

26-09-27 – A Dispensation Isn't What Theologians Say It Is

I have been discussing the word 'dispensation' in scripture, and why I believe it has been mis-used by almost everyone, including myself. We have seen in the past two times I spoke, the standard theological definition that is pretty universal, with some defining it slightly different. But almost universally, a dispensation is defined as how God is dealing with mankind in a particular era.

The reason I believe this definition is incorrect is that only the only dispensations mentioned in the Word of God are either given to Paul or to God. The standard idea is that, since what is given to Paul is the dispensation of the grace of God, then other dispensations must exist because God has dealt with mankind in different ways throughout history.

So using that logic, they begin looking for the different ways God has dealt with mankind throughout history, and when a change is perceived, they call that a new dispensation. But we have to determine then, has God really dealt with mankind in different ways throughout history.

In other words: Is the assumption that God has dealt with mankind differently throughout history true? Has God changed the manner in which one can obtain eternal life in different eras?

There are many ways in which this seems to be the case, but what has God required of man to obtain eternal life throughout the ages?

Hebrews 11:4 ¶ **By faith Abel** offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Hebrews 11:5 **By faith Enoch** was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Hebrews 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Hebrews 11:7 **By faith Noah**, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Hebrews 11:8 **By faith Abraham**, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Hebrews 11:9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange

country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

Hebrews 11:10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.

It is a plain fact that from Abel to Malachi – he was a prophet, after all – that God was dealing with mankind by faith.

Those who may challenge this would say that a Gentile would first have to join the nation as a proselyte to get access to God. After all, doesn't Paul say that we were 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world?'

Yes, he does. That was the corporate position of Gentiles. But any Gentile who had faith in the God of Israel could obtain eternal life. For example, look here in

Hebrews 11:31 By faith the harlot Rahab perished not

Rahab didn't perish physically, but she also didn't perish spiritually. Why did those that did perish die physically and spiritually?

with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

And what exactly did Rahab believe? She believed what God had told Moses.

Joshua 2:9 And she said unto the men, **I know that the LORD hath given you the land**, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

And she believed that Israel's God was God and He was more powerful than any of the gods of her land.

Joshua 2:11 And as soon as we had heard *these things*, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: **for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.**

At that point, had Rahab become a proselyte?

She didn't even ask to join the nation, she only asked that they spare her and her family. Of course she did join the nation and became David's great-great grandmother. But she was delivered by faith before any of that.

There are other examples given of this. Naaman was captain of the Syrian army which had brought captives out of Israel. But he had become leprous. An Israeli girl that had become a servant to his wife told him to go to Israel and

there was a great prophet there that could heal him. He did this, and after a bit of anger and resentment, he finally did what Elijah's servant told him to do. He washed in the river Jordan seven times and was healed. He returned to Elijah and said:

2 Kings 5:15-19 ¶ And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, **Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel:** now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. **16** But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take *it*; but he refused. **17** And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, **be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.** **18** In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, *that* when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing. **19** And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.

Naaman never became a proselyte, but he was certainly saved. There are other examples of this, including even that bad old king, Nebuchadnezzar.

But the point of all of this is that God has all throughout the time before Christ given eternal life to mankind by only one means: faith.

But then we come to what is referred to as the New Testament. How was God dealing with mankind at this point? We only really need to read two verses to establish this:

John 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.**

John 20:31 But these are written, that ye might **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that **believing ye might have life** through his name.

Believe that Jesus is the Christ. Eternal salvation is still by faith.

No one ever received eternal life without faith in what Jehovah God told them. On the other hand, no one ever received eternal life by works.

So getting back to how to define the word dispensation: If dispensation is defined by how God deals with mankind during a certain age, then there can only be one dispensation until the dispensation of the fulness of times. God

has always dealt with mankind by faith. No man or woman ever pleased God by not believing what was revealed to them at that time. Rahab didn't have any scriptures to rely on. But she knew the name of Israel's God, and she knew He was the God of heaven and earth. And that faith is what saved her.

Let's do a logical exercise here. For those who call themselves dispensationalists, it is almost universally accepted the Mosaic law was a dispensation. We touched on this briefly the last time, so we won't spend a lot of time here. But if the Mosaic law, whether from Mount Sinai to John the Baptist, Christ's death, Pentecost, or Paul's calling, was how God was dealing with mankind, then no one could have obtained eternal life under the law.

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Most dispensationalists would argue that the law was to show them their sin and lead them to faith. That is true, but what did God look upon to save any individual? Their faith. So how can the law be a way in which God is dealing with man if its' purpose is to lead them to faith. Wasn't that also John the Baptist's purpose? Christ's purpose? The Apostles purpose? Isn't the purpose of any dealings of God with mankind to lead them to faith?

So if every dealing of God with mankind is to lead mankind to faith, how can you separate God's dealings with man into different eras of progressive revelation and name them something that is rightly only given to Paul and God the Father in scripture – a dispensation.

So how can we define the word dispensation? We saw before that the Greek word that is translated dispensation is used only seven times in the New Testament. Three times it is defined stewardship.

STEWARDSHIP, *noun*: The office of a steward.

Four times it is translated dispensation. We went over the dictionary definitions, and saw that the theological definition goes way back before English was even a language.

So I spent an hour or so digging into how the word **oikonomía** was defined in regular Greek – English dictionaries before 1900, rather than lexicons written by theologians. I was using the AI ChatGPT. Then I asked to see how oikonomía was used in Greek literature in ancient and more modern times. I had the AI create a summary of this whole discussion and it is available on the back table.

Using what I learned, I created a sentence describing how the dispensation given to Paul could accurately be described, and asked if that would be technically and literally accurate. It corrected what I wrote and said a more accurate way of putting it would be:

Accordingly, it is lexically sound to understand Paul's οἰκονομία as an entrusted administration, stewardship, or ordered management by which his God-given commission was to be carried out toward its intended recipients.

or

God entrusted Paul with a particular administration or stewardship, including the responsibility for how what had been entrusted to him was to be carried out toward its intended recipients.

Personally, I like the second definition better. Now, that doesn't mean that is the actual and true scriptural meaning, but it certainly gives life to different possibilities that the translators were looking at when they translated the word that way.

It means that the translators of the King James Bible had a lot more to work with than simply Greek lexicons. If ChatGPT has access to ancient Greek literature, the translators also had access to that literature and much more. There were also many other ways that word was used in ancient Greek that aren't included on the summary paper. They also would have known this. But you notice that ChatGPT also has the word stewardship, which is how it's translated in Luke.

I believe, as I said before, that the translators didn't use stewardship in Paul's epistles is because Paul didn't have that office. He hadn't received all of the instructions yet. But he was a steward over what he was receiving.

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 ¶ Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

So he was a steward of the mysteries of God as they were revealed to him. A steward handles the portion that is given to him to handle. For example:

Titus 1:7-9 For a bishop must be blameless, **as the steward of God**; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; **8** But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; **9** Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

A bishop is a steward, but only over the church in which he is over. He wouldn't be a steward over the entire body of Christ, and his office is therefore not a stewardship.

The office of stewardship requires one to handle all of the affairs of the household or government, or even a farming operation. Paul couldn't have that office because he didn't have all of the information until he wrote II Timothy. So the translators didn't translate that word as stewardship, as even ChatGPT was anxious to do.

Instead, Paul's office, in which he received the dispensation given him, was

Romans 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am **the apostle of the Gentiles**, I magnify mine office:

From that office, by the dispensation given to him from Jesus Christ, he created the office of the bishop and the office of the deacon to continue the growth of the body of Christ and to edify it according to the information he was inspired of God to write down.

Having said all that, now I would like to try to find the scriptural meaning of the word dispensation. To do that, we need to look at scripture rather than ancient Greek literature, theological lexicons, or asking an artificial intelligence agent.

We'll take these passages one by one and see if we can learn anything from them.

In I Corinthians 9, he is upbraiding the Corinthians about their financial responsibilities to those who are teaching them. They had material obligations for those in the office of a bishop, or those who would come and teach them for a period of time. They were supposed to be paying them – helping them financially or materially to live.

Paul hadn't accepted anything from them because he didn't want to give them any reason to resent him, find fault in him, or say he was abusing his power.

1 Corinthians 9:15-18 ¶ But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for *it were* better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void. **16** For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! **17** For if I do this thing willingly, I

have a reward: but if against my will, **a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.** **18** What is my reward then? *Verily* that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

The first thing I notice when I read this is that Paul has no choice in the matter. This was committed to him, and he has to do it.

The second thing I notice is that this dispensation involves preaching the gospel of Christ. Preaching the gospel of Christ was committed to Paul. This is what was part of a dispensation of the gospel.

But wasn't preaching the gospel of Christ also committed to the Apostles, especially Peter?

Galatians 2:7-8 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter*; **8** (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

Yes, Peter preached the gospel of the circumcision. Paul preached the gospel of the uncircumcision. So what Paul was preaching was a different gospel. It was a gospel that was committed to him.

It is the only gospel in scripture that was received and preached as a dispensation of the gospel, and it was committed to Paul, and he was mandated to preach it.

Why then, is this gospel committed as a dispensation when no other gospel ever was?

Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom, but it wasn't committed to him as a dispensation of the gospel.

Mark wrote of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but no mention of a dispensation is made in the book of Mark.

The gospel was preached to Abraham, *saying*, "In thee shall all nations be blessed," but the scripture doesn't mention a dispensation in that gospel.

An angel is some day going to preach the everlasting gospel to them that dwell on the earth, but nothing there indicates that it is dispensational in nature.

Only one gospel is linked to a dispensational foundation. Why this is can be found in the gospels themselves.

Acts 3:19-21 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when **the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;** **20** And he shall **send** Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: **21** Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

The times of refreshing of the earth. He will send Jesus to the earth.

Mark 10:29-30 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and **the gospel's,** **30** But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, **and lands,** with persecutions; and **in the world to come eternal life.**

Receive a hundred-fold on the earth. That is both the gospel of the kingdom from Jesus Christ, and the gospel of Jesus Christ found in Mark.

Galatians 3:8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall **all nations** be blessed.

Genesis 12:3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall **all families of the earth** be blessed.

Those nations are on the earth.

Revelation 14:6 ¶ And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach **unto them that dwell on the earth,** and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

Those gospels are all gospels concerning the purpose, plan and destiny of the earth.

The gospel of the grace of God that was contained in the dispensation committed to Paul is different.

2 Timothy 4:17-18 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; **that by me the preaching might be fully known,** and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. **18** And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto **his heavenly kingdom:** to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Corinthians 5:1 ¶ For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, **eternal in the heavens.**

1 Corinthians 15:49 And as we have borne the image of the earthy, **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.**

Ephesians 1:3 ¶ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings **in heavenly places in Christ:**

The first thing we learn about the dispensation of the gospel committed to Paul is that it is different from all the other gospels. The gospel committed to Paul concerns the purpose, plan and destiny of the heavens.

This is different from all of the other gospels, which were all dealing with the earth.

So,

In defining the word ‘dispensation,’ a dispensation must give, not just new information never revealed before, but must also reveal a new plan and purpose of God.

To be continued . . .