

Review of Dispensations

The purpose of today's lesson is two-fold.

First, this is a review of dispensations which is tangential to our study of Romans chapter 4. Issues are 1) salvation which is the same throughout all the dispensations and 2) circumcision that applies only to certain individuals who are still under the Abrahamic Covenant. It was also enforced in the dispensation of Law (Leviticus 12:2-3).

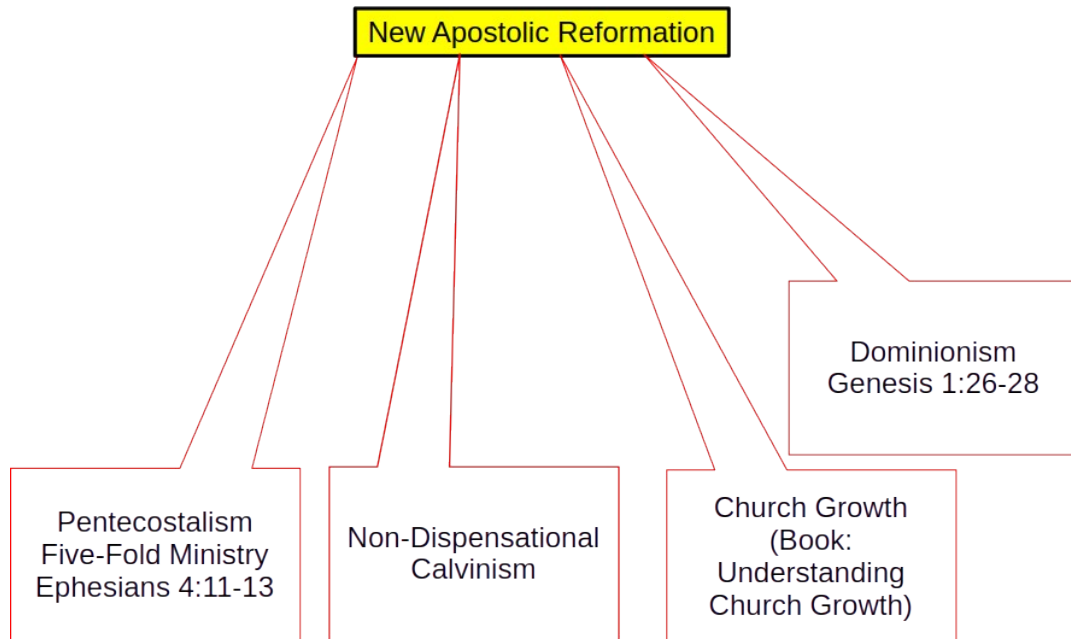
Second, this identifies one of several major differences between Free-Grace Dispensational Theology (i.e. what Spring Valley Bible Church teaches) and the theology of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR).

The NAR theology is a mix of elements from different Christian movements: Calvinism (including a non-dispensational perspective), Kingdom Now Theology (or Post-Millennialism versus our Pre-Millennialism), Pentecostalism (including Continuationism and Restorationism of the "temporary" spiritual gifts under the title of "Five-fold Ministry" versus teaching that such gifts have ceased), the church growth movement, and the Seven Mountain Mandate (which includes the concept of "dominionism"). I started a graphical illustration tracing the influences on NAR below. I will add and enhance as needed as time goes by. From my perspective it is syncretic. From Wikipedia:

"Syncretism is the practice of combining different beliefs and various schools of thought. Syncretism involves the merging or assimilation of several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion, thus asserting an underlying unity and allowing for an inclusive approach to other faiths.¹"

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syncretism>

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When reading a book on the “kingdom” aspect of NAR, I had difficulty following it because it did not recognize the different dispensations. NAR has a different world-view. As time goes by, I will address the specific differences that exist between what we teach and what NAR teaches, one by one. Today, one of those differences is “dispensations.”

Dispensations, although not directly mentioned in Romans chapter 4 is still present in the background. The issue at hand from last week is circumcision. This does not apply to the Christian. However, keep in mind that Jews who become Christians may still practice circumcision in recognition of the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant has not been completely fulfilled yet. It waits for the Millennium. And also keep in mind that there is no prohibition against any male practicing circumcision. But, and this is very important, it has never been a requirement for salvation. Never.

The last time I taught dispensations was in December 2019. Many teachers provide a point by point doctrine of dispensations and leave you

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to look up the various Bible verses. While this is fine in providing a study aid, I like to approach the subject verse-by-verse in which we see the changes in administration between dispensations. Whether you want to accept dispensational theology or not is up to you. But I want you to see the changes in the environment, in people and their relationship to God as documented in the Bible. You will see for yourself what dispensationalists see.

1. First, What is a dispensation?

GotQuestions.org provides one definition which is pretty good.

“A dispensation is a way of ordering things—an administration, a system, or a management. In theology, a dispensation is the divine administration of a period of time; each dispensation is a divinely appointed age. Dispensationalism is a theological system that recognizes these ages ordained by God to order the affairs of the world. Dispensationalism has two primary distinctives:

- 1) a consistently literal interpretation of Scripture, especially Bible prophecy, and
- 2) a view of the uniqueness of Israel as separate from the Church in God’s program.

Classical dispensationalism identifies seven dispensations in God’s plan for humanity.²”

Robby Dean gives us a similar definition which I like. He stresses in his teaching that the concept of dispensation does not have “time” as part of its definition. Obviously time is a factor, but the core idea is administration or management.

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/dispensationalism.html>

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““a dispensation therefore is a distinct and identifiable administration.” That means it has certain characteristics. So you can distinguish one from another. They have distinct, identifiable characteristics, distinct identifiable "administration in the development of God's plan and purposes for human history. A closely connected, but not interchangeable, word is age, which introduces the time element. God manages the entirety of human history as a household, moving humanity through sequential stages of administration, determined by the level of revelation He has provided up to that time in history.³””

2. Perhaps one of the most influential dispensational theologian was Charles Ryrie. He wrote an often quoted book titled “Dispensationalism Today.⁴” He revised it under the title “Dispensationalism.⁵” Charles Ryrie taught at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS) for many years. Both the author of GotQuestions.org and Robby Dean received degrees from DTS.

Charles Ryrie lists three items which he calls the “sin qua non” or in English those items without which there is no Dispensationalism⁶:

- 1) A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct.
- 2) The distinction between Israel and the church is born out of a system of hermeneutics that is usually called literal interpretation.
- 3) The dispensationalists says God’s purpose in the world is His glorification, the glory of God.

3 <https://deanbible.org/doctrines-topics-menuitem/disp-menuitem/message/4-dispensations-truth-and-fiction-b/read>

4 Ryrie, C.C., *Dispensationalism Today*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1970, pp43-47

5 Charles Caldwell Ryrie (2007). *Dispensationalism*. Chicago, Il: Moody Publishers.

6 Charles Caldwell Ryrie (2007). *Dispensationalism*. Chicago, Il: Moody Publishers. pp 46-48.

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God didn't leave Adam clueless in the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam a set of rules to govern his life in the Garden.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Let them rule. The King James Version (KJV) translates this as "let them have dominion." This is where dominionism acquires its name and concept. That is not the subject here, but since we cross this verse here, I point this out. Something that we will deal with at a later date.

Genesis 1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful (imperative) and multiply (imperative), and fill the earth (imperative), and subdue it (imperative); and rule over (imperative) the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

God said to them. God gave man the rules to live by. The rules are imperatives. They were given in the Garden.

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These are imperatives in the Hebrew.

Be fruitful. Imperative.

Multiply. Imperative

Fill the earth. Imperative

Subdue it. Imperative.

Rule over/Have dominion... Imperative.

These instructions detail what Adam and his descendants should do.

Genesis 1:29 Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be (imperfect) food for you;

It shall be food for you. Apparently, Adam and Eve were to be vegetarians. We know that changes later. But here, there is no instruction for killing animals, eating animals or animal sacrifice. None. That doesn't happen until after the fall. After sin has entered the picture. These are the initial rules.

Genesis 1:30 and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food”; and it was so.

Apparently, the animals were vegetarian as well. These rules applied while Adam and Eve were in the garden.

There were tasks that God gave man besides “rule over the earth and dominate it.”

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Genesis 2:15 Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it (infinitive - purpose) and keep it (infinitive - purpose).

God gave Adam a specific job. God gave Adam purpose (infinitive). Essentially, he became a gardener. Or farmer depending on how you look at this.

Genesis 2:16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;

Genesis 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

Adam and Eve did not yet have a sin nature. So there was one overt sin defined by God. He warned Adam and Eve. Don't do this.

In summary, God gave Adam and Eve

- 1) Life instructions (imperatives), [The Plan]
- 2) Food instructions (imperfect), [Sustenance]
- 3) Work tasks/purpose (infinitive). [Purpose]

These were rules given while Adam and Eve were in the Garden.

After the fall there were changes as a result of Adam's sin.

Adam and Eve died spiritually (Genesis 2:17). Depending on how the penalty of sin is translated, it either emphasizes spiritual death or

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identifies two deaths: spiritual death immediately and physical death eventually. In either case, they died spiritually and hence their relationship to God changed.

Genesis 2:16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;

Genesis 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

So their relationship to God changed.

Genesis 3:22 Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”—

Man has changed. God prevents man from access to everlasting life. Life and righteousness are linked. Salvation is now required to restore life and righteousness while sin had to be judged. In other words, there is now a barrier between God and man. God will provide the solution. (Genesis 3:15).

Genesis 3:23 therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken.

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Man's location/environment has changed. The end result is banishment from perfect environment in the Garden. But the task of "cultivate" continues.

Genesis 3:24 So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

And that environment was now cursed.

Genesis 3:17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life.

Genesis 3:18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field;

Apparently food is again plants, not meat.

Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

In summary, after the fall, man's relationship to God has changed, man's location has changed, man's environment is cursed. There is nothing to say that man now eats meat. They are still vegetarians. Able was a herder

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of flocks which were used for sacrifice. Perhaps God had given instructions for sacrifices in anticipation of the sacrifice of the cross. But it is not until after the flood that God specifically says they can eat meat.

Environment is changed. It is cursed.

Man remains a vegetarian. No change.

Man, already dead spiritually, will die physically. The dead corpse will decay and return to “dust.”

After the flood, God gives extensive instructions. Note that some of these instructions change or nullify previous instructions given in the Garden. Others affirm those initial instructions. The point is, the administration has changed. The rules to live under have changed.

Genesis 9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

This affirms the instruction in the Garden. No change here.

Genesis 9:2 The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given.

Interesting that animals are now afraid of men. This was apparently not the case in the Garden. Note that in the Millennium, man’s relationship to animals again changes. But in the meantime, when animals attack humans, it indicates there is an issue between God and man (2 Kings 17:25).

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Genesis 9:3 Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green plant.

Wow! God says I gave you green plants to eat previously. Now you can eat “every moving thing that is alive.” This is a new instruction. A new rule for a new administration (dispensation).

Genesis 9:4 Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

Interesting rule. I can't address the implications of this here and now.

Genesis 9:5 Surely I will require your lifeblood; from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man's brother I will require the life of man.

Genesis 9:6 “Whoever sheds man's blood, By man his blood shall be shed, For in the image of God He made man.

Previously, Cain killed Abel. His life was not taken from him. No capital punishment. But now, there is capital punishment. It is required by God. Yet, at some times God permits someone who has committed a “capital crime” to live. We saw this last week with David. He acknowledged his sin to God. Then Nathan said to David, “You will not die.”

Genesis 9:7 “As for you, be fruitful and multiply; Populate the earth abundantly and multiply in it.”

Again, the affirmation of previous instructions about “be fruitful and multiply.” It is a repetition of Genesis 9:1 which is drawn from

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Genesis 1:28. It also factors into the judgment of Babel. The people congregated in one place and did not fill the earth.

For the Dispensation of the Law, I have gone to GotQuestions.org.

“While the Abrahamic Covenant continues and has not yet been completely fulfilled (even to this day), God changed course with His chosen people Israel at Mt. Sinai. God added the Law, and with it a new dispensation, which had a beginning and an ending (Romans 10:4).”

The fifth dispensation is that of Law—Exodus 19:5 to John 19:30.

Stewards: Moses and the children of Israel as a nation at Mt. Sinai
The Period: from Mt. Sinai until Christ Jesus fulfilled the Law with His death

Responsibility: Keep the whole Law (Exodus 19:3-8)

Failure: The Law was broken (2 Kings 17:7-20)

Judgment: Worldwide dispersion (Deuteronomy 28:63-66; Luke 21:20-24)

Grace: The promised Savior is sent (Isaiah 9:6-7; Galatians 4:4-5)”

“Israel was never to be saved by keeping the Law (Romans 3:20). The Law was meant to govern their earthly lives, to define sin, and to point to the coming Savior. Neither did the Law change the provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant.”

“The dispensation of Law is named after the Mosaic Law, called a “covenant” in Exodus 24:7-8; Deuteronomy 4:13; and Galatians 3:19. It was God’s only conditional covenant with Israel in that blessing and success depended upon the people’s obedience to the Law (Exodus 19:5). It did not take long for the Law to be broken, as proved by the golden calf in Exodus 32.”

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“The Law was also a temporary covenant to be made null and void by the institution of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:32; Hebrews 8:13; 10:9). The Law was added “because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come” (Galatians 3:19).⁸”

A short summary. Relationship to God is illustrated through the Levitical sacrifices. Grace is still the rule of the day. Faith as illustrated from Abraham (Genesis 15:6) still applies. But the food has changed. There are dietary laws. There are legal rules which include capital punishment.

When the Church interrupted the Dispensation of the Law, there are again changes. The Mosaic Law is not the rule for life. Christians live under the Law of Faith/Grace using the faith dependence on the Holy Spirit. There are some laws from the dispensation of Law that are obviously still applicable. Do not murder. Do not steal. And so on. These are repeated in the New Testament. The relationship to God changes. Christians now have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, potentially filling of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual gift, position in Christ and many other assets that were not available in any previous dispensation. We also know that the Church was not revealed in the Old Testament.

The Tribulation contains the final seven years of the Dispensation of the Law.

The Millennium, in which Jesus Christ is glorified, is the culmination of the previous permanent covenants to the Jews. It will itself be under the “New Covenant.”

This study is not exhaustive. I have concentrated the verse quotations from the Old Testament. The point is that you see what dispensationalists see. The word dispensation is used in the New Testament. There are clearly defined administrations with different rules. Not mentioned in this

⁸ <https://www.gotquestions.org/dispensation-of-Law.html>

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lesson is the application of the Angelic Conflict/Appeal Trial of Satan in these dispensations. God changed rules as He provided more revealed information in the written Word. It also shows the fallen angels that in any situation there are people who believe and accept God's plan and those that do not. It is all dependent upon free will.