

# Dispensations Devotion

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Based on scripture, we believe that God never changes, God's character never changes, and God's original purposes for people as his image bearers – the four Rs of reflecting God's character, representing God, reproducing God's image, and ruling as God's stewards – never change. On the other hand, we believe certain things do change, including how God develops his plan in history, how God interacts with people, and what he specifically requires of his people. We believe this because we see it in the Bible; we are not imposing it on the Bible. When God makes a major change in his plan, his method of interacting with people, or what he requires of his people, we say there has been a change in dispensation, because there is a new time period with its own way that God is administrating over things.

Even before Jesus came, God's plans for people and his requirements of people changed through history. Can you think of any obvious shifts in how God administrated his people, even though God himself never changed? Let's take a look at some of them. In each case, try to write down your answers, before reading the italicized examples.

Read Genesis 3.16-23. God did not change and we are talking about the same people as were in the Garden of Eden, but what do you notice did change?

- *Some changes you might note include the following: the people no longer were welcome in the Garden of Eden, because they now knew the difference between sin and righteousness; the land was cursed, so people would have to work harder and struggle; relationships now would suffer; their relationship with God was not as intimate, because they were tainted with sin; God initiated animal sacrifices to appease his wrath about sin until the savior would come.*

Read Genesis 7.23; 8.20-22; 9.1-6; 9.11-13. There still is the same purpose of being God's image and a continuation of sacrifices, but what can you see changed in God's plans or commands?

- *Some changes you might note include the following: almost all the people and animals were destroyed, so God was starting over with eight people and a few of each type of animal; there was a new promise never to destroy the earth again, and a sign of this promise [or covenant] in the rainbow; people would now eat animals; animals would now fear people; there was the beginning of law or government in that God or his people would bring capital punishment to any person or animal that killed a person [an image bearer of God].*

Read Genesis 12.1-3; 13.14-17; 17.7-11. What changed in God's plans or commands?

- *Some changes you might note include the following: now one family would be God's image bearers, his people; God promised this family specific land, that they someday would be a nation; God made another covenant which would be forever between himself and Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob; the people had a new sign of their covenantal relationship with God, circumcision.*

Read Exodus 3.1-10; 19.3-6; 24.3-8. The covenant read by Moses in Exodus 24 was the Law God gave him in Exodus 20-23. This is the same people, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They would still have blood sacrifices and the land that was promised. They already had the covenants God had made with Noah and Abraham. Why did God add another covenant here? What was changing?

- *Some changes you might note include the following: there were conditions in this covenant; they had to obey many commands that constituted their new law code, and blessings depended on obedience; this was called a blood covenant, foreshadowing the covenant sacrifice of Christ far in the future; they were to think of themselves as a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, which is a continuation of being God's image bearers, but now they would actually be a nation.*

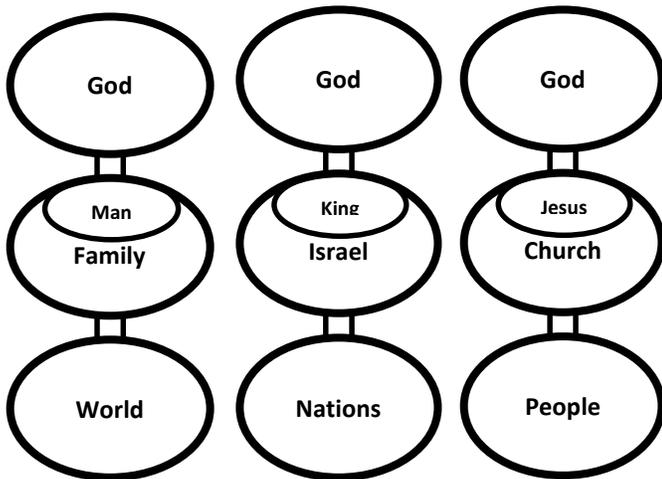
Read Jeremiah 31.31-36; Ezekiel 11.17-20; 36.24-28. Notice the promise of a New Covenant which would replace the Mosaic Covenant. To whom was this promise made? To Israel, the same people in the same land. What would change under the New Covenant?

- *Some changes you might note include the following: this new covenant would render the old Mosaic Covenant obsolete [the first time God said that about any of the covenants]; the law would be inside the people, they would be empowered to obey; the people would know God and his ways intimately and inherently; God would forgive sins completely, to the point of not remembering them, which implies there would be no more need for animal sacrifices to appease God's wrath; God promised that though he would exile them, they would not cease to be a nation forever, he would regather them, they would repent; the Holy Spirit would be in them, so they would be cleansed spiritually, desiring to obey and empowered to obey.*

Read Luke 22.20; Hebrews 8.13; 9.15. Again we see the New Covenant replaces the Mosaic Covenant. Is the Church under the New Covenant with God, even though Israel is not yet fully repentant, or still under the old Mosaic Covenant? What else do you observe?

- *Some changes you might note include the following: Jesus ushered in the New Covenant with his blood sacrifice on the cross, making the Mosaic Covenant obsolete; so the church made up of both Jews and Gentiles [!] is now God's people, his image bearers; the church is experiencing some of the New Covenant blessings, before national Israel does; Jesus is our mediator of our covenant relationship with God; we have complete redemption, which means Christ purchased with his blood our complete freedom from the power of sin, the penalty of sin, the power of evil, the effects of death, and the Mosaic Law under the Mosaic Covenant; we experience internal transformation by the Holy Spirit, so we desire to obey and can obey.*

We can illustrate the biggest dispensational changes with our three circles paradigm.



God at the start was in authority over all he created [thus in the top circle]. He made people in his own image, to be his image bearers, reflecting his character, representing him here, reproducing his image, and ruling over the rest of the created world as his stewards. So at the start, all people, the entire human family, with a patriarch [like Adam] at the head, represented God to the rest of creation.

Because all people went astray, God later chose one family from all people, the family of Abram or Abraham, to be his people, his image bearers. God was still in authority over all, but now it was the family of Abraham, with a patriarch [like Abraham or Jacob] at the head, who would pursue the four Rs,

as they represented God to the other nations. This family would become the nation of Israel, and eventually a king [like David] would replace the patriarch as the head of the nation.

Israel ultimately failed to represent God well, especially when they nationally rejected the Messiah-savior God sent. So after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, God created the church when he sent the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the New Covenant blessings. Today, God remains in authority over all, and the church, with Christ at the head, is to be the image bearer of God, pursuing the four Rs, as we represent God to the other peoples of the world.

Throughout history, God stays the same, God's character stays the same, God's purpose for people as his image bearers, the four Rs, stays the same, but how God develops his plan in history, how God interacts with people, and what he requires his people to do all change. That is what we see in scripture.

To relate this to the earlier questions, you can see that life in the Garden of Eden, life after the fall into sin and the consequent curse, and life after the flood all fit in the first of the three circles model; life for Abraham and his descendants before the Exodus and life for Israel after the Exodus fit the second model; the church age we now are in, and life in the millennial kingdom still to come fit the third model. When Christ establishes his permanent kingdom, he will have fulfilled all three models.