

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER (SA. 55: 1 0 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGE FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

In our previous study (Issue No. 56) it was declared that a dispensation is an administration, and an administration was further defined as being a method or manner of dealing. This definition is based upon the usage of the Greek word *oikonomia* in the New Testament, the fact that its elements mean house-law, and the fact that at the time the *King James Version* was translated, to dispense meant to administer or manage. And even though this meaning is now obsolete, it is of real help in understanding this word. It should be remembered that in a patriarchal society, house-law was usually the total administration under which a man lived.

The fact that God's administrations change and, therefore, vary from time to time, even varying among people at the same time, is an evident truth to the careful student of God's Word. It is quite plain that God's method of dealing with Israel in the centuries before Christ was based upon a set of principles which had not been imposed upon other nations. In other words, there was no dispensation of divine law that covered all mankind, even though there was one for the nation of Israel. **"For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:7, 8)** These were the inspired words of Moses to Israel, which tell us that this one people were under a peculiar divine administration distinct from all others. **"You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"** (Amos 3:2) was God's message to them.

A reading of Matt. 10:1-4 will show that God's method of dealing with the twelve special disciples was somewhat different from the way He dealt with the majority of those who followed Him. These twelve were given great

authority; and, of course, with the authority came great responsibility.

Some men raise their hands in holy horror at the thought of two dispensations operating at the same time, but their response is based upon an erroneous understanding of a dispensation. If it were correctly understood, they should be able to see scores of dispensations operating concurrently. Since a dispensation is a method of dealing with men, and since at one time, some men were apostles, they must have been dealt with as apostles, while at the same time others were being dealt with as prophets and teachers. Inasmuch as we can identify eighteen different gifts in the Acts period, and since each gift constituted a position or calling before God, it would be proper to say that there were an equal number of methods of dealing. Each man had to recognize the gift that God had dispensed to him, and thus, to know his own personal dispensation. In view of this, it is certainly erroneous to divide all time into seven dispensations, and then to place all who lived during one time under the same method of divine dealing.

One lesson we need to learn is that there was never at any time a single method of dealing that covered the whole human race until we come in sacred history to the present dispensation, the dispensation of the grace of God. This is God's first universal method of dealing, one under which all men stand before God on the basis of absolute equality, and under which all are dealt with alike. God's present method of dealing with all mankind, and even all nations, is one of grace. He has a definite purpose in this, and He will not violate His own purpose.

The next dispensation, which is the manifest kingdom of God, will also be universal, and will be one of absolute government under which the will of God will regulate every detail of human life. It will be an administration of perfect justice and righteousness. God will also have a purpose under divine government and He will not deviate from this purpose.

God's dispensation of grace had its beginning with Paul's great pronouncement recorded in Acts 28:28, in about A. D. 66 according to our calendar. To the chief men of the Jews assembled in Rome, he announced that the salvation-bringing message of God had been made freely available to the nations and that it would get through to them. It had been freely available to all Israelites for thirty three years before this. Now being authorized, or, made freely available to all nations, it places all nations then

and all nations now on the basis of absolute equality so far as the gospel is concerned. (See Issues No. **SB005**, **SB007**, and **SB011** for further truth on this.)

A further pronouncement concerning the dispensation of grace was made by Paul in his Ephesian epistle. The truth of God's present administration had been given to him for proclamation to "**you of the nations**" (Eph. 3:1, 2). He was bound by the Lord to do this in their behalf. It was not an easy matter for him to declare that which would place his beloved Israel under the same status before God as all others. They had been the most favored nation under God, but this would no longer be true. The descriptive phrase "you of the nations" now includes every member of the human race.

That there would be a dispensation of grace, a long period during which God would do nothing but show favor to the wicked, had been a secret purpose of God, hid within Himself, never revealed in any previous revelation of truth (Eph. 3:3). It was no part of any previous prediction, and the sole revelator was the apostle Paul (Eph. 3:8).

Much confusion has been created due to failure to distinguish between the grace of God, as being part of His character, and the dispensation of grace, as an absolute method of dealing. He, being the God of every grace, was always showing grace to men from the time He provided coats of skin to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve. We read that Noah, along with seven others, found grace in the sight of the Lord (Gen 6: 8), but it was not an absolute method of dealing with him or the rest of mankind. These were dealt with in strict justice, resulting in God's bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly (2 Peter 2:5).

In the Acts period so much grace was shown to men that it could be said that grace reigned (Rom. 5:21), a fact in the life of all who believed. Nevertheless, there were numerous instances when God acted in justice and judgment. The Acts period was no part of God's gracious administration, and we stultify the truth of grace when we try to make it so. Consider the cases of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), of King Herod (Acts 12:20-23), and of the Corinthian saints who were visited with sickness and death because of their disorderly conduct (1 Cor. 11: 30). This was God's dealing in justice and not in grace.

One of the most positive revelations in regard to God's present method of dealing is hidden from the reader of the *King James Version* due to a faulty translation. In Ephesians 4:32 we are exhorted to be kind one to another, tenderhearted, dealing graciously one with another, even as God also in Christ deals graciously with us. In this declaration we have a simple and most positive revelation in regard to God's present method of dealing. The word *charizomai* means to deal graciously; and this is God's declared manner of dealing with us, whether we deal with others in this manner or not.

This statement, it should be noted, is found in an epistle written after Acts 28:28. It would not be speaking the truth if it were found in the Corinthian epistle. God did not deal graciously with those spoken to in 1 Cor. 11:30.

In the Colossian epistle, also written after Acts 28:28, Paul declares that these believers had been saved by God's dealing graciously (*charizomai*) with all their trespasses (Col. 2: 13). From these two passages the present-day believer should know that he has been saved by God's dealing graciously with his sins and that he is kept saved by this same gracious dealing. How good it is for those such as we are to be living under God's dispensation of grace!

It needs to be understood that God's grace can be either active or passive. If He does something good for us in view of our sins and needs, then He is actively gracious. If He does nothing in view of our iniquities, then He is passively gracious.

The militant atheist of former years, Robert G. Ingersoll, during the course of his lectures, would shake his fist toward the heavens and cry out, "If there be a God, let Him strike me dead." When nothing happened, it was considered by many to be positive proof of the nonexistence of God. Yet, all that it demonstrated was that God is the God of grace, Who continues to be gracious even in view of wicked challenges.

During the present dispensation, every act of God is an act of grace; so much so, that if He cannot act in grace, He will not act at all. During this time all judgment and punishment is in abeyance. Grace is His present method of dealing with mankind; and in the course of displaying His grace, many, as believers, have found themselves caught up in the flow of it, and have been carried into the very fullness of forgiveness and salvation. God's

purpose is to display His grace, and the present-day believer is a by-product of this purpose (2 Tim. 1:9).

The grace that God is now showing is untraceable. It comes to mankind as a part of the outflowing wealth of God. Every good and perfect gift is a part of it. It operates in secret; for His present method of dealing is not only gracious, it is also in secret. Some day it will all be traceable. No act of God's grace in 1900 years has gone unrecorded. The hour will come when the record will no longer be secret. It will be open and available as part of our knowledge of Him.

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