about two specific dispensations: 1) “...the church, which is His body,...” (Eph. 1:22-23); and 2) “...the dispensation of the fullness of times...” (Eph. 1:10). Many theologians title the “dispensation of the church which is His body as “the dispensation of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2), which is really describing this dispensation as being given by God to Paul ‘by’ His grace. Titling it incorrectly with the word “grace” makes it seem as if God’s grace was new to the church whereas Noah (and many others) found favor (grace) in the sight of the Lord. The fact that Paul was entrusted with a new dispensation (house order) assumes wisely a change from the previous dispensation, which is the “Law of Moses.” Thus, within the book of Ephesians, we have three dispensations alluded to and two specifically described.