

Three Dispensations:

The Age of Israel, the Age of the Hypostatic Union and the Church Age

(Taken from Lessons #124–125 in the study of Genesis)

Gen 13:14–17 The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

Abram has 3 categories of *offspring*: (1) those who are descended from him, but are not regenerate (such as, Esau, his grandson); (2) those who are descended from him, and, because of their faith in Jehovah Elohim, are also heirs to the promise (Isaac and Jacob, his son and grandson); and (3) those who have believed in Jesus Christ, who are Abraham's sons by faith (Gal. 3:6–7). The latter 2 categories will be like the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16), the sand of the sea (Gen. 22:7), and the stars of the sky (Gen. 15:5). These are those God promised would be blessed through Abram's Seed, which is Christ.

At this point in time in the book of Genesis, we are moving from the Age of the Gentiles into the Age of the Israel. We examined the doctrine of dispensations back in [Introduction to the Bible, Lesson #6](#), and we differentiated between these ages at that time. Everyone reacts to this doctrine of dispensations in different ways. For me, the first time I saw it (it was on a small chart I got from a bookstore), it made perfect sense to me—I believed it immediately. To others, this doctrine does not interest them one way or the other. And then, to others, who have been brought up in a church which teaches and emphasizes covenant theology (which teaches that the *church* begins in Abraham's tent), it is a difficult adjustment. However, simply put, God deals with the human race in a slightly different way and functions through a different set of institutions in each dispensation. Some things remain constant throughout, e.g., salvation comes by faith in Christ in all dispensations; and [the laws of divine establishment](#) remain intact throughout all human history. Some dramatic differences include, God works primarily through the nation Israel during the Jewish Age and primarily through the church during the Church Age. During the Age of the Hypostatic Union, there is no church and the religious institutions in Israel had become incredibly corrupt so that God no longer functioned through them. Furthermore, since Jesus Christ was on the earth, speaking directly to man, there were no intermediary institutions needed. Therefore, the Temple, the Ark of God, and animal sacrifices are all set aside, because their antitype, in the person of Jesus Christ, is walking the earth (John 1:14 Heb. 6:6).

These are 3 very different dispensations (the Age of Israel, the 1st Advent of Christ, and the Church Age), during which God communicates with His people through 3 very different institutions: through Israel, through His Son, and through the church. **Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the Heir of all things, through whom also He created the world** (Heb. 1:1–2).

In the Age of the Gentiles (Gen. 1–11), God worked through individuals—primarily, those in a particular line—and we do not have a record of a codified system of law (apart from a prohibition of murder), although, there appears to have been one (Gen. 26:5). In the Jewish Age, God will work within a particular family, which will become a nation; and God will work through that nation. God will give that nation a very specific set of laws; laws which fall into different categories. There are the Ten Commandments, which are nearly a universal law for all mankind; there is a system of civil law, which can be, to some degree, transferred from nation to nation, and modified according to the norms of that society. There will also be the ceremonial law, which will codify the various animal sacrifices to God, all of which look forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Most of the Bible will be composed during the Age of Israel.

The Age of Israel is broken up into 3 parts: the Time of the Patriarchs (from Abraham to Moses), the Law and the Nation Israel (from Moses to Jesus), and the Tribulation (the final 7 years which will follow the end of the Church Age). Until Moses, we do not have the Mosaic Law (also called the Torah). However, we have some sort of system of law, because God will later say to Abram: **“I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky, I will give your offspring all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed by your offspring, because Abraham listened to My voice and kept My mandate, My commands, My statutes, and My laws [My torah].”** (Gen. 26:4–5).

In the second phase of the Jewish Age, we deal with Moses and the nation Israel, and Moses will give God’s Law to the Jews—which laws are recorded in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. The 3rd phase occurs at the end of the Church Age, after the church is taken out of the world. For the purposes of our study, the Patriarchal Age begins in Gen. 12 and goes until the end of Genesis.

Dispensations, an Overview

Dispensation	Period	Date	Scripture
The Age of Israel	The Patriarchal Period	2100–1445 B.C.	Gen. 12–50
The Age of Israel	The Nation Israel	1445–5 B.C.	Ex. 1 to Malachi
The Age of the Hypostatic Union		5 B.C.–33 A.D.	The Gospels
The Church Age	Pre-Canon Period	A.D. 33–100	The Book of Acts
The Church Age	Post-Canon Period	100–present	The Epistles and Rev. 1–3

The Age of Israel	The Tribulation; the 2 nd Advent of Jesus Christ	7 years following the Church Age	Rev. 4–20
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- The Age of Israel looks forward to the Age of the Hypostatic Union. This can be represented by the altars on which animals were sacrificed.
- The Church Age looks backward to the Age of the Hypostatic Union. This can be represented by the Eucharist, which recalls the cross upon which our Lord paid for our sins.
- The Law of Moses from the Age of Israel is fulfilled by our Lord during the Age of the Hypostatic Union.
- The spiritual life of the Church Age believer is initiated in the Age of the Hypostatic Union, where Jesus “test drives” the spiritual life all believers in the Church Age are given.

Dispensation comes from the Greek word *oikonomia* (οἰκονομία) [pronounced *oy-koh-nohm-EE-uh*], which means: 1) *the management of a household or of household affairs; 1a) specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of other’s property; 1b) the office of a manager or overseer, stewardship; 1c) administration, dispensation.* Thayer definitions. Strong’s #3622.

- In the Age of Israel, God works first through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph; and later, through the nation Israel. First the patriarchs and then the nation Israel are in charge or managing the Lord’s household.
- In the Age of the Hypostatic Union, God works through Jesus Christ, His Son.
- In the Church Age, God primarily works through the local church. The church universal (all believers in Jesus Christ) and the local church become the stewards of God’s plan and purpose. God works through us, in the Church Age.

Let’s sum up this information.

Three Dispensations Summarized			
	Age of Israel	Age of the Hypostatic Union	The Church Age
Scripture	Old Testament beginning at Gen. 12 including Rev. 4–20	The Gospels	Acts and the epistles and Rev. 1–3
Time	2100–4 B.C. + 7 years	4 B.C.–A.D. 33	A.D. 33–rapture

Three Dispensations Summarized

	Age of Israel	Age of the Hypostatic Union	The Church Age
Ritual and Reality	The Tabernacle, Temple, sacrifices and Ark of God all looked forward to Jesus Christ	The incarnation of Jesus Christ, Who becomes the focal point of human history	We look back to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, celebrating that in the Lord's supper.
Specific Differences	The Mosaic Law, the animal sacrifices, the rituals and the Sabbaths.	The incarnation of Jesus Christ, fulfilling the Mosaic Law, and pioneering the spiritual life for the next age.	The Lord's Supper; the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit; the universal priesthood of the believer.
How Jesus is Revealed	Jesus is revealed through types and prophecies	Jesus Christ presents Himself to mankind. His work on the cross delivers us from eternal judgment. He is the antitype of dozens of types, as well as the fulfillment of all Messianic prophecies	In the Church Age, we look back upon all of this historically, as revealed in the Word of God. We study types and antitypes, prophecies and their fulfillments, which gives us great confidence in the Word of God
Spiritual life	Empowerment of the Holy Spirit is given only to a relatively few believers with specific responsibilities.	Jesus Christ kept the Law by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit and test-drove the spiritual life for believers in the Church Age. His disciples received the Holy Spirit by asking for it.	All believers receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and may choose to be filled with the Spirit. All believers potentially have spiritual impact. All believers are priests before God.

Three Dispensations Summarized

	Age of Israel	Age of the Hypostatic Union	The Church Age
Agency through which God works	The patriarchs and then the nation Israel; the Jews themselves; the kings and prophets of Israel	Jesus Christ	Church Age believers (the church universal) and the local church

I realize that this is repetitive, but this keeps you from confusing the dispensations.

The purpose of studying dispensations is so that you can see where we are in human history at this time, and where we are going. We are with Abraham—God is speaking to him, making great promises to him; and these promises begin the Age of Israel.

The Age of the Hypostatic Union is the cornerstone between the Age of Israel and the Church Age. All of the requirements of the Law, all of the fulfillments of prophecy, and all of the types are revealed in our Lord. He perfectly keeps the Law of Moses; He perfectly fulfills every single prophecy in the Old Testament; and He is the antitype for all the Old Testament types which looked forward to Him.

Jesus is the basis of the salvation of everyone in the Old and New Testaments. He takes upon Himself our sins and received the punishment which we deserve for our sins; and we are saved because we exercise faith in Him. The basis for our salvation is accomplished during the Age of the Hypostatic Union. The Old Testament looks forward to this sacrifice in many ways, going all the way back to God putting skins on Adam and the woman, in order to cover up their nakedness. In order for that to happen, an animal had to die.

Jesus lives His life by means of the power of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Word of God, which is the prototype spiritual life which we will lead in the Church Age. That is, we have the exact same spiritual assets as Jesus. We lead a spiritual life with the same power that Jesus had. Unless the plan of God called for it, Jesus depended upon the Holy Spirit for his power. He restricted the independent use of the attributes of His Deity (this is known as the doctrine of kenosis). He always had access to the use of His Deity (which is revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration to Peter, James and John), but He chose not to depend upon His Deity (Matt. 4:1–4 Philip. 2:6–8). He depended completely upon the power of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of the Word of God (Luke 2:40, 52)—in the **exact same way that we depend upon the Holy Spirit and the Word of God**. In the plan of God, Jesus did not sometimes operate from His Deity, when that was convenient; and, at other times, operate from His humanity by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit (this is what the temptation of Jesus by Satan is all about). For example, Jesus did not depend upon His omniscience to understand all things; He depended upon learning the Word of God, word upon word, doctrine built upon doctrine (again, Luke 2:40, 52).

Jesus not only had His Deity to which He could turn, but He had legions of angels which He could have called upon (Matt. 26:53 Luke 4:9–12). However, this was not in God's plan. Jesus was to accomplish God's plan with the exact same spiritual assets as we have. Therefore, every time that we are in some kind of jam (usually of our own making), we ought not to depend upon some great miracle of God or upon the intervening of angels (they do intervene and they do protect us, but that is in the world that we do not see). Our life, like His, is based upon the filling of the Holy Spirit and the inculcation of doctrine in our souls.