

LESSON TWO: A SURVEY OF BIBLE HISTORY

This lesson will provide you with a survey of Bible history from the creation of the world through the New Testament period. It will serve as a background for the remaining lessons in the course.

THE THREE DISPENSATIONS

Bible history may be divided into three periods of time called dispensations. A dispensation is a system of the laws and promises by which God deals with man, and there have been three different dispensations since the beginning of the world. The first of these periods is called the **Patriarchal Dispensation**, the word patriarch meaning the father of a family or household. During this time God communed directly with patriarchs such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham. The Patriarchal Dispensation lasted from creation to the giving of the Law of Moses (c. 1450 B.C.), and its history is recorded in Genesis 1 through Exodus 20.

The second period is called the **Mosaical Dispensation**, which lasted from the giving of the Law of Moses to the death of Christ (c. 1450 B.C.-33 A.D.). During this period God had a special covenant with the people who were descendants of the twelve sons of a patriarch named Israel. These people are known as the children of Israel, or the Jews. The history of this dispensation is recorded in Exodus 20 through the rest of the Old Testament and "In the four accounts of the gospel—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—in the New Testament.

The third period is the **Christian Dispensation**, which began with the death of Christ on the cross (33 A.D.) and which will continue until the end of the world. During this period man is under the covenant which Christ established for all mankind at his death and which is revealed in the New Testament.

Following is a survey of the history of the three dispensations.

THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION

(Genesis 1 - Exodus 20)

The Creation to the Call of Abraham

(Genesis 1 - 12)

Bible history begins with the creation of the world. Genesis 1 and 2 relate how God made the universe and then created man and woman in his own image, placing them in a paradise known as the Garden of Eden. Man lived happily here until Satan induced him to sin by transgressing God's law, with the result that he was expelled from the garden to make his way in the world (Genesis 3). Yet man left paradise with God's promise that some day one born of a woman would redeem him from his sins (Genesis 3:15). This was the first prophecy of Jesus, the Christ, who would come in the form of man to die on the cross so that man could be saved. Unfortunately men became increasingly wicked in succeeding generations, and God finally determined to destroy them with a great flood (Genesis 6-9). The only one spared were a righteous man named Noah and his family. Noah's sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and they became the fathers of all the nations of the earth. Evidently these nations originated in the incident of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11), when God caused men to begin to speak different languages.

Abraham to Moses

(Genesis 12 - Exodus 20)

Some time near the date of 2000 B.C., God called a man named Abraham to leave his homeland and be his servant. God promised him that his descendants would become a great nation and possess the land of Palestine, and that from his seed would come the Savior of man (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17). Abraham's son was Isaac, and Isaac's son was Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel.

Jacob had twelve sons, one of whom, Joseph, by the providence of God became a ruler in Egypt (Genesis 37-50). Jacob and his family then settled in that country, and the descendants of the twelve sons multiplied into a great nation known as the twelve tribes of Israel. The Egyptians, fearing their numbers and wishing to exploit them, enslaved the Israelites and kept them in bondage for four hundred years. Finally God called, one of the Israelites named Moses to deliver them out of bondage, and after a great struggle with "Pharaoh Moses led his people out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai as God had commanded him (Exodus 1-20).

THE MOSAICAL DISPENSATION

(Exodus 20 - John)

Sinai to the Conquest of Canaan

(Exodus 20 - Joshua)

On Mt. Sinai God established a new dispensation with the children of Israel by giving them a new law, commonly known as the Law of Moses. The Ten Commandments were the heart of the law, and these were accompanied by many other commandments concerning worship and daily life. In return for their obedience, the children of Israel would receive God's blessing and protection and possess the land of Canaan as he had promised Abraham (Deuteronomy 11).

After a forty-year period of wandering in the wilderness of Sinai as punishment for disobedience, the Israelites under the generalship of Moses' successor Joshua conquered the land of Canaan c. 1400 B.C.

The Period of the Judges

(Judges 1 - 1 Samuel 8)

For approximately four hundred years (1400 B.C.-1000 B.C.) the Israelites lived in Canaan with God as their only ruler. During this time they alternately obeyed and were blessed, or disobeyed and were punished by God's allowing them to be afflicted by heathen nations in Canaan such as the Philistines and Ammonites. When Israel would repent, God would raise up a leader called a judge who would deliver them out of oppression. Outstanding among the judges were Deborah, Gideon, Samson, and Samuel. Judges 21:25 says of this period:

"In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

The United Kingdom

(1 Samuel 8 - 1 Kings 12)

Eventually, Israel demanded a king so that they could be like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:4-5). God granted their desire, although he warned them of the persecutions, which a king would inflict on them. The first king of Israel was Saul (1 Samuel 9-31). The second was David, one of the Bible's greatest men, who became king near the time of 1000 B.C. (1 Samuel 17-1 Kings 2). God promised David that the Savior would come from his descendants and would sit on David's throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16). The third king was David's son Solomon, renowned for his great wisdom (1 Kings 1-11). Solomon brought Israel to the height of her national power and built a great temple in Jerusalem for a place of worship. The period of the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon is called the United Kingdom because during this time all Israel served under one monarchy.

The Divided Kingdom

(1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 25, supplemented by 1 and 2 Chronicles and by Isaiah - Lamentations and Hosea - Zephaniah)

After King Solomon's death, his son Rehoboam succeeded him and foolishly oppressed the people, with the result that ten of the tribes of Israel rebelled. The nation was then divided into the Northern Kingdom of Israel, with its capital in Samaria, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah, with its capital in Jerusalem.

There followed a troubled time. All of the kings of Israel were wicked, and it was finally defeated by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., never to rise again. Many of the kings of Judah were obedient to God, but the people ultimately lapsed into sin and idolatry. In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and led the people away to captivity in his country. During this period several prophets of God had preached to both Judah and Israel and warned them of destruction if they did not repent of their sins. These included Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, whose histories and prophecies are recorded in the Old Testament books, which bear their names.

The Exilic and Post-Exilic Periods

(Ezra - Esther, Ezekiel - Daniel, and Haggai - Malachi)

The Jews stayed in Babylonian captivity for about seventy years (c. 605 B.C.-c. 538 B.C.). Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied there, and Daniel foretold the nations that would succeed Babylon—Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome—as well as the establishment of the kingdom of God during the days of the Roman Caesars (Daniel 2).

Cyrus, king of the Persians, conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. and decreed that the Jews could return to their homeland. A priest named Ezra and a devout Jew named Nehemiah led the return and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied to the post-exilic Jews in Palestine, and Malachi especially foretold the coming of the Messiah (Christ) and his kingdom. His book, written around 400 B.C., was the last of the Old Testament period.

The Period Between the Testaments

The Jews in Palestine continued to live under Persian rule until that nation was conquered by Alexander the Great of Greece in 333 B.C. From that time the Jews were governed by Greece and by the successors of Alexander. These successors included the rulers in Egypt known as the Ptolemy's and the rulers in Syria known as the Seleucids. Although these two groups were rivals, both helped to spread the Greek culture in Palestine, and the Greek language became common there.

The Jews of course resented foreign control and the encroachment of Greek culture on their traditions. Military revolts were led with some success by Jewish patriots known as the Maccabees and the Hasmonaeans, and Jewish sects such as the Pharisees and Sadducees developed.

Finally, the nation of Rome overcame the remnants of the Greek empire, and the Roman general Pompey invaded Palestine and conquered Jerusalem in 64 B.C. From that time through the life of Christ and the New Testament period, the Roman Empire ruled the Jews.

The Time of Christ

(Matthew - Acts 1)

After thousands of years of preparation and expectation, Jesus Christ came to earth to sacrifice himself for man's salvation. Jesus was born about 4 B.C. by today's calendar and began his ministry at the age of thirty. For three years he went about Palestine preaching that the kingdom of God was near at hand and that men should repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. He also appointed and trained twelve apostles to carry on his work after he returned to heaven. Finally, in 33 A.D. he was crucified by the Jews, shedding his blood, which would take away the sins of men. His death fulfilled the Law of Moses and brought the Mosaic dispensation to a

close. In place of the law, the New Testament of Christ would provide a way for reconciliation between God and man. On the third day following his crucifixion, God raised Jesus from the tomb in triumph over Satan and death. After forty days of appearances to his disciples, Jesus commanded them to go into the entire world and preach the gospel, the good news that whoever would believe that Jesus was the Son of God and would be baptized would be saved from his sins (Mt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16). With a final promise to be with his disciples until the end of the world, Jesus ascended into heaven and began his reign at the right hand of God.

THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION

(Acts 2 - Revelation)

Following Jesus' ascension, the disciples returned to Jerusalem as he had commanded them. There on the day of Pentecost (A.D. 33) the Holy Spirit came on the apostles, giving them miraculous power and knowledge, and the church, the kingdom of God, was established. Those who heard the preaching of the apostles and obeyed the gospel by believing in Jesus, repenting of their sins, and being baptized for the remission of sins were added by Christ to his church (Acts 2:37-47). Shortly thereafter these new disciples of Christ, called Christians, scattered throughout the world to preach the gospel. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, some of the apostles and disciples wrote the books of the New Testament, which contains God's will for men under the Christian Dispensation. That dispensation has continued from the first century A.D. until now, and will continue until Christ returns to destroy the world, take those who have been faithful back with him to heaven, and punish those who have disobeyed him (1 Corinthians 15:24-25; Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 3:1; Mt. 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Please feel free to read and study this lesson as many times as you wish to do so. After you are comfortable with the knowledge you have gained you may want to test yourself to learn how well you remember. Questions for review and study on this lesson may be found by going to <http://64.177.52.39/8LESSONS/2Q.htm> .

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