

THE THREE DISPENSATIONS OF GOD'S WILL TO MAN

Introduction: *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork"* (Psm. 19:1). Thus, to know God's *glory*, and His *handywork*, let us study the heavens and the firmament. But one may study the stars until the day of his death and never know one thing about the *WILL* of God to mankind. To know God's *WILL*, man must study His Word.

A careful study of God's Word, the Bible, shows it is divided into THREE DISPENSATIONS – Patriarchal, Jewish and Christian. God revealed His Will to men in each dispensation. However, God's will in one dispensation (i.e. Divinely appointed order or system) was not the same in succeeding dispensations. From God's Word, let us study the basic differences:

I. THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION (Genesis 1:1 to Exodus 20).

- A. For approximately the first 2,500 years of mankind, God dealt with human beings as individuals and families.
 - 1. The head of each family, called the "*patriarch*," was used as a sort of priest over his family.
 - 2. This was from Adam to Moses.
- B. During this period, God commanded one thing of one person, another thing of another person; His commands from one person or family to the next were not necessarily the same.
- C. EXAMPLES:
 - 1. **Adam and Eve** – God commanded, "*thou shalt not eat*" – Gen. 2:17.
 - a. The consequences – Gen. 3:1-24
 - b. Whom else were ever commanded not to eat of this tree? No one else!
 - 2. **Noah** – God commanded him to build an ark of gopher wood – Gen. 6:14-16.
 - a. God was grieved by the wickedness of man – Gen. 6:5-6.
 - b. God determined to destroy man from the face of the earth – Gen. 6:7.
 - c. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord – Gen. 6:8.
 - d. Though no rain is recorded to have fallen upon the earth, Noah believed God and did ALL that God commanded him – Gen. 6:22.
 - e. The result – Genesis 7 - 8.
 - f. Whom else were ever commanded to build such an ark? No one else!
 - 3. **Abraham** – God commanded him to offer his son on an altar as an offering – Gen. 22:1-2.
 - a. The purpose was to prove Abraham's faith – Gen. 22:1, 12.
 - b. Abraham proceeded to do exactly as God commanded, until God was satisfied of his faithfulness and stayed his hand (vs. 3-14).
 - c. God blessed Abraham for his faithfulness – Gen. 22:1-24
 - d. Whom else did God command to offer his son as an offering? No one else!
- D. From the foregoing, we see that God's revealed Will, during the time of the patriarchs from Adam to Moses, *differed* from one individual and/or family to another.

II. THE JEWISH DISPENSATION – Exodus 20 to Acts 2.

- A. Toward the end of the patriarchal period, Abraham's grandson, Jacob, wrestled with an angel one night "*until the breaking of the day*" – Gen. 32:24-32.

1. This angel was unable to prevail against Jacob (v. 25).
 2. He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, and it went out of joint (v. 25).
 3. The angel said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh" (v. 26).
 4. Jacob said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (v. 26).
 5. The angel said, "What is thy name?" And he said, "Jacob" (v. 27).
 6. The angel replied, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel" (v. 28).
 7. The angel blessed him (v. 29).
- B. Hundreds of years before this, God told Abraham (then called Abram) to go to a land that I will shew thee and "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:1-3).
- C. By the end of their sojourn in the land of Egypt, several centuries later, Abraham's descendents, now known as the "children of Israel" had, indeed, become "a great nation."
1. The children of Israel were fruitful, increased abundantly, and multiplied, and grew mighty; and the land was filled with them (Exod. 1:7).
 2. The Egyptians had become jealous of them (i.e., the Jews) and subjected them to bondage and slavery (Exod. 1:8-14).
 3. God raised up a mighty leader among the children of Israel, named Moses.
 4. After fruitless contention with the Egyptians, Moses led the children of Israel out of bondage into the wilderness of Zin, which was across the Red Sea from Egypt (Exod. 14).
 5. In the third month after leaving bondage, they came to the wilderness of Sinai (Exod. 19:1).
 - a. In that wilderness, they camped before a certain mountain (v. 2).
 - b. God called Moses up into the mountain to talk (v. 3).
 - c. God told Moses if the people would obey Him and keep His covenant, He should make them a peculiar treasure unto Himself above all others (v. 5).
- D. Having chosen the children of Israel to be His "people," God gave them a special "law" at Mount Sinai (Exod. 20).
1. This law was unknown to their fathers (Deut. 5:3).
 2. This law (which included the Ten Commandments) was made with Israel (i.e., those brought out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exod. 20:2).
 3. This law was binding ONLY upon Israel (Deut. 5:1-14).
 4. It was NOT binding upon the Gentiles (Rom. 2:14).
- E. Thus, for approximately the next 1,500 years, God *NO LONGER* dealt with individuals and families, but with the children of Israel, AS A NATION.
(NOTE: This "law" known as "the covenant," "the law of the Lord," or "the law of Moses," thus became a middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles. National Israel had the law; Gentile nations had not the law. This arrangement continued from Moses on Sinai to Christ on Pentecost.

III. THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

- A. Jesus Christ was born under the law of Moses (Gal. 4:4).
- B. Jesus did not come to "destroy" the law, but to "fulfill" it (Matt. 5:17-18).
1. He taught that the law could not pass until ALL BE FULFILLED (v. 18).
 2. His purpose in coming was to FULFILL the law (v. 17).
 3. Jesus FINISHED the work He came to do (John 17:4).
 4. Hence, we see the law passing, *not* by being destroyed, but by being fulfilled.

- C. While Jesus was fulfilling the terms of the OLD LAW – the law under which He was born – He was announcing the principles and terms of a NEW LAW.
 1. This NEW law (or testament) could not come into force, while Jesus was alive upon the earth (Heb. 9:15-17).
 2. This law was to be of force later on.

- D. Also the SECOND law could not be established, while the first law remained (Heb. 10:9).
 1. It was necessary, therefore, that the OLD testament (or law), which came by Moses, be nailed to the cross (figuratively), thus clearing the way for the New Testament to come into force (NOTE: in our next lesson we will examine this more exhaustively).
 2. No part of the old law was carried over into the new.
 3. Every “jot” and “tittle” was abrogated at Calvary.

- E. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), thus empowering the apostles to preach the gospel according to the New Testament (which came into force that day).

- F. The NEW testament, from that day forward, wholly supplanted the OLD testament (Heb. 10:9).
 1. The Jews, who formerly kept the Old Testament, now were obligated to give it up and accept the New Testament.
 2. The Gentiles, who were excluded under the Old Testament, were included under the New Testament.

- G. The New Testament, thus, became the basis of INTERNATIONAL or WORLD-WIDE religion (Luke 24:46-47; Mark 16:15-16).

- H. Beginning on Pentecost (A.D. 33), as set forth in Acts 2, it is to remain in force until the end of time (Matt. 28:20).

IV. CHARTS To Illustrate The THREE DISPENSATIONS

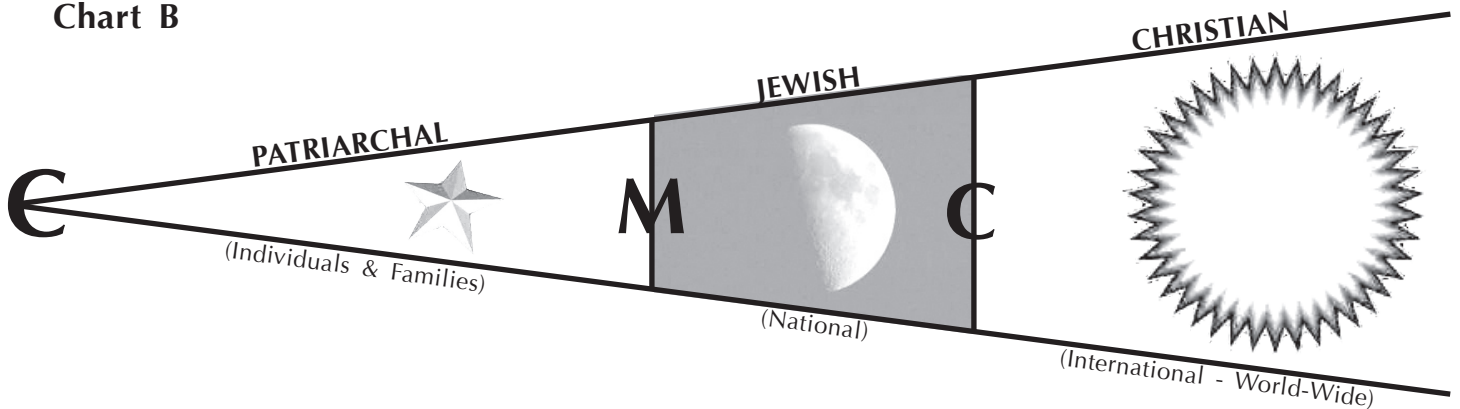
Chart A



EXPLANATION: The center line from C to E represents the passage of time from CREATION to the END of the world. The tree with A&E (left) is the Garden of Eden, where ADAM and EVE were placed. The mountain with M at the top is Moses on Mount Sinai, receiving the LAW. The next C stands for the COMING OF CHRIST; the cross and His crucifixion. The D, B, R is the DEATH, BURIAL and RESURRECTION of Christ from the dead on the third day. P is for PENTECOST 50 days later.

From Adam and Eve to Moses on Sinai, a PATRIARCHAL type of religion reigned, based on the FAMILY, lasting 2,500 years. From Moses to Christ on Pentecost (A.D. 33), the Patriarchal system gave way to the JEWISH religion, based on the children of Israel as a NATION, lasting for 1,500 years. From Christ on Pentecost to the end of time, the CHRISTIAN religion supplants the Jewish; is INTERNATIONAL in character, world-wide in extent, has already lasted almost 2,000 years and must continue to the end of the world.

Chart B



EXPLANATION: Chart B is self-explanatory, but consider two extra thoughts. We have used a STAR in the patriarchal section to denote the tiny bit of “light” God gave to mankind as INDIVIDUALS and FAMILIES during that period. By the time we come to Moses on Sinai, the light of God’s will was greatly increased, as religion was enlarged from family worship to NATIONAL worship (thus we have the MOON to illustrate the idea. But the starlight of the patriarchs and the moonlight of the Jewish nation (i.e., the Old Testament) could in no wise compare with the SUN LIGHT of the CHRISTIAN religion (i.e., the New Testament), whereby Jesus Christ shed His saving grace abroad to ALL MEN EVERYWHERE. Thus we have used the SUN to illustrate the world-wide enlightenment of the CHRISTIAN AGE.

V. IMPORTANCE OF THIS LESSON

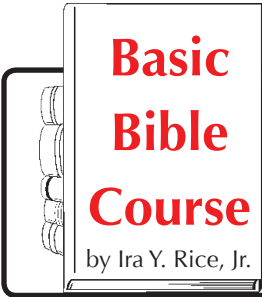
A clear understanding of the Bible cannot be over-emphasized. So many fail to comprehend the Scriptures through failure to recognize they cover THREE DISTINCT and SEPARATE DISPENSATIONS OF RELIGION. God Himself never changes. However, He certainly has changed His will toward man in different dispensations. (All the more reason His Word must be rightly divided.)

It is at once apparent to every thoughtful student that the individual commands God gave to individuals and/or families in the FIRST dispensation ended with the ones to whom the commands were given. For example, when **Adam** and **Eve** died, no one else having been forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the command died with them. No one else having been commanded to build an ark, this command died with **Noah**. No one else having been commanded to offer his son as a burnt offering, this command died with **Abraham**. So also for the other individual commands of the patriarchal dispensation.

But what of the law God gave through Moses on Sinai? Because that law contained the TEN COMMANDMENTS, a great effort is made by some to show that though the law as a whole died, yet the ten commandments continue. Otherwise, we are asked, where is your MORAL LAW?

In the NEXT LESSON, Lesson #4, we will show conclusively that NO PART OF THE LAW to Israel continues over into the New Testament, or Christian dispensation – that EVERY BIT OF IT was, in a figure, “nailed to the cross.” As long as any of that law continued, the New Testament could not come into force.

Please study through the things set forth in this Lesson #3 and then answer the questions.



THE THREE DISPENSATIONS OF GOD'S WILL TO MAN

QUESTIONS ON

Lesson
#3

1. By studying the STARS, can man learn anything about the WILL of God to mankind? _____

2. If not, what must we study to know God's WILL to man? _____
3. A careful study of the Bible shows it is divided into _____ DISPENSATIONS of religion?
4. Name or identify these dispensations: _____

5. From Adam to Moses, what religious dispensation was in force? _____
6. How did God deal with human beings during this period of religion? _____

7. During the Patriarchal dispensation, did God command the SAME things or DIFFERENT things of every man?

8. What was the SECOND dispensation of God's will to mankind? _____
9. To what NATION was the law given on Mount Sinai? _____
10. Whose name was changed to ISRAEL, after he had wrestled with an angel all night (Give book, chapter for your answer)?

11. Was the LAW given on Mount Sinai also given to Israel's fathers? _____
12. What NATION did God make "above all people"? _____
13. Was the LAW given on Mount Sinai also binding upon Gentiles? _____
14. How many years did the PATRIARCHAL dispensation last? _____
15. How many years did the JEWISH dispensation last? _____
16. How many years has the CHRISTIAN dispensation lasted so far? _____

17. Was Jesus Christ born under the law of Moses? _____

18. Concerning the LAW, what was Jesus Christ's PURPOSE in coming to earth? _____

19. Could the law pass BEFORE it was fulfilled? _____

20. Did Jesus Christ FULFILL the law? _____

21. Did the terms of Jesus Christ's NEW testament come into force while He was alive before His death on earth?

22. Did the NEW testament come into force while the FIRST testament was still in force (Heb. 10:9).

23. If the PATRIARCHAL dispensation applied to individuals and families, and the JEWISH dispensation applied to national Israel ONLY, then to whom does the CHRISTIAN dispensation apply?

24. Under what dispensation are we living NOW? _____

25. When is the CHRISTIAN dispensation to end? _____



Basic Bible Course

by Ira Y. Rice, Jr.

Lesson

#3

Name _____

Address _____

Reference # _____

Grade _____