

Appendix 195.

THE DIFFERENT AGES AND DISPENSATIONS OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH MEN.

1. God has spoken at "sundry times" as well as "in divers manners" (Heb. 1:1). The time when He spoke to "the fathers" is distinguished from the time in which He has "spoken to us". The time in which He spake by the prophets "stands in contrast with the time in which He spake by (His) Son". And the "time past" is obviously distinguished from "these last days" (Heb. 1:2). To "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15) it is essential to regard *the times* in which the words were spoken, as well as *the times* to which they refer.

Three Greek words in the New Testament call for careful consideration. These are:

(1) *chronos*, time, duration unlimited unless defined; occ. fifty-three times and is translated "time" in thirty-two;

(2) *kairos*, a certain limited and definite portion of *chronos*, the right time or season; occ. eighty-seven times; and is rendered "time" in sixty-five passages, "season" in fifteen;

(3) *oikonomia*, meaning lit. administration of a household (Eng., economy, including the idea of stewardship); occ. eight times, trans. "dispensation" four, "stewardship" three, "edifying" once (1 Tim. 1:4), which the R.V. rightly corrects to "dispensation", making five occ. in all of that English term.

A dispensation, administration, or arrangement, during a portion of *chronos* may, or may not, be equal to *kairos*, according as the context determines.

Nothing but confusion can arise from reading into one dispensation that which relates to another. To connect with God said and did in one dispensation with another, in which His administration was on an altogether different principle, is to ensure error. And finally, to take doctrine of late revelation and read it into the time when it was "hidden" leads to disaster.

The nations, Israel the Chosen Nation, and the church (Ap. 186) are each dealt with in distinct "times" and on distinct principles, and the doctrine relating to each must be kept distinct. When our Lord speaks (Luke 21:24) of "the times (*kairos*) of the Gentiles", the implication is that there are times of the Jews (under Messiah, Isa. 33:6, &c.), whatever be the contrasted elements. So that what is recorded as connected with the times of the Jews is not necessarily applicable to the times of the Gentiles. The present administration of God is in grace, not in law, judgment, or glory, and belongs to the "dispensation" (*oikonomia*) of the Mystery (Ap. 193), that secret "which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints" (Col. 1:26), that secret "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men" (Eph. 3:5). Hid in God from the beginning of the world (see Eph. 3:9), it was kept secret since the world began (see Rom. 16:25).

There is no authority for taking enactments Divinely fitted for the times of the Jews and transferring them to the present dispensation of God in grace. Similarly, the endeavor to read the precepts of the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matt. 5-7), which are the laws of the kingdom of heaven (see Ap. 114), into such church epistles as Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, not only obscures the truth, but antagonizes one part of Scripture with another.

2. THE SEVEN TIMES OR DISPENSATIONS

In the Bible seven distinct administrations are set before us. Each has its own beginning and ending; each is characterized by certain distinctive principles of God's dealings; each ends in a crisis or judgment peculiar to itself, save No. 7, which is without end. These may be tabulated thus:

1. The Edenic state of innocence.
End -- the expulsion from Eden.
2. The period "without law" (the times of ignorance, Acts 17:30).
End -- The Flood, and the judgment on Babel.
3. The era under law.
End - The rejection of Israel.
4. The period of grace.
End - The "day of the Lord".
5. The epoch of judgment.
End - The destruction of Antichrist.
6. The millennial age.
End - The destruction of Satan, and the judgment of the great white throne.
7. The eternal state of glory.
No End

All seven dispensations exhibit differing characteristics which call for the close attention of the Bible student.

3. THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES.

While the seven dispensations above specified are the main divisions of the long period of the Divine dealings, there is still another dispensation referred to as "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), a dispensation which overlaps two of the above divisions. *These* times began when Jerusalem passed under the power of Babylon (477 B.C. See Ap. 50, p. 60, and Ap. 180), and continue while Jerusalem is "trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24). These "times" are referred to in Rom. 11:25, which has no reference to the completion of "the church", as is so generally believed, but relates to the fullness, or filling up, of the times of the Gentiles, the word "Gentiles" being put for *the times* which they fill up.

4. THE PARENTHESIS OF THE PRESENT DISPENSATION.

In the Nazareth Synagogue (Luke 4:16-20) our Lord stood up and read from the book of the prophet Isaiah. After reading the first verse and part of the second (of ch. 61), He closed the book. Why stop there? Because the next sentence belonged, and still belongs, to a future dispensation. The acceptable "year of the Lord" had come, but "the day of vengeance of our God" has not even yet appeared. Thus did the Lord divide two dispensations. There is no mark in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 61:2 to indicate any break, yet an interval of nearly 2,000 years separates the two clauses quoted. In this interval comes the whole of the present church dispensation, following on the years after Israel's final rejection (Acts 28:25-28). See Ap. 180, 181.