

# What are the dispensations?

Grace Abroad Ministries

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The Bible divides history into dispensations, which are unique periods of time in which God tests man's obedience to Him. Salvation has always been by grace through faith, so the purpose of these tests is not to save men, but to glorify God. Every dispensation ends with man failing the test and God's judgment. Here is an overview of eight biblical dispensations with their tests, failures, and judgments.



## Innocence (Gen 1:26-3:21)

**Test:** To refrain from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

**Failure:** Adam and Eve ate

**Judgment:** Sin, death, expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and a curse upon earth and mankind

Gen 1:26-30; 2:15-17;  
3:1-7, 22-24



## Conscience (Gen 3:22-7:24)

**Test:** To obey the commands given to Adam using man's knowledge of good and evil as a guide

**Failure:** Global wickedness

**Judgment:** Worldwide destruction with the Great Flood; lifespans drop from ≈1,000 years to ≈100

Gen 3:7, 14-19, 22; 6:5-12;  
7:11-12, 23



## Civil Government (Gen 8:1-11:32)

**Test:** To govern according to the Noahic Covenant, including the command to fill the earth

**Failure:** Building the Tower of Babel to avoid dispersion

**Judgment:** Confusion of languages, causing mankind to scatter

Gen 8:13-22; 9:2-17;  
10:5, 20, 25, 31-32; 11:1-9



## Patriarchal Rule (Gen 12:1-Ex 18:27)

**Test:** For Abraham and his descendants to abide in the land which God showed them

**Failure:** Leaving the land

**Judgment:** 400 years of oppression, beginning with Ishmael and ending with exodus from Egyptian slavery

Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15; 17;  
21:9; 26:2-5; 35:9-13; Ex 1:8-14



## Mosaic Law (Ex 19:1-Acts 1:26)

**Test:** For Israel to obey the Mosaic Covenant and the prophets

**Failure:** Violation of the Law and rejection of the Messiah

**Judgment:** Exiles and eventual postponement of the Messianic Kingdom

Ex 19:1-8; Deut 18:15-18; 28;  
2 Ki 17:6-23; 25:8-21; Mat 23



## Church Age (Acts 2:1-Rev 4:1)

**Test:** To make disciples of all nations, driving Israel to a righteous jealousy

**Failure:** Neglect of the Great Commission and apostasy of the Church

**Judgment:** The Rapture and the Judgment Seat of Christ (to reward believers for their works)

Matt 28:16-20; Rom 11:11-16;  
2 Cor 5:9-11; 1 Th 4:13-18



## 7-Year Tribulation (Rev 4:2-19:21)

**Test:** For Israel to become a purified remnant of faithful believers

**Failure:** Many still reject Christ, and many believers fail to persevere

**Judgment:** When the Jewish remnant calls on Jesus, He returns and conquers the world

Dan 9:27; 12:1; Joel 2:30-32;  
Matt 23:37-24:31; 2 Th 2:1-12



## Kingdom (Rev 20:1-10)

**Test:** To live under Christ's rule

**Failure:** After 1,000 years, the unsaved join Satan's final rebellion against Jerusalem and the saints

**Judgment:** God crushes rebellion with fire, ushering in the Great White Throne Judgment for the unsaved

Ez 36:33-38; Dan 7:13-14;  
Hag 2:5-9; Rev 20:7-15