

The Lamp of Prophecy

or

Signs of the Times

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

REAFFIRMATION OF DISPENSATIONAL TRUTH

BY THIS SUBJECT I have in mind certain objections that have lately been taken to the dispensational view of the Word of GOD. It has often been said that the dispensational teachers are quite unable to meet the new position, but I really think that most of us have too profound a regard for one or two of the brethren who are leading the new dispensational departure to like to appear in public against them; at any rate, to take sharp issue with them.

We realize that in this age men and women who firmly believe in the inspiration of the Word of GOD ought to stand shoulder to shoulder as far as possible. It is always with greatest regret that I take issue with any who love the Lord JESUS CHRIST, who believe firmly in His true deity, who believe in His virgin birth, His sinlessness, humanity, His atoning work, the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, and the full inspiration of the Word of GOD. We consider that however we may differ on other lines, if they agree with us on these, on our part we don't like to be found apparently in opposition to them. Therefore, many dispensational teachers have felt it hardly wise to say very much about this issue, but in schools such as this school and similar institutions, it is well to make clear our position on dispensational truth and reaffirm it to the students.

For years I have read carefully and prayerfully nearly all the books written from the other side, and I see no reason to change my point of view. The Scriptures are plain on the subject.

Turn to Ephesians 3:1-11:

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the *dispensation* of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ;) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and

partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel; Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ: And to make all men see, what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose - literally - "according to the purpose of the ages." I call attention to that expression. There is in Scripture a doctrine of the ages-GOD working out a very definite purpose of the ages - and we are now living in one particular age, the age of grace. **"According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

Ephesians 1:8-10: **"Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself: That in the *dispensation* of the fulness of time, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him."**

I have quoted these Scriptures, to which many more could be added, to show in the first place that the word "**dispensation**" is an eminently Scriptural term. It comes from a Greek word that is translated in four different ways in the New Testament. In these passages and in several others, it is rendered "**dispensation**." In the Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 12, it is translated "**administration**." It is elsewhere rendered "**order**," and in the Gospel of Luke it is rendered "**stewardship**." **"Give an account of thy stewardship . . ."**

The only way really to understand our Bible and get things in their places so that we are not in confusion of mind as we read and study is by noticing the various dispensations or administrations or stewardships or other periods that run through the Scripture. But we have recently been told by some prominent writers that this is all a mistake.

There is, they declare, no dispensational plan running through the Scripture, or, if there are any dispensations, there are only two - the dispensation of the Old Testament and the dispensation of the New; and that Dr. Scofield and others who have been glad to learn from him, and many great men who have learned independently of him, are all wrong in thinking that the Old Testament presents a series of dispensations and that in the New Testament we find people passing out of one dispensation into another, and that there is still ahead of us a glorious dispensation of the "**fulness of time**."

So when a position like this is challenged, we shall examine the foundations again and see if dispensational teaching rests upon any solid basis.

First, let us be very clear as to what we mean by a dispensation.

The word simply means the "*ordering of a house*." It is a word we have taken over bodily into English. The English word "*economy*" is but the Greek word *oikonomia*, anglicized, which is translated "**dispensation**," "**administration**," "**stewardship**," or "**order**."

We know what that word "*economy*" means. Our statesmen study political economy. What is that? It is the ordering of the affairs of the nation. If the affairs of all nations were ordered just exactly the same way, then the study of international politics would be very simple, but the affairs of nations differ.

Take this great country of ours in contrast with Great Britain. We have largely the same civilization. It isn't the easiest thing to tell a Britisher from an American, yet their fundamental systems of governments are altogether different. We base everything on a Constitution. Great Britain has no Constitution. Here is this great government and it rests on its Constitution, while in Great Britain the government rests on tradition. Their body of law has been built up century after century and changes have come very slowly, for the English people are strong for custom, and it is very hard to bring about a change.

With us in America, we just put up an Amendment to the Constitution and have the people vote on it, and if endorsed, it is added to the Constitution. Whether we keep the Amendments or not is another thing!

The laws of nations differ. Each nation has its own peculiar economy. Now, I might be well versed in American economy and go over to Great Britain and find myself constantly at outs with the people there and yet be perfectly innocent about it. I have been brought up differently, and I don't understand. I have been taught from boyhood in the United States what to do under certain circumstances, but I find I have to learn a new dispensation over there.

Our children go to school, especially our girls, and they study domestic economy, which is the ordering of a house or a home.

Sometimes I illustrate domestic economy like this:

Suppose a young girl goes out to learn how to become a housekeeper. She takes a position in a certain home. By and by she becomes thoroughly adept and trustworthy. The mistress can depend upon her under all circumstances and feels that Mary knows just how she wants things run, and with a mere word from her, everything is understood. Well, after a few years, Mary feels that she is so proficient that she can get a better position. She is working in a little home where the people are working people who get up early in the morning, so she has to be up at five, have the breakfast ready at 5:30, on the table by 6:00, lunches prepared for the men by 6:30, etc., and she knows exactly how this house is to be run. But now she learns that the big house up yonder on the heights is in need of a housekeeper. They pay more and Mary wants to earn all she can, so she interviews the mistress, and finally, everything being satisfactory, she leaves the one place and goes to work in the mansion.

She comes to the new home, and the mistress takes her into the kitchen and says, "Mary, let me tell you now what to do."

"Oh, you don't need to bother. I know exactly how a house should be run. I wouldn't have taken this position if I didn't understand how to run a house."

"But, Mary, not all houses are run the same way."

"Oh, that's all right; you needn't tell me anything.

It isn't necessary. You can leave everything to me."

So the first morning Mary is up at five o'clock and the gong is duly rung at 5:30. The man of the house jumps up and calls to his wife, "My dear, whatever is the matter? Is the house on fire?"

"Why, I don't know," she replies, and rushes to the head of the stairs and calls down, "Mary, what is it?"

"Why, mum, it just means that breakfast will be on the table in half an hour."

"Breakfast in half an hour! Why, we don't sit down to breakfast here until nine o'clock. What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean that they always had breakfast at six o'clock where I have been working."

"That's all right, Mary, but I tried to explain to you yesterday that you must learn how to run things in this house. I can't have this sort of thing! Now, do your best until nine o'clock. Ring a rising bell at eight-thirty if you like."

Poor Mary bursts into tears because her thriftiness is not appreciated. She learns the importance of dispensational truth.

How do we apply this? Some of us remember the time when we read the Bible fervently and devoutly prayed to understand it; but we were always in confusion of mind. Why? Because we were trying to apply the order that prevailed in the house of Israel to the church, the house of GOD, in this dispensation. Then we took the passages that apply to the dispensation of the "**fulness of time**," when CHRIST will come and "**in his own times, show who is that blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and the Lord of lords**," and we applied all those passages to the present dispensation, and we couldn't make them fit.

I am reminded of the Scotch Covenanters, those good old people among whom were some of my own ancestors. The Scotch Covenanters took their swords and were ready to fight for their religion. They entered into a solemn covenant to oppose Episcopacy and establish Presbyterianism, which they conceived as the only divine religion on earth. They did this with good conscience because they believed that GOD had set up His kingdom now, that JESUS CHRIST is King, and that those who neglected Presbyterianism were the enemies of the kingdom of GOD on earth. They did not understand dispensational truth. Then take Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages. The church fought with sword and fire to destroy heresy because they did not understand the present age of grace.

When you come to the Word of GOD and you recognize this dispensational principle running through the Scriptures, everything opens up in a perfectly marvelous way.

In Ephesians, we have read of "**the purpose of the ages**." Augustine said, "Distinguish the ages and the Scriptures are plain." I saw a sentence in a book the other day that all this dispensational

teaching has come about within the last fifty years. There was never a greater mistake and blunder. Godly men in all the Christian centuries have taught it, but in our day, this light is shining brighter and brighter.

DISPENSATION OF INNOCENCE

Going back to the creation of man, we see that GOD placed Adam and Eve in the garden of delight. You can see that the economy under which our first parents were placed in the Garden of Eden was altogether different to the economy under which we are placed in this present day. What was the stewardship committed to Adam and Eve? They were to dress and keep the garden and have authority over all creation. The beasts were brought to Adam and whatever he called them, they were named. All was subject to them, but there was one stipulation - they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

That was their stewardship. That was the dispensation of innocence. Who would say for a moment that that dispensation, that stewardship, that administration fits with ours? They failed in their stewardship and were turned out. **"Give an account of thy stewardship,"** the master says to the servant. "Give an account of thy dispensational responsibility." So they were turned out and that dispensation ended.

DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE

Take them outside of the garden - from the garden to the flood. Who would dare to say that the same dispensation, the same stewardship, the same administration was committed to the patriarchs in those so far distant millenniums as to us? For instance, we have no record of a Bible, a written revelation, though there may have been one. We are told by Jude that Enoch prophesied concerning the second coming, so there may have been some written record, but as far as we know, writing was not invented before the flood. We have no record of any inspired Bible of any kind before the writings of Moses. The Book of Job may or may not have been written before Moses. Enoch's prophecy may simply have been spoken.

It is certain that they had no body of rules and regulations in regard to conduct as we have in the law. The great thing that seems to stand out in that dispensation is that men now had conscience. They were able to discern between good and evil, and they were held responsible by GOD to choose the good and reject the evil. If men sought consistently after the good, GOD revealed Himself to them.

Abel, bringing his lamb of sacrifice, we are told in Hebrews, offered it by faith. GOD from time to time revealed Himself to them, but they had no written law, no body of doctrine, no organized church. The line of Seth chose the ways of GOD and the line of Cain chose the path of evil, and the two were separated. One called upon the name of the Lord; the other refused obedience to the revealed will of GOD.

We often hear it said by people who don't think things through that we don't need a Bible; men need only to obey the dictates of their consciences. For a period of sixteen hundred years by the Hebrew Version, but nearly two thousand years by the Septuagint, men were left largely to the dictates of conscience. What was the result? Corruption and violence filled the earth. GOD said,

"The only thing to do is to wipe it out with a flood." Thus that dispensation came to an end.

DISPENSATION OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT

A dispensation is a period of time, long or short, in which GOD is dealing with men in a different way than He has ever dealt with them before. He dealt with them one way in the garden. He dealt with them differently from the expulsion until the flood. Now, consider the period from the flood to the calling out of Abraham.

What difference have we in GOD's way of dealing with men in this period ? We do not yet have a written Bible. We do not yet have a called-out nation nor a called-out church, but we do have something added to check man's natural propensities and hold him in subjection. We now have the principle of human government.

GOD constituted Noah the first magistrate, so far as records show, that the world ever knew. We have no word whatever of magistracy before the flood - no divinely given form of government. GOD, Himself, out of love for His creatures, seeing their need of Him, instituted human government. Brutal and wicked men came into the place of power, but the Apostle tells us that the institution was a divine one. GOD appointed a magistrate, and a new principle came into operation.

With all the experience of the past and with the fearful warning of the flood, surely this little company coming out from the ark will remember the past and will be grateful to GOD for the new provision He has made, and will be in subjection to Him, and the authority He has instituted. What is the result? Follow it down, and again if you take the Septuagint, about one thousand years go by and at the end of the first millennium after the flood the whole human race has gone into idolatry. Instead of men obeying conscience and being subject to government and authority, the governors themselves have become apostate.

Nimrod, the mighty hunter before the Lord, the hunter of the souls of men, is the first despot and first apostate. We find that men need more than conscience, need more than corrective power of environment and government to turn them to GOD. Of course, in all dispensations, GOD has undoubtedly saved thousands of men for Heaven of whom we have no record in Scripture. I do not suppose that all of the people who lived before the flood were lost eternally. Wherever men in any dispensation have obeyed the light GOD has given them, He has revealed Himself to them so that they could believe and be saved. But the dispensation of government closed in the darkness of idolatry.

DISPENSATION OF PROMISE

With the call of Abraham we have the beginning of another dispensation, GOD calling Abraham out from an idolatrous people and revealing Himself and giving the promise of the coming Saviour.

Up to that time there had been only one promise given - the primeval promise made in the garden that the serpent should bruise the seed of the woman and He should bruise its head. Men could look forward, as they did undoubtedly, to the coming Seed of the woman, who was

eventually to make propitiation for sin.

When GOD calls Abraham and tells him, "**In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,**" He gives Abraham the promise of the coming Saviour. What we may call the dispensation of promise began with Abraham. We have something we have not had before. The old dispensation changes and the new dispensation comes in. GOD is dealing with men in a different way.

How were men to be saved now? "**Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.**" "**Abraham rejoiced to see my day. He saw it and was glad,**" said our blessed Lord. He looked forward in faith to the coming Saviour. That dispensation was a brief one. Our definition says "a period of time either long or short."

Now, the people of Israel go down into Egypt. They have the promise and are sure of it, and that promise is so well known even in Egypt that the time comes when the man looked upon as the heir to the throne of Egypt, the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, considers that promise. I suppose it had been told him by his own mother; we read, "**He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.**" Why? Because he was ready to assume the reproach of CHRIST. What did Moses know about the reproach of CHRIST? He knew that CHRIST was to come through the despised people, the seed of Abraham, and he said, "I will identify myself with them."

DISPENSATION OF LAW

Then we come to the scene on Mount Sinai. Now what? A new dispensation altogether, that of law. The moment the Law is given, GOD has committed an altogether different administration to them. Yet we are told there is only one dispensation in the Old Testament. What did Abraham know about the provision of Law? What did Noah know about the Law before the flood? Nothing whatsoever. They were given something they had never had before.

Was the Law given in order that men might be saved? The Law was given even at the very first in order to prove to man his helplessness. GOD always casts man upon His own infinite mercy and grace for salvation.

I attended a little church in a country village one Sunday and got there just as Sunday school was convening. I was asked to go into the Bible class. I do not remember the particular chapter they were studying, but the leader put this question: "Class, how were people saved before CHRIST came into the world?"

Someone answered, "By keeping the Law."

"Exactly," said the leader. He was going on, and I did not, as a stranger, want to interrupt, but I said, "I beg your pardon, but did I understand that correctly? Did you say that people were saved by keeping the Law before CHRIST came into the world?"

"Certainly, until CHRIST came that was the only way."

"Well, then, what do you do with this verse in Galatians, **'If there had been a law given which could have given life, then verily righteousness would have been by the law'?**"

"Oh, yes, I hadn't thought of that. Well, class, we were wrong. What other suggestions have you?"

Finally a woman spoke up, "Why, by offering animal sacrifices."

"Exactly; I think the woman is right. Now, is that satisfactory?"

"It would be but for a verse here, **'It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should put away sin.'**

"Oh, yes, that's true isn't it? Well, then how do you think that people were saved before CHRIST came into the world?"

"Why, exactly as Abraham. He rejoiced to see the salvation of the Lord. He saw it and was glad. They looked on in faith to the Seed of Abraham."

Wherever men will honestly judge themselves and repent, GOD will give them light enough to be saved. They were saved through the same sacrifice as that which saved us; they were saved through the coming Saviour as we are through the risen Saviour.

David lived in the dispensation of law. David committed a fearful sin, and he cried aloud, **"Against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight."** Why did he not hurry down to the temple and offer a sacrifice? **"In burnt offerings and sacrifice [for sin] thou hast no pleasure. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."** He depended upon the infinite sacrifice of the Lord JESUS CHRIST yet to be offered.

The dispensation of law did not propose the Law as a means of salvation but proposed the Law as the expression of integrity of heart toward GOD. People honest toward GOD would seek to keep that Law, and failing to keep it, it would impress upon them their own sinfulness and the need of a Saviour. Paul said, **"The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ."**

Our blessed Lord, when He died on Calvary, cried, **"It is finished."** What was finished? The work of saving poor sinners was finished. The dispensation of law was finished. On the Cross, He bore in His own body all the penalty of that outraged Law.

DISPENSATION OF GRACE

There is a verse in Colossians that is rarely ever explained in a way that seems at all clear, and yet I believe it is a most striking picture. Colossians 2:14:

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross."

In this connection we often hear the illustration used of the old-fashioned way of keeping books.

There were nails on the wall, and when you bought something, the grocery man made out a slip and placed it on the nail. Then when you paid your bill, you presented your slips and he put them on another nail. They were nailed to the wall. But we learn from history that it was customary under the Roman law if a man were to be hanged on a tree for some crime, to write out the indictment, the law, the particular crime of which he was guilty and nail it on the Cross above his head. Pilate did that. He placed a placard over the head of JESUS CHRIST, which read, "**Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews,**" which meant that He was a traitor to Caesar. He had dared to set Himself up as King of the Jews. That was the crime for which He hung on the tree. Over each of the robbers' heads a placard was nailed upon which was written the crime of which they were guilty, the laws they had broken. They were suffering for having broken those laws.

So our blessed CHRIST, hanging upon the tree, with Pilate's statement over His head, was supposed to die because He had declared Himself King of the Jews! But, although His hands were nailed to that cross, yet in a spiritual sense they were free to nail His own accusation to that Cross. He, as it were, nailed over His own head, the Law; the ten words given at Mount Sinai. He died because of the violation of that holy Law. Who broke it? Did He? No. He took it out of the way for us, nailing it to His Cross.

Now the penalty is paid. Everything is settled. So far as we are concerned, we are under grace, and that brings us to the present glorious dispensation the Apostle Paul calls the dispensation of the grace of GOD, and the dispensation of the mystery, the dispensation of the grace of GOD because He is making known His free grace in CHRIST JESUS to all who believe. "**By grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of GOD. Not of works, lest any man should boast.**" "

I remember some years ago preaching in Salt Lake City. I was younger then and had a little more fire and energy. Every night I would stand out in the snow and preach - it was during the winter time - and although I had a place with an awning where the people were protected, I was standing in the snow and preaching to them. One night I was preaching the Gospel to about three hundred Mormons, when a surly man came along and said, "Look here, may I ask you a question?"

"Yes, if you will be prompt, please."

"I am an elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. I understood you to say that we could be saved by grace apart from human merit. I deny that, and I challenge you to show me a place in the Bible that says that anybody can be saved by grace without works."

I opened my Bible and read Romans 4:4-5: "**But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.**" I also read in Ephesians (chapter 2), "**By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.**"

"Let me see that," he said, and I handed him my Bible. "This is not in my Bible."

"What kind of a Bible have you? I think it is."

"I have read my Bible a good many times, but I never saw that."

"Well, when you go home tonight, you just look it up."

"What kind of a Bible have you?"

"This is the Authorized Version."

"Oh, well, that explains it all. I use the King James Version."

"Well," I said, "you know perhaps that the Authorized Version and the King James are the same."

"Is that so? I never knew that. Does yours have the letter to King James in the front of it?"

"Yes."

"Well, all I have got to say is that I have never seen that in my Bible, and if that is in the Bible, I would rather have the Book of Mormon any day," and he ripped out a fearful oath and cursed and damned the Bible.

I saw my advantage, and I said, "Look here, this is a practical demonstration of the thing that I have been preaching. Here is an elder of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, and he tells us that he is saved by his own works. We have just had a sample of his works-cursing and swearing. Now, I come to you as a younger in the church of JESUS CHRIST of the former-day saints, telling you that I am saved by grace alone, without works, and I challenge you to put a detective on my tracks, and if you can find one unholy thing that I am saying or one wicked thing that I am doing, you can proclaim it from the housetops." Grace makes us righteous.

This is also called the dispensation of mystery.

This is the age when GOD had made known His eternal purpose to take out of Jew and Gentile a people and unite them into one body; His Body and His Bride. When He reigns, He will not reign alone. This secret was never revealed in the Old Testament period - that the church, brought out of Jew and Gentile, united by the Holy Ghost during this present dispensation, should some day reign with Him.

When this dispensation is ended, are there any others to follow? According to some of our recent writers, there are not. The next great event will be, they say, the coming of the Lord; that the rapture and the appearing will all take place at the same time and that GOD is then through with Israel; that the promises to Israel are now being fulfilled spiritually in the church; that we are to be called up to Heaven and the earth is to be destroyed by fire; that there is no dispensation to follow this. They are telling us that we have been misled during all these years of dispensational teaching; that they don't know when the Lord may come; that all the things and signs of the times leading on to the end amount to nothing; that there will not be a millennium; that we may be here a few thousand years or less, that they don't know, but when this dispensation is ended, we shall enter immediately into our eternal state.

THE MILLENNIUM

What do we find when we come to this old Book?

Paul points out to the Ephesians another dispensation. I shall not touch on the brief dispensation of judgment. Some think that hardly deserves the dignified name of a dispensation. I am thinking of this glorious dispensation of the "**fulness of time**," commonly called the millennium. The time will come when our Lord JESUS will be King over all the world, and He will show the world a happy potentate. Shakespeare says, "Unhappy lies the head that wears the crown," but when JESUS comes, He will be a happy King. When He comes He will show us who is that blessed (or happy) and only potentate; there will be no other. JESUS alone will be King in that day. There will be no one to dispute His sway.

We are told that the term "*millennium*" is never found in Scripture. It is true that the Latin word is not found, but we have the English equivalent, "**a thousand years**," and this is found six times in the twentieth chapter of Revelation.

We read that the serpent is bound for one thousand years. When did the binding of Satan take place? If this is all in the past, we have never known the time when Satan was really bound. He has always seemed active so far as our own day is concerned. He is to be bound for one thousand years and is not to deceive the nations any more until the thousand-year period is over.

Revelation 20:4: "**And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.**"

This refers to the church and the martyred tribulation saints. Verse 5: "**But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.**" This is the fourth time this is mentioned. "**Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection, on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.**" Verse 7: "**And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison.**" And this is what we mean by "*the millennium*."

This term has been used in the church from the very earliest ages, but now men rise up who profess to have increased light and suddenly discover that there is never to be a millennium. But this Scripture stands as a bulwark in the way of all who would deny that CHRIST is yet to reign for a thousand glorious years.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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