

# Dispensations:

The Key to Rightly Dividing God's Word

## The Church: Transition from Jew to Gentile and God's Grace

**Names:** Dispensation of grace. Ecclesiastical dispensation. The Church Age.

**Scripture:** Acts – Revelation (rapture of Church).

**Covenant:** None.

**Key events to know:**

1. The establishment and transition of the church - continued.
2. Church history from Acts to present day.
3. Dangers of wrongly dividing – false doctrines of our day.

### THE ESTABLISHMENT AND TRANSITION OF THE CHURCH - continued

It is important to remember how "church" is defined in the Bible:

1. The church – the "**body of Christ**": the saved multitudes from every nation, tribe, and tongue. This represents the spiritual kingdom.
2. The local church - a body of men and women who have been saved and called by God to serve in a specific geographic area. This is a picture of the physical kingdom in that the body of Christ can be observed at a local level.

<b>Dispensation</b>	<b>Covenant</b>	<b>Description</b>
Eternity Past	None	Original creation. Lucifer & angels.
Innocence	Edenic	Reconstruction of earth. Creation of man.
Conscience	Adamic	Adam's lineage and sons of God.
Human government	Noahic	Noah's flood and lineage.
Promise	Abrahamic	Abraham's seed and birth of nation of Israel.
Law-Kingdom	Mosaic	Moses leading the exodus, the giving of the law, the kingdom's rise & fall.
	Davidic	The line and Kingdom of David.
Christ's 1 <sup>st</sup> coming	Davidic*	2 Kingdoms. The start of the Church.
<b>The Church &amp; God's grace</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Transition of Church from Jew to Gentile oversight.</b>

### Key Notes Concerning the Church:

- The Church, as the "body of Christ", began when Jesus died on the cross. It is made up of Jews and Gentiles – 1 Cor. 10:32; Gal. 3:28-29; Eph. 4:4, 2:16.
- The local church, in its simplest definition as a gathering of believers, began with Peter's confession of Jesus as the Son of God – Matt. 16:16-18. The church being a local body of believers picturing the body of Christ as we know it today, started in Jerusalem – Acts 2:47, 5:11, 8:1.

#### KEY POINTS

Remember there is a transitional period for both as we saw in Acts 1-7 which is waiting on the acceptance or rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel.

- As we saw previously, the first 7 chapters of Acts are directed toward Israel and their \_\_\_\_\_ repentance so the Kingdom of Heaven can be ushered in and restored. In chapter 7, a 4<sup>th</sup> witness is sent to them, Stephen, who preaches Christ one final time to the Jewish leadership. They again reject Christ and stone Stephen to death. Interestingly Saul (soon to be Paul) is present and approving his execution. Saul wreaks havoc on the newly formed church and imprisons as many believers as he can, even going house to house to do so – Acts 8:1-4. It is from this point forward that we begin to see things change with the church.

Since God cannot use the Nation of Israel as He intended, He will begin to use the Gentiles as His \_\_\_\_\_ "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6) to spread the gospel to the known world. Remember things are **transitioning** and that includes **what the disciples and apostles know and understand about this dispensation of grace** (*God dispensing His grace through the church*).

**Notes from Acts 8-29:**

- 8:3-4 – the church is scattered abroad preaching the word.
- 8:5 – the gospel is preached in Samaria.
- 8:12-17 – Peter and John are sent to Samaria upon hearing the Samaritans are receiving the word of God. They lay hands on them, and they receive the Holy Ghost. (**Jew to Gentile** -official recognition & transition from OT to NT salvation)
- 8:26-40 – the first Gentile seen being born again and baptized as we are today.
- 9 – Paul is saved.
- 10 - Gentiles automatically receive the Holy Spirit upon salvation (Cornelius).
- 11 – start and growth of church in Antioch.
- 15 – the council at Jerusalem where the NT gospel is discussed and "finalized".
- 13-28 – Paul’s 3 missionary journeys planting and encouraging churches.

See the move from Jew to Gentile. See the refining of those preaching the gospel. Their understanding being enlightened – Eph. 1:17-18.

**THE CHURCH FROM ACTS TO PRESENT DAY**

Revelation 1-3, historically speaking, contains 7 letters written to 7 local churches. Doctrinally, they describe the characteristics and events of 7 time periods starting with the early church and leading up to our current time (Church history):

<b>Church</b>	<b>Time Represented*</b>	<b>Description</b>
Ephesus - Rev. 2:1-7	90 - 175/200 AD	Means fully purposed, desired ones. Gradually fell away from their first love – Christ and His word.
Smyrna - Rev. 2:8-11	175/200 - 325 AD	Means myrrh or bitterness. Persecutions of pagan Rome.
Pergamos - Rev. 2:12-17	325 - 500 AD	Means much marriage. Rome unites herself with "Christianity".
Thyatira - Rev. 2:18-29	500 - 1000 AD	Means odor of affliction. Scriptural heresies and physical atrocities of papal Rome.
Sardis - Rev. 3:1-6	1000 - 1500 AD	Means red ones. Horrific and murderous events of the Dark Ages by Rome.
Philadelphia - Rev. 3:7-13	1500 - 1900 AD	Means brotherly love. Incredible revival as worldwide missions carry the completed English Bible to the ends of the Earth.
Laodicea - Rev. 3:14-22	1900 - Present	Means rights of the people. Lukewarm and apathetic state toward the word of God.

*\*Dates are approximate. Remember transitions are gradual.*

## DANGERS OF WRONGLY DIVIDING

**Hyper-dispensationalism** holds that there was a Church during the period of the Acts that is not the Church today, and that today's Church began when the book of Acts was closed and more specifically when Paul's ministry started. Its main doctrines below are the result of \_\_\_\_\_ (and wrongly) dividing the scriptures.

1. They follow absolute discontinuity between testaments, believing that none of the Old Testament applies or is binding on Christians today.
  - Where does your conscience come from? (John 8:9; Rom. 2:14-15) What about human government? (Gen. 9 – present) How about the law? Though given to the Jew in the OT, it is also found throughout the NT. How would we know sin without the law? (Rom. 3:20) What is the Kingdom of Heaven preached in Matthew? What about the Kingdom of God? Who are the sons of God in Genesis 6 and what impact did they have upon mankind? Who is Satan...where did he come from and why did he tempt Jesus? Why does mankind need a Savior? We would not know or understand any of these things without the Old Testament!
2. They view the start of the Christian church as beginning with the ministry of the Apostle Paul after the early part of the book of Acts OR some say after Acts 28. They use Acts 2 to "show" there is a difference and division between the Jewish Church and Gentile Church (meaning there were 2 churches) and they further claim that there was no body of Christ before Paul revealed it.
  - It would appear in an attempt to combat the false doctrines of the charismatics and also "baptism for salvation", they \_\_\_\_\_ and create some false doctrines of their own.
  - Acts 2 – we know the audience is Jewish. Even though it is the start of the church age, God's plan is and always has been to work through the Jew - Rom. 1:16, 2:10. The disciples are preparing for the return of the Kingdom of Heaven and are preaching accordingly. Remember the transitions happening: OT to NT, Jew to Gentile, Law to grace, Kingdom of Heaven to Kingdom of God, the knowledge of how to properly communicate the gospel as things change! (2:38, 3:19-21, 4:12)

Many will say this is another gospel and therefore this is not the church or body of Christ. But look where these believing Jews wind up – the church! (2:47, 5:11,14) By chapter 8 we see the first of many local churches named! **NOTE:** the Bible does not make any distinction between the church in Acts 2 vs the church after Acts 8 other than Gentiles being added (11:24)! It is ONE body with its focus changing...
  - Starting in Acts 8 we see the transition from a Jewish to a Gentile focus of the church due to Israel's rejection of Christ. Even this goes through a "phase": note the difference between 8:12-17 and 10:42-48.
  - To say there was no church or body of Christ before Paul because it was not known until Paul revealed it makes no sense. Just because something wasn't revealed doesn't mean it did not exist. Paul, whom God chose to specifically reveal the mystery of the church, clearly states the church is \_\_\_\_\_ body, starting at the cross, and built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets – Eph. 2:16-22.
  - If there was no body of Christ before Paul, then explain Romans 16:7!

Do not base doctrine on transitional passages: rightly divide!