

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

Master - The master remains God the Father. We do see God the Son appearing several times during this dispensation. He appeared to Abraham in Ur, Canaan, after the war of the kings, at the giving of the covenant at the circumcision, and then when he proved Abraham's faith (Gen 12:1,7;13;14;15:4;17:1;18:1; and 22:1). In Genesis 18 there are differing views of how the Son appeared. One view is that the Trinity had taken on human form, the other is that the Son appeared with two angels. The Son appeared to Jacob in a dream and in person (Gen 28:12-15;32:24-30). God was with Joseph. Was this in spirit form or in person? (Gen 39:2-3, 21-23; 40:8; 41:16, 25; 45:5,7,9; 50:19-20).

Steward- The steward of the dispensation of promise was Abraham (Gen.12:1-3).Abraham received his instructions while he was an unsaved man. In this way he was like Cain. There was not many more likenesses. While Abraham struggled at times following the mandate of the Master, he returned and expressed faith in the promises of God.

Abraham's state when he was called out of Ur was that of an idolator (Josh. 24:2-3). Abraham did not leave immediately (Gen 11:31-32). It was not until the death of Haran, Abraham's father that he continued to Canaan (Acts 7:4, Gen 20:13). God made promises to Abraham in chapter 12, and there was action, but there was not obedience, nor was there any inclination that he believed these promises.

God called Abram/Abraham several times, Heb 11:8 refers to the time when Abraham obeyed. The passage in Acts as Stephen recounts these events confirm this.

Household - This is the first time in human history that the household is limited to a specific group of people. The promises of the Abrahamic covenant were made to and for Abraham and a limited group of his descendants. God limited the household to Isaac, not Ishmael, to Jacob, not Esau, and to only 12 of Jacob's children and their descendants. The rest of the household was not a part of the household, so it was not under the rule of life (dispensation). The nations were allowed to go their own way (Acts 14:16). The focus of God's rule for life would be Abraham's family.

Rule of Life/Test - God gave promises to Abraham. These promises form the Abrahamic Covenant:

- His descendants would inherit a large portion of land (Canaan) after 400 years of slavery.
- His descendants would have the blessing of God (sign of circumcision).
- His descendants would make a great nation as the sand of the and stars of the sky.

The Covenant is to be distinguished from the test. The dispensation is temporary but the covenants are eternal. God will fulfill his promises, even though man may/will fail at his obligations.

These promises were repeated to Abraham's son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons. The responsibility of the household was to believe that God would give them the land and bless them as He had promised.

There were those who expressed faith in these promises. We see them in Hebrews 11. Sarah laughed, Abraham strayed and lied about his relationship with his wife. Abraham and Sarah connived to produce Ishmael, Abraham asked if his servant Eleazar was the child of promise. Jacob was a scoundrel, Jacob's sons conspired to eliminate Joseph. God tested the household multiple times. Would they direct faith towards the promises? Would the time in Egypt affect their faith? Would the people take what was provided for them when they were at the gates to the promised land?

Dispensation of Promise

The elders of Israel were made to believe in God's plans when God sent the plagues on Egypt (Ex . 4-12). 430 years to the day, God performed what He had promised (Ex. 12:40-41). God demonstrated his power at the Red Sea (Ex. 14). God provided water when they had none (Ex. 15: 22-25). In chapters 16 and 17 we see further demonstrations of God's power and provision, but the people still grumbled and complained. They had a demonstration of God's power with Joseph's bones, yet the people were obstinate.

When they arrived at Sinai they had a reminder of God's provision and power (Gen 19:4). The interaction in this chapter is vital to understanding the purpose of the law and the failure of Promise. The answer of the people in verse 8 is presumptive, not faith filled. Had they directed faith in the Provider, they would have been made a nation of priests. However their faith in themselves caused God to pivot. He made it difficult to approach him (Ex 19:16-20). This was God's response to Israel's claim. It was not a pleasant response. Before this time, God was very approachable and accessible. Burning Bush, wrestling with Jacob, all the times when Abraham was approached by God, walking with Enoch and Noah. God was kind and personal. After this, specific rules were given to Israel on how to approach. God had not changed, the people's assumption that they were able to obey God's commands had made God change his dealings with them.

The people's unbelief culminated at the failure at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13:2, 17-24, 30;14:2-4).

They received judgement, God's covenanted promises were postponed. Stringent requirements were attached to how Israel was to approach God.

God revealed that man would doubt rather than believe His promises. As long as God did signs and wonders, they believed. When they were tested, they failed. There were exceptions: Joshua and Caleb, Joseph, Moses' parents, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and at times Jacob. Many of these acts of faith were pointed out to Hebrew believers in Heb. 11.

God's response to the failure of the people was a demonstration that their presumptive claim would not be able to be kept, except by One. This demonstration was the dispensation of Law.