Genesis 2:7 (Cyrus Ingerson Scofield) 122093

Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth: Ten Outline Studies of the More Important Divisions of Scripture, Seven Dispensations (2:7)

The Scriptures divide time—by which is meant the entire period from the creation of Adam to the "new heaven and a new earth" of Rev. 21:1— into seven unequal periods, called "dispensations" (Eph. 3:2), "ages" (Eph. 2:7) and "days," as in the "day of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:10).

These periods are marked off in Scripture by some change in God's method of dealing with mankind, or a portion of mankind, in respect of the two questions of sin and of man's responsibility. Each of the dispensations may be regarded as a new test of the natural man, and each ends in judgment—marking his utter failure.

Five of these dispensations, or periods of time, have been fulfilled. We are living in the sixth, probably towards its close, and have before us the seventh, and last—the millennium.

1. Man Innocent

This dispensation extends from the creation of Adam (Gen. 2:7) to his expulsion from Eden. Adam, created innocent and ignorant of good and evil, was placed in the garden with his wife, Eve, and put under responsibility to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The dispensation of innocence resulted in the first failure of man and in its far-reaching effects, the most disastrous of the failures of the natural man. It closed in judgment: "So He drove out the man" ({vi 26;47-48;62;78-80}Gen. 1:26; 2:16-17; 3:6, 22-24).

2. Man Under Conscience

By the fall, Adam and Eve acquired and transmitted to the race the knowledge of good and evil. This gave conscience a basis for right moral judgment, and hence the race came under this measure of responsibility—to do good and shun evil. The result of the dispensation of conscience was that "all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth," that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And God closed the second testing of the natural man with judgment the Flood ({vi 63;78;143;149-150;183;171-172}Gen. 3:7, 22; 6:5,11-12; 7:23,11-12).

3. Man in Authority Over the Earth

Out of the fearful judgment of the Flood, God saved eight persons to whom, after the waters were calmed, He gave the purified earth with ample power to govern it. This, Noah and his descendants were responsible to do. The dispensation of human government resulted, upon the plain of Shinar, in the impious attempt to become independent of God and closed in judgment—the confusion of tongues ({vi 207-208;281;272-275}Gen. 9:1-2; 11:14, 5-8).

4. Man Under Promise

Out of the dispersed descendants of the builders of Babel, God now calls one man Abram, with whom He enters into covenant. Some of the promises to Abram and his descendants were purely gracious and unconditional. These either have been, or will yet be, literally fulfilled. Other promises were conditional upon the faithfulness and obedience of the Israelites. Every one of these conditions was violated, and the dispensation of promise resulted in the utter failure of Israel, and closed in the judgment of bondage in Egypt.

5. Man Under Law

Again the grace of God came to the help of helpless man and redeemed the chosen people out of the hand of their oppressor. In the Wilderness of Sinai He proposed to them the covenant of law. Instead of humbly pleading for a continued relation of grace, they presumptuously answered, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." The history of Israel in the wilderness and in the land is one long record of flagrant, persistent violation of the law; and at last, after multiplied warnings, God closed the testing of man by law in judgment, and first Israel, and then Judah, were driven out of the land into a dispersion which still continues. A feeble remnant returned under Ezra and Nehemiah, of which, in due time, Christ came, "born of a woman—made under the law." Both Jews and Gentiles conspired to crucify Him ({vi 2028-2035}Ex. 19:1-8; {vi 28011-28012;28194}Rom. 3:19-20;10:5; Gal. 3:10, {vi 28011-28012}Rom. 3:19-20; {vi 9985-10002;10224-10234}2 Kings 17:1-18; 25:1-11; {vi 26972-26973;27168-27169}Acts 2:22-23; 7:51-52).

6. Man Under Grace

The sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ introduced the dispensation of pure grace—which means undeserved favor, or God giving righteousness, instead of requiring righteousness, as under Law. Salvation, perfect and eternal, is now freely offered to Jew and Gentile upon the one condition of faith.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (John 6:29).

"He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life" (John 6:47).

"He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life" (John 5:24).

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" ({vi 26509-26510}John 10:27-28).

"For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast" ({vi 29238-29239}Eph. 2:8-9 RV).

The predicted result of this testing of man under grace is judgment upon an unbelieving world and an apostate Church ({vi 30762-30763}Rev. 3:15-16; {vi 25697;25678-25682}Luke 18:8; 17:26-30; {vi 29669-29674}2 Thess. 2:7-12). The first event in the closing of this dispensation will be the descent of the Lord from heaven, when sleeping saints will be raised and, together with believers then living, caught up "to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" ({vi 29620-29621}1 Thess. 4:16-17). Then follows the brief period called "the great tribulation" ({vi 23979-23980}Matt. 24:21-22; {vi 22803-22806}Zeph. 1:15-18; Dan. 12:1; {vi 19673-19675}Jer. 30:5-7).

After this, the personal return of the Lord to the earth in power and great glory occurs, and the judgments which introduce the seventh and last dispensation ({vi 23987-23988;24040-24055}Matt. 24:29-30; 25:31-46).

7. Man Under the Reign of Christ

After the purifying judgments which accompany His personal return to the earth, Christ will reign over restored Israel and over the earth for one thousand years. This is the period commonly called the Millennium. The seat of His power will be Jerusalem, and the saints, including the saved of the dispensation of grace (the Church) will be associated with Him in His glory ({vi 27457-27460}Acts 15:14-17; {vi 17687-17690}Isa. 2:1-4; {vi 31029-31039;31040-31045}Rev. 19:11-21;20:1-6; Isa. 11).

But when Satan is "loosed a little season" he finds the natural heart as prone to evil as ever, and easily gathers the nations to battle against the Lord and His saints, and this last dispensation closes, like the others, in judgment. The "great white throne" is set, the wicked dead are raised and finally judged, and then come the "new heaven and a new earth." ({vi 31042;31046-31054}Rev. 20:3,7-15; ch. 21,22).

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