

Dispensation of Law - *a study for the Bible Institute*
at Gulf Coast Baptist Church Spring 2021 by Steve Thomas

Master - God is the master of all of our dispensations. The three persons of the Godhead are all on display during this dispensation. The Father is seen clearly in Isaiah 44:6 and Hosea 1:4,7. It is evident that the Father is speaking because the Redeemer is referenced as well as a savior. These are both titles of the Son.

The Son is identified as "I AM" several times in the book of John and as far back as when He was talking to Moses. He continued to appear to Moses and was visible to the Nation in the wilderness wanderings by a pillar of fire and the cloud. Jesus also fulfilled the law in human form, during his incarnation/humiliation.

The Holy Spirit had an active ministry during the dispensation of law, but it was different than his ministry today. The HS was not universally given to believers or to Israel. He would come and go upon the anointed. David viewed the departure of the Spirit from Saul, and he himself asked that the Spirit not be removed from upon him. This would not happen today. The HS filled men with great skill and craftsmanship for the building of the tabernacle and Temple. He came upon anointed priests and rulers for service to God. In John 14:17, Christ distinguished the relationship between the Spirit and believers as "with" and would soon be "in". Daniel (Dan 4:8-9), Joseph (Gen 41:38), Ezekiel (Ez 2:2), and Joshua (Num 27:18) had a special closeness with the Spirit, but not as close as believers today.

Steward - Moses is the steward of the dispensation of law. While he was not the originator of the Law (Christ - John 1:17) he was the human instrument in the giving of the law. The Law is frequently described as being "of Moses". The Prophets deepened the understanding of what came from Moses. The OT scriptures are summarized under the heading "the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 7:12). Moses is not the only Inspired communicator of the plan that God had for Israel. The essential truth was given through Moses and others were given additional revelation for the benefit of the household.

Household - This point is very misunderstood in Christendom. The Law was given to Israel, not to the other nations (Acts 15:5,10;Rom 9:4). The words in the law were a covenant between God, Moses, and Israel (Lev 16:29;17:8). Once a covenant was made, one does not add to it, participants may not be added to it, or the covenant rule has been violated. The Gentiles who were proselytes were considered strangers and sojourners and had to be circumcised and participated in the rituals of the people. This individual then became a native of the land and was thus under law (Lev 16:29, 17:8). The law did shut everyone's mouths, leaving them without excuse before God (Rom 1:20-21, 2:1;12-15). God intended for Israel to live the law before the nations (Deut 4:6-8). What is said to Israel is for the benefit of all nations (Rom 3:19).

Rule of Life/Test - Israel received the blessings from God for obedience to Law (Deut 28:1-14). The law was the rule for the management or dispensing of God's property, in this case physical blessings. Remember, part of the rule for each dispensation is a motivation for the household to live by the given rule. The Law motivated Israel to obey by promising conditional blessings and curses for obedience and disobedience, respectively (Deut 8:1, Lev 18:5). Deut 28:1-13 delineate some of these blessings.

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Israel was motivated by fear to obey as well. The death penalty was required for breaking 7 of the 10 commandments. Two of the remaining three required death under certain circumstances. God punished the remaining commandment of covetousness by death at least once. These punishments were fairly strict and were intended to motivate the people by fear. The penalty of death was to be enacted by the people (Deut 13:9-11). If Israel would live by the law they could remain in the land and would be set apart unto God (Lev 11:44, 45; Deut 11:8-9).

The law is summarized in its moral aspects by the ten commandments. But it was given as a unit. James tells us that breaking one aspect of the law is failure in its entirety (James 2:10,11).

Israel did not submit to the righteousness from God that was revealed in the law. They went about to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3). They departed from the law, taking bribes, taking advantage of widows and orphans, dishonoring family members. When Christ came he required of the nation that their righteousness be greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:20).

Israel failed to recognize the righteousness revealed in the Law when it rejected Christ as their righteous king. He was the Holy One of Israel, and the people rejected Him. The nation made the law an end in and of itself. It was only a Shadow of Good things to come, but they did not see this (Heb 10:1). This failure leads to a hopeless legalism which cycles in failure. We see this in the book of Judges. We see it also in the time of the kings. The cycle is obedience, pride, failure, judgement, enslavement, then a cry for a deliverer, then obedience for a time. The judgement of the nation varied, but included captivity of both the northern and southern tribes with Assyria and Babylon, respectively.

The judgement on the failure of the people is two-fold. The judgement first fell on Christ as He hung on the cross. His judgement bought out the people from under the law (Gal 4:5, 2 Cor. 5:21). Christ became a curse for those under law. The final judgement of the nation will take place during the Seventieth Week of Daniel. These seven years will be the final part of the dispensation of law.

There are several misunderstandings concerning the law. One of the chief purposes of law was to demonstrate that mankind cannot be righteous before God. Remember the naive claim of the people at the end of Promise that what you say we will do? Obeying the law did not make one righteous before God (Rom 3:20). The Law provides a full experiential knowledge of sin (Rom 7). It is not a guide for daily righteousness. Galatians was written to a group who believed that the law could make them righteous in their present tense salvation. Romans refutes the fact that law could make people righteous in initial salvation. The law is not out from faith, it is by sight. The believer is to walk by faith and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). The next dispensation is out from faith (Grace).

If there was a law that could give life, it would have been God's law (Gal 3:21-22). The law was given to show man his need, not to provide life. There is a righteousness which is from the law, but it is distinguished from the righteousness from God, which is out from faith (Rom 10:3, Phil 3:9).