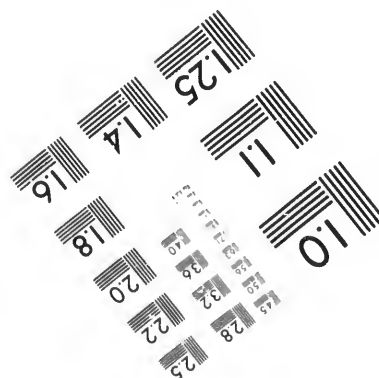
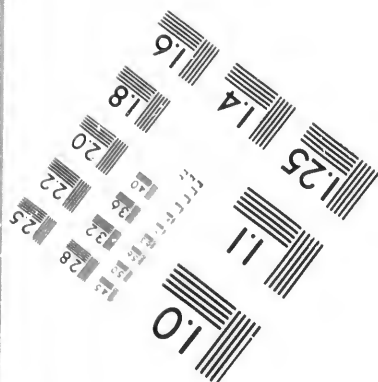
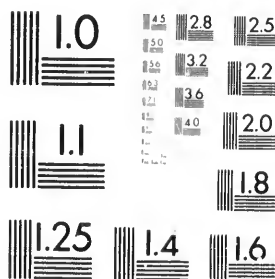


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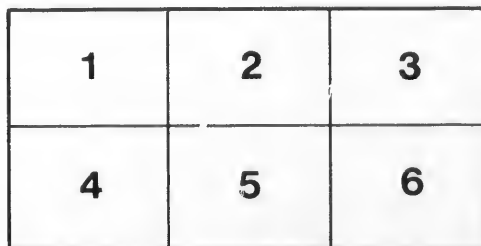
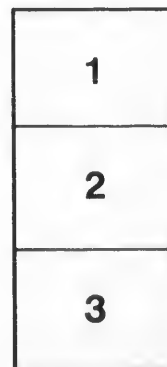
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THE

DISPENSATIONS.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE THEOLOGICAL UNION OF THE
GUELPH CONFERENCE.

BY THE

REV. T. M. CAMPBELL.



TORONTO:

WILLIAM BRIGGS, 78 & 80 KING STREET EAST.

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THE SEVERAL
DISPENSATIONS

OF THE
GOVERNMENT AND GRACE
OF GOD,

FROM THE
ADAMIC TO THE CHRISTIAN.

BY THE
REV. T. M. CAMPBELL.

TORONTO:
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C. W. COATES, MONTREAL. S. F. HUESTIS, HALIFAX.

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PREFACE.

This Lecture is published—1st, because the author has been advised to do so by brethren of eminent scholarly attainments and candid criticism; and, 2nd, because he does not know of anything else published on this subject, and therefore believes it may have a place of its own size in the literature of theology. No apology is offered for its appearance, as nobody is hurt by it, and no favours are asked for it.

If it is worth reading, people will read it, and if not, the author does not want any time wasted over it.

The condensed form of most of its parts must be explained by the fact that it was prepared for reading before the Theological Union, and the time allowed for delivery constrained its dimensions. There is no money in its publication, but if those who read it are pleased or profited, the labour and loss will be recompensed to

THE AUTHOR.

THE DISPENSATIONS.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His SON, whom He hath appointed heir of all things.”—*Heb. 1:1, 2.*

Distinctive periods mark the progress of the world in every department of its history. The work of creation had its *six days*, and each with its specific work. The course of nature moves in seasons from winter's death to autumn's finished life; and animal, like vegetable life, reaches completeness through distinctive periods of growth.

Along the highways of human progress, too, the milestones are as distinctly seen. The progress of art has been in stages. Science has marched in epochs. The history of literature is marked in paragraphs. All along the line of human history, steps and stages mark the progress of the world.

Each distinctive period which marks material or mental progress, is signified by some new light, which reveals more clearly the forces of nature, and kindles into greater activity the forces of men.

These periods or epochs are not equal in time, nor equal in importance, yet each is stamped with an inspiration of genius peculiarly its own.

What is thus characteristic of the movements of men, and Divine unfoldings in nature and art and

science, is also characteristic of Divine revelation in the moral and spiritual sphere. God's manifestations of Himself and His will concerning man have grown clearer through the world's ages, and this growth has been marked by distinctive lines, which divide its progress into epochs. These several epochs or stages we call DISPENSATIONS, so called because these periods were opened with the dispensation of *new light, new law, and new ceremonials*. (I use the term new law in a subsidiary sense, as in the primary sense law is the same in all the ages, and unchangeable under the moral government of God.)

These several dispensations may be named and limited as follows, viz :

1st. The *Adamic*, embracing the period of primeval purity.

2nd. The *Patriarchal*, embracing the period from the curse upon the serpent and the promise to Adam, down to the giving of the law upon Sinai.

3rd. The *Mosaic*, embracing the period from the giving of the law on Sinai until the preaching of John the Baptist.

4th. That of *John the Baptist*, embracing the period from the beginning of his ministry until the day of Pentecost.

5th. The *Christian*, embracing the period from the morning of Pentecost to the morning of the Resurrection.

I. THE ADAMIC DISPENSATION.

The Adamic dispensation is dissociated from the rest, yet allied to them all by absolute ties. It is separated from them by the great chasm of sin, and linked to them by the great ties of humanity, and the transmission of certain institutions, which come down

through all the dispensations laden with the richest odours of Eden's fairest bowers.

The time of that primeval day of purity and truth and love we cannot tell. It may have been a matter of days, or decades. Nothing is given us to indicate points of time, and our relation to Adam and Eden requires not the settlement of this point. -

Four things we notice in this dispensation, viz.: 1st, the moral condition of man; 2nd, the Divine Government; 3rd, the exposure to temptation; 4th, the appointment of certain institutions designed as perpetual safeguards to the race.

1. THE MORAL NATURE OF ADAM

was simple and perfect purity; a purity that shed its lustre through the whole being of body, mind, and soul, giving to the triple life a rapture that rose responsive to the symphony of its pure environment; a purity untarnished even by the gambols and disports of a free imagination; a purity to which all the powers and passions of body and mind did homage constantly, and which responded ever to the look of the Holy One with joy and gladness.

To this life, too, belonged experiences of truth and love which far transcended the best experiences of human life to-day. Within the sublime circle of truth they dwelt, and they knew not truth by contrast with the false, but they knew it by dwelling in the illimitable expanse of Him who is Himself the Truth.

Their nature, too, was love. God is love, and in the love likeness and love image of God were they made.

They dwell in heights sublime who rest in perfect love to-day—the paradise regained—but that primeval Eden-love knew richer raptures in the unrestrained felicity of unfettered fellowship with God.

2. THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD

in this dispensation is exhibited in the expression of law—the universal expression of government. The principles of Divine government are ever the same. Worlds may come and worlds may go, but God rules on forever, asserting His sovereignty in nature with an arbitrary hand, and to man with a moral law.

In every dispensation the expression of moral law is suited to the condition of the agent.

In the Adamic dispensation its form is simply negative—"Thou shalt not." The reason of this is obvious. Man's nature was positively good, and his inclinations and tendencies were in the lines of righteousness. The intention of moral law is two-fold, viz.: 1st, to secure the dignity and supremacy of the power which promulgates it, and 2nd, to protect and guide those to whom it is given. Only righteous law can fulfil this two-fold intention. God preserves His dignity and secures the homage of angels and of men by the righteousness of His moral law.

But why a law at all in Eden? Because moral freedom requires a moral test, by which the agent may be justified or condemned. The test in Eden was the simplest, fairest conceivable test, and Adam and Eve, though excusing their sin, make no complaint against the law which proved them.

3. THE TEMPTATION

to which Adam and Eve were exposed in this first dispensation calls for but little observation. Universal human experience bears witness to the fact of a tempter, and as far as this temptation itself is concerned, it was the same as now. The Devil is ever the same since he became Devil, and his temptations

vary only in adaptation to the person and the circumstances. Without the temptation, the probation of Adam and Eve would not have been complete. The law did not test them until the enemy provoked them to break the law. We may sin without temptation, but Adam could not; we might have a probation without a Devil, but Adam in Eden, to be tested and know the bliss of integrity and fidelity, must be proved by temptation.

4. THE INSTITUTIONS

given in Eden under the Adamic dispensation were two, viz., the *Sabbath* and *Marriage*. These have been preserved to the world through all the dispensations. The *Sabbath* was doubtless a day of rest and special enjoyment in the presence and fellowship of God. In Eden Adam was a toiler, for he was "to dress" the garden "and keep it," and "to till the ground." The curse, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," doubtless meant excessive and anxious toil. To Adam, therefore, as a toiler, the Sabbath of rest, with its gracious memories of the finished creation, would be, as to us, a weekly refreshing, and the emphasis which God placed upon this institution certainly meant the Sabbath some real benefit and blessing to Adam.

The institution of *marriage* in Eden is a simple and beautiful story, and the fragrance of Eden lingers still about the names of wife, and husband, and children, and home. The sanctity of the family institution is not only set before us in the commands of subsequent dispensations, but by the great Teacher Himself reference is made to the Eden example, as the human ideal and the Divine purpose of this holy ordinance. All that is left us of Eden is the Sabbath and marriage, and by investing these holy ordinances with the spirit of purity and love, we strengthen the ties between the first and the last dispensation.

II. THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION.

The Patriarchal dispensation is so called because the patriarchs, who exercised the office of governors, were also priests to their people, and God chose these men as the medium of His revealed will. The office of patriarch, literally *Father-Governor*, was a part of the inheritance of the first-born son, unless incompetent or set aside by a special providence. The patriarch held authority over his house and the whole of his kindred who remained a part of the colony, together with all employed in their service—a company which, with Abraham, numbered three hundred and eighteen servants born in his house, besides the members of his family; and in the case of Jacob, when he went down to Egypt, a company of sixty-six of his own seed, without any mention of servants.

The saddest paragraph of human history is that which immediately precedes the opening of this patriarchal dispensation. The scene is in the garden. The curse had not yet fallen from the lips of the Judge, and flowers and fruits had not yet felt its blight, but standing there in strange contrast with the beautiful and tranquil surroundings were the human pair, writhing in the agony of relentless remorse. The lofty heights of purity from which they fell; the unutterable gloom which wrapped them in its deepening, thickening folds; the bitter pangs of deep and dark despair which filled and thrilled their souls; and the thought of that starless waste of those eternal years which fill their space with weeping, wailing, and woe, all combined to make them feel the *wrong*, the *curse*, of sin.

It was here, right here, in the presence of a triumphant Devil, in the awful presence of sin, in the threatening presence of hell's devouring mouth, that

God began His "story of grace." The beginning of the Patriarchal dispensation is the beginning of the Gospel, the beginning of that glad evangel of mercy and love, which, in the fulness of time, sent forth its fulness of grace and truth.

The opening of this dispensation did not, however, introduce the person of the Eternal Son to this world. He was here in the voice that spake light and life in the order of creation. He was now in the garden executing the office of Judge, and here, in the presence of justice and judgment, He planted His triple office of *Redeemer*, *Mediator*, and *Saviour*.

How far God explained and expanded His purpose and plan of salvation to the first sinning ones, we cannot tell. History records to us the first word of salvation's hope in the mystic promise-prophecy, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise *His* heel."

The written word of this revelation was, however, given after 2,500 years had accumulated its traditional testimony of God, and therefore, as a history and a testimony, it stands only for the ages since it was written. But to Adam and Eve the word was spoken, and doubtless was expanded to their minds in that simplicity and plainness characteristic of the teaching of God.

To us, who read this first prophetic promise in the light of a brighter dispensation, there is a poetic grandeur. The whole Gospel lies couched and covered in embryo here. The world's Deliverer in His *manhood*, His *suffering*, and His *conquest*, is vividly portrayed in the picture of the woman's seed, with bruised heel, bruising the head of the serpent. The might and majesty, the virtue and the victory of the world's Redeemer, are written in this first record of sin and salvation, and we might almost preface this

dispensation with the opening words of the Gospel by Mark, "The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God."

The Patriarchal dispensation covers a period of 2,513 years. It began in the word of judgment and mercy in Eden, just before the expulsion, and ended at Sinai. This dispensation has three several stages or periods, each of which opens with a special covenant. The first is represented by Adam, and may be called the covenant of *Redemption*, with its sign of the altar and its victim. The second is represented by Noah, and may be called the covenant of *preservation*, with its sign of the rainbow. The third is represented by Abraham, and may be called the covenant of *nationality*, with its sign of circumcision.

The first of these reckons from the fall to the flood, a space of 1,656 years. Its general characteristic was the pledge of mercy and forgiveness to the believing worshipper, with its sign and symbol of the altar and the sacrifice. This was God's chosen method of worship for man, and happily adapted to that pictorial age of the world's childhood. The significance of the altar and its sacrifice is brought before us with great interest in the historic record of the first worshippers. Cain, the first-born of the race, and his brother Abel, came to make their offering of overt homage to God. "And Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." Gen. 4:3-5. It was God's purpose that the great sad fact of sin should have its *memorial*, and that the generations of men should confess their blood-guiltiness before Him; it was God's purpose that the great grand fact of atonement, with its outflow of mercy, should have its *memorial* and *witness* among men; it

was God's purpose that man's obedience and faith should have some towering testimony to the world, and to emblazon these doctrines of the everlasting covenant, God ordained the ALTAR and the SACRIFICE for man.

In the very first family mankind divides on the question of sin and salvation. Cain rejects the altar and the sacrifice, becomes a murderer and a branded wanderer from God, a sensuous and profligate progenitor of a sensuous and profligate race. Seth, the successor of Abel, accepts like him the altar and the sacrifice, and becomes the progenitor of "the sons of God." Many years pass by, and then the sons of God, *i.e.*, the sons of Seth, took wives of the fair daughters of men—daughters of Cain—and the sensuality and pride and violence of the Cainites prevailed among the Sethites, until the whole world was full of violence and villainy. Then God came down and talked with Noah, telling him of His purpose to wash away the wickedness of the world with the wasting waters of a flood.

That purpose was fulfilled, and God started the race anew from one righteous family, under

A NEW COVENANT

of promise, of which the rainbow became the sign: "I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between *Me* and the *earth*." Gen. 9:13.

But this new covenant of mercy and hope failed to preserve the race in righteousness. The sons of Noah soon forsook their father's faith, and in the very presence of Noah and the rainbow itself began to build their BABEL monument of unbelief and rebellion. Then God came down to visit the earth again with judgment, and in the "confusion of speech"

he scattered the people. Japheth, the eldest, and his sons, pitched their tents to the northward, ultimately possessing Europe. Ham, the second, with his progeny, struck for the west, and claimed the land of the Nile, with an ultimate possession of Africa. Shem, the youngest, but the chosen progenitor of the chosen race, held the old landmarks, with an ultimate claim on all Asia. The increase of humanity brought the increase of wickedness, and the wider settlement of the earth seemed to give the wider spread to unbelief and idolatry. Four hundred and twenty-seven years under the Rainbow Covenant gives a sad record of moral degeneration, and God, to rescue the earth again, called

ABRAHAM,

and, under another special covenant, made him and his seed the custodians of Divine revelation for the blessing of the world.

This ABRAHAMIC COVENANT had its origin in circumcision, which became a sacred rite with all the descendants of the patriarch. Four hundred and thirty years of this Abrahamic covenant closes up the Patriarchal dispensation, while the covenant of circumcision itself, with its provisions and promises, is carried into the Mosaic economy. This 430 years contains as its most interesting records the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, and the bondage of Israel and their deliverance by the hand of Moses.

Through this 2500 years of the Patriarchal dispensation the revelation of Divine will was oral and traditional. There was no written word of "law and testimony" to which appeal might be made. The patriarchs received the "word of the Lord" from time to time, and tradition alone preserved it. The longevity of these periods favoured the purity of the traditions, but on the other hand, their moral corrup-

tions perverted the word of traditional testimony. Agreeable to this is the historic fact, that those families who lived near to God preserved the truth, while those who departed from Him conformed the traditional word to their own moral degeneracy. Upon the whole, both life and doctrine were sadly corrupted throughout this dispensation, with here and there an Enoch, a Noah, an Abraham, as waymarks along the line of truth and righteousness.

We next turn to notice the "development of doctrine" during this dispensation. The Mosaic record of these ages we must regard as a simple summary of human history and Divine teaching, and therefore do not expect to find any completeness in doctrinal statements; yet it has its theological teaching and a gradual advancement in doctrinal testimony.

The dispensation opens with a broken law inflicting its penalty upon the race, and the JEHOVAH—the SAVIOUR—cursing the serpent, and proclaiming deliverance for man.

Thus, in the very outset, the fact of sin and the provision of salvation were declared. Then comes the altar and the sacrifice, with its doctrinal significance, laying emphasis upon, 1st, the confession of sin; 2d, atonement for sin, and 3d, faith in the promise of Jehovah.

Here, too, by the first altar, and with the first family, God propounded the doctrine of personal responsibility for acceptance or rejection by Him: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Gen. 4:7. Thus the very first pronouncement in that region of theology is distinct Arminianism. A little past midway in this dispensation the doctrine of total depravity is affirmed: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Gen. 6 : 5. About this time, too, is noted a reference to the Holy Ghost and His office in the world : "My spirit shall not always strive with man." Somewhere, too, in this dispensation belongs the story of Job, and this poetic history, while affording us a sublime exposition of some phases of the Divine government, also adds its quota to the theology of the time, in its doctrine of the future state, with its rewards and punishments. Besides this positive teaching of theology in the record given us, there is a vast accumulation of doctrinal teaching, in assumptions, incidental references, and reviews of personal character, all of which goes far to establish a system of truth, and furnish a "body of theology," which, as the dispensation advances, grows brighter and clearer even to the close.

Although the doctrinal teaching of these ages is dim and clouded, in contrast with subsequent revelation, yet within its records is built up a complete system of theology, declaring the being and attributes of God ; the universality of sin and the total depravity of the race ; universal redemption and the common privilege of salvation through faith in the atonement, and conscious favour and fellowship with God ; a distinct code of morals, and a future state, with its rewards and punishments.

III. THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION.

Amid scenes of thrilling grandeur and transcendent sublimity, the Mosaic dispensation was ushered in. Fifty days' march from Egypt brought the great caravan of Israel to this sacred shrine of nature and of God, and here, encamped before the mount called Sinai, over two millions of people watched and wondered, while the mountain moved and smoked "as the

smoke of a furnace," and a matchless voice, clothed with power and glory, spake the immortal words of the TEN COMMANDMENTS.

The chief characteristic of this dispensation is *law*, for "the law was given by Moses." It was not, however, the first promulgation of law, but law for the first time formulated, codified, and written. The law of this dispensation was given in its completeness at Sinai, and, unlike the previous dispensation, one covenant at its opening serves unto its close. This law is three-fold: 1st, *The moral*, spoken by the voice of God from the mount, and afterward written on tables of stone. 2nd, *The ceremonial*, which provided an ecclesiastical polity and ritual. 3rd, *The civil*, which provided for judicial, commercial, and social regulations. The first of this triple code is the substance and source of all law. The ceremonial and the civil are but expansions of its principles, made necessary by the blindness and waywardness of man.

The decalogue is changeless. It was spoken by God, and written on stone. The rest was spoken through Moses and written on parchment, and was tentative. The decalogue belongs to all the dispensations, but the ceremonial is purely Mosaic. The decalogue, as containing *fixed principles*, stands separate and alone, while the ceremonial and civil are mixed together. Judaism, the product of this mixed law, was a national ecclesiasticism, or an ecclesiastical nationalism, to which was committed the "ORACLES OF GOD" in the moral law, and when the purposes of that holy trust were fulfilled it passed away.

National and ecclesiastical systems are but the traveling dress of human experience, and are mended or made over, or thrown away, as experience may demand, until the final disrobing of human life.

But while the ceremonial law was only temporary, it was nevertheless grand. The comprehensive sig-

nificance of its symbolism, and the dignity of its forms; the beauty of its priestly robes, and the graceful movement in priestly performances; the devout mien of the humble worshippers, and the solemn and poetic grandeur of its readings, songs, and benedictions, gave to the ceremonials of Judaism such a character of unparalleled magnificence as shades with oblivion all subsequent apings of its gorgeous ritual.

Modern ritualism is but a rehabilitation with the worn-out rags of Judaism which will not fit these days, nor serve to cover the spiritual nakedness or hide the shame of moral deformity. The beauty and benefit of the ceremonial ended with the dispensation to which it belonged, and all efforts to revive its times and tunes are hopeless gropings among the sepulchres. It is dead and buried a "hundred fathoms deep," and even the might of the resurrection morning will fail to restore it.

The Mosaic economy, in addition to the magnificence of its ritual and its priesthood, is invested with a thrilling interest by the words and work of its HEROIC RACE OF PROPHETS. It is true there were prophets in patriarchal times, and the patriarchs themselves did prophecy of things which should come to pass, but *the days of the prophets* belong emphatically to post-Mosaic times. The law and the prophets are linked together, and the majesty of the law is more than co-qualified by the grandeur of prophetic testimony, which centred in JESUS CHRIST.

The movements of these mighty men must have much impressed the times in which they lived.

The kind yet kingly utterances of Samuel, through the closing days of the judges, and opening of the new monarchy; the dauntless challenges of the intrepid Elijah as he faced kings and courtiers; the faith and fervour of the tender-hearted Elisha; the matchless rhetoric which clothes the predictions of the evan-

gelical Isaiah; the plaintive pleadings of the weeping Jeremiah; the fervent appeals of the impassioned dreamer Ezekiel; the stately deliverances of the pure and princely Daniel; and the many testimonies of the Minor Prophets in unfolding the law and enforcing the word of the Lord, immensely add to the greatness and grandeur of the Mosaic dispensation.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE

through this dispensation is clearly marked. The doctrinal teaching here is by two methods, as under the former economy, viz., the symbolic, as contained in the ecclesiastical ritual, and the literal, as presented in the law and taught by the prophets and teachers. The ceremonial law of Moses was a great enlargement of the simple principles of sacrifice and service, as given under the patriarchal regime, and was intended more clearly to illustrate and enforce the doctrines contained in the great covenant of mercy which opened that dispensation.

In the great number and variety of sacrifices, and the elaborate ritual of this economy, everything was doctrinally significant. In the sacrifices of the former dispensation only the cardinal doctrines of religion were symbolized, but in the Mosaic the closest details within the lines of sin and salvation are illustrated. The bounds of this paper will not suffer us to exemplify much, but a reference or two will be necessary to impress the fact. First we turn to the Passover. This institution, although given fifty days before the law, nevertheless belongs to it. Here we have a number of particulars specifically appointed, each of which is symbolic.

1st. The unblemished Lamb is a symbol of Christ.

2nd. The shedding of blood is symbolic of atonement.

3rd. The sprinkling of blood represents the personal shelter in the atonement.

4th. The feast upon the lamb represents the life and comfort by Jesus Christ.

5th. The unbroken bones and undivided lamb-represent a *whole Christ* in all His offices for every believer

6th. The bitter herbs represent the trials and tribulations which mingle with the joy of a holy life.

7th. The unleavened bread represents the purity of the feast and of the life which it sustains.

8th. The attitude in which the feast was eaten represents the pilgrimage of this life, with the hope of a better life.

In like manner, also, the particulars of "the great day of atonement," and the sacrifice for "the sins of ignorance," are doctrinally instructive.

It may be sufficient, without further illustration, to say, that the doctrinal teaching of this dispensation in symbol and ritual alone represents the universal fact of sin and the total depravity of the race; atonement satisfactory to infinite justice, with ample provision for the pardon of sin as a crime, purification from it as a pollution, and deliverance from it as a power; and also the practical duties of prayer, penitence, and faith, and the privilege of favour and fellowship with God.

There was also great doctrinal advancement made in this economy, by the literal teaching of the priests and the prophets, especially the latter. Apart from the visions and predictions of the prophets, there is a vast mass of moral truth and teaching in the books they have left us, and then we must also remember, what comes to us represents but a fragment of the words and works of these holy men.

But what we have is ample to build a "*body of divinity*" both clear and strong. The book of Psalms alone would sustain our whole Methodist theology, or

if there be any lack here, the evangelical Isaiah and the Arminian Ezekiel will supply it all.

But the moral teaching of the prophets was intended to be more practical than doctrinal. Their great aim was to bring their people into obedience to God, and see them happy in the worship and service of Jehovah; yet it must be observed, that the incidental droppings of doctrinal truth, together with the teachings of the sacrifices, are sufficient to build a system of theology as complete as was possible without the facts of Christianity.

IV. THE DISPENSATION OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

This economy forms but a brief period in the history of revealed religion. John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, and his ministry the prelude to the Gospel. "The law was a school-master to bring men to Christ," and John a flaming herald to prepare the way still further for the world's acceptance of the Gospel; yet this ministry of John stands essentially a separate dispensation, as much as "the law of Moses;" "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."

The distinctive characteristics of a dispensation are here clearly marked, in the introduction of A NEW DOCTRINE, and A NEW ORDINANCE. This new doctrine is *Repentance*, and the new ordinance is *Baptism*. It is true these things were not absolutely new, but they were new in a dispensational sense, that is, in the prominence given them, and the stern requirement of them.

The Scripture records of this dispensation are written in the third chapters of Matthew and Luke, and the first chapters of Mark and John, together with

a few incidental allusions to John and his work recorded elsewhere in the Gospels. To these, therefore, we must go for information to limit its boundaries and define its place. Of the four Gospel recorders, Matthew most happily describes the opening of this dispensation: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight."

John the Baptist was a priest according to the law, in direct lineal descent from Aaron, both on his father's and his mother's side, but on this ground had he no authority for such a new departure in religion. Nor was the mission of John attested by the miraculous power, as in the case of Moses, and Christ, and the apostles, for "John did no miracle," yet his ministry did receive even greater sanction in the Divine presence and the endorsement of the people, for "there went out unto him all they of Jerusalem and Judea, and the region round about, and were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins."

But the authority for this dispensation lies not in the facts of its existence and its success, but in the *Divine appointment*, as witnessed by the prophecies of Isaiah and Malachi, and the *endorsement of Jesus Christ*, who Himself received baptism at the hands of John.

The preaching of John renounced nothing in the doctrinal code of Moses, nor did it set aside any of the Mosaic ceremonials.

In stirring, startling tones he made the very wilderness resound the cry, "*Repent ye*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The awful fact of sin in the moral constitution of man, as well as in the wilful

wrong of his daily thoughts and deeds, was set before the people with such vehemence and power that they came crying out, "What shall we do?" To these anxious inquiries John replied, teaching *repentance* in order to forgiveness, and that they should believe on *Him* that should come after him. To those, also, who avowed their repentance, John administered the *ordinance of Baptism*, as a sign of repentance and a symbol of the Holy Ghost's operation on the heart.

Religion, both theoretical and practical, was much advanced during this short dispensation, but it does not appear so much marked in spiritual experience as in the great moral awakening and wide-spread quickening of men to seek the Lord. The religion of this dispensation was the *Religion of Repentance*. I do not mean to say, that during this economy of grace men necessarily lived and died without conscious forgiveness of sins, for under every dispensation some men at least did not only enjoy Divine acceptance, but walked with God, as Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and the prophets; but the general character of personal religion through this *regime* only reached the altitude of repentance.

As "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the LAW, that the man which *doeth* those things shall live by them," (Rom. 10 : 5) so John the Baptist proclaimed *repentance* as the great requirement of God; and certainly every man who lived and died in true repentance passed through, by the grace of God, into the paradise of Christ.

Further evidence on this line is gathered from two incidental paragraphs of subsequent history.

Turning to the Acts of the Apostles, and the last paragraph of the 18th chapter and the first paragraph of the 19th chapter, we find the spiritual experience, under the teaching of John, set forth as already stated.

In the first of these is given the case of Apollos,

"who taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John," whom, when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of the Lord more perfectly, that is, the way of the Gospel dispensation. In the next paragraph is given an account of several disciples whom Paul found in Ephesus, who, like Apollos, knew only "the baptism of John," and had not heard of the Holy Ghost as given under the Gospel economy. To some it may seem strange, that twenty years after Pentecost earnest and honest disciples should be found living only in the dispensation of John, but stranger still must seem the experience of John Wesley, who, seventeen hundred years after Pentecost, spent several years preaching the Gospel before he knew the witness and comfort of the Holy Ghost.

To this dispensation of John there belonged only the preaching of the great prophet himself. His ministry began about six months before that of Christ, and continued perhaps for a year and a half, although the dispensation itself continued until the day of Pentecost. The mission of John was to "prepare the way of the Lord," and with touching fidelity to that mission did he proclaim the supremacy of Christ, and transfer from himself to the GREATER ONE the allegiance of the thousands baptized by his hands: "He must increase, but I must decrease; He that cometh from above is above all."

V. THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

"Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His SON."

These are the last days. This is the last dispensation; and whether the world shall see a thousand or ten thousand years to come, it shall know nothing

greater in the mercy of God than the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is "appointed heir of all things."

This dispensation began at Pentecost, although there belongs to it much that preceded that time. As the teaching of Moses and the institution of the Passover preceded the giving of the law, and yet belong to the covenant of Sinai, so the teaching of Christ and His death and resurrection all belong to that dispensation of the Spirit which unfolded its forces so sublimely on that historic Pentecost day in the sacred city of Jerusalem.

In the fore-front of this dispensation stand several *historic facts*, to which the early expounders of Christianity always gave prominence, and the recital of which, all along the centuries, has been accompanied with spiritual power. Nor has the mystery with which these facts are clothed lessened their force among men. The stories of GOD INCARNATED, the SUPERNATURAL DEATH OF CHRIST, HIS RESURRECTION and ASCENSION, seemed like idle tales, but a strange and mystic power constrained the world's acceptance of them; and these *facts* form the groundwork of the Gospel, and the foundation of all its doctrines.

Following these historic facts, the distinguishing characteristics of the Christian dispensation are, 1st, the doctrine of *the new birth*, or conversion; 2nd, the ordinance of *the Lord's Supper*; and 3rd, that *abundant measure* of the HOLY SPIRIT as given for: (1) the conviction of sin; (2) the assurance of forgiveness; (3) the purification of the heart, and (4) the guidance of believers.

The first of these chief characteristics is before us most clearly in our Lord's conversations with Nicodemus. Here the inquirer is startled with the words of Christ, "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," and earnestly protests, "How can

these things be?" Jesus answers, "Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things." Nicodemus, as a teacher in Israel, might have discovered this doctrine in the testimony of the prophets, but he did not. To him and to the religious world it came with all the strangeness of a new requirement, and a new doctrine it practically was, as repentance was new under the preaching of John.

The second chief characteristic of the Christian economy, the Lord's Supper, was instituted by its founder under circumstances which must ever invest it with the most solemn interest and the most sacred memories. With what subdued feelings we read the account given by Paul: "The Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood: This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

By this ordinance of Christianity the perpetuity of the Passover is secured, and the word of the Lord which established it "an ordinance forever" is maintained. The Pascal Lamb found its typical fulfilment in "Christ our passover sacrificed for us," and this great symbol of sacrifice and salvation becomes the lasting ceremonial of many nations.

The third chief characteristic of the Christian economy may be more properly designated its *constitution* than its characteristic, for it is the "*ministration of the Spirit*." 2 Cor. 3:8. The dispensation of Christ is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. It is true the Holy Spirit was present in all the dispensations, and His office the same in them all, but in the

latter He is *more manifest in presence*, and *more expressive in office*, and *more demonstrative in power*.

The *great event* of Christianity was the death of Christ, but the *greater event* of Christianity is the gift of the Spirit. Christ's death, as the superinducing cause of the Spirit's gift and all Divine mercies, stands pre-eminent, but the four-fold office of the Holy Ghost becomes the practical administration of all spiritual benefits to man. The Holy Spirit, as the "executive of the Godhead," reveals the Fatherhood of the Father, and the Brotherhood of the Son; directs in Providence and dispenses in grace; enforces the law and applies the blood.

VI. THE SUPREMACY OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

The several dispensations of the grace of God, from the Patriarchal to the Christian, present to us an ascending scale of beauty and benefit in the revelations of God and the instructions of man. The simple worship of the patriarchs rises into stately dignity under the grand ritual of Moses; while that of Moses again is overshadowed by the greater spirituality of the Baptist; and this, in turn, is lost in the transcendent glory of the Christian.

The sublimity of the Christian dispensation may perhaps be best seen by contrast. This was Paul's method in several of his epistles, and also the method employed by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The contrast in these cases is made with the Mosaic only, but we shall follow this line, making the contrast more general.

1st. We mark this supremacy of the Gospel economy, in that it was given through the SON OF GOD. Other economies were introduced by *men*. The Patriarchal is represented by Adam, Noah, and Abraham, the heads of the three covenants within that dispensation. The law is represented by Moses, and John the Baptist stands for the economy which bears his name.

Unto these men God spake great promises, "but unto the SON He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom." "Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His SON, whom he hath appointed heir of all things."

2nd. This dispensation is supreme, because it treasures all the benefits and blessings of all the former ones, besides all that is peculiar to itself.

The pledge of mercy to Adam; the promise of preservation to Noah; the covenant blessings of Abraham; the moral and civil obligations of Moses; the doctrine and ordinance of John the Baptist, and all the spiritual significance of all the rites and ceremonies through the 4,000 years, are conserved and concentered in this dispensation of Christ.

3rd. This dispensation triumphs in that it is the fulfilment of the promises, prophecies and symbols of all the past. Away back in those first words of promise, which lifted the cloud of despair from the heart of fallen Adam, is revealed the hope on which the ages hung—the hope of a man-child who should redeem the race.

Eve, rejoicing over her first-born, exclaimed, "I have gotten *the* man from the Lord," but alas for the hope of the promise in Cain, the branded murderer!

Down through the ages and the covenants the world still watched and waited until four thousand years had filled the scroll of prophecy and promise,

when *Christ* came and fulfilled them all. "The hope of the promise made unto our fathers," also set forth in altar and incense, in sacrifice and service, is fulfilled in Christ alone. He is not only "the end of the law," but "the spirit of prophecy," the subject of promise, and the substance of all those shadowy forms in symbol and ceremonial.

"These feeble types and shadows old
Are all in *Thee*, the Truth, fulfilled ;
We in Thy sacrifice behold
The *substance* of those rites revealed."

4th. The grandeur of the Gospel economy is further observed in the clearer revelation of the Word.

The patriarchal days had no written testimony, but in this respect the law was complete; yet how much beneath the teaching of Christ are the writings of Moses. Even the decalogue, with all its majesty, is far transcended by the Sermon on the Mount, and every injunction of those everlasting oracles requires the spiritual supplement of the *Gospel* word. The law of Moses required the worship of God, but Christ teaches the spirituality of that worship; the law of Moses enjoins the sanctity of the Sabbath, but Christ teaches *how* to keep it holy; the law of Moses demands honour to parents, but Christ teaches filial love; the law of Moses charges against murder, and adultery, and theft, but Christ discovers murder in the heart, adultery in the look, and theft in the covetous purpose.

And this revelation is not only clearer in its requirements, but also brighter in its promises. The heart convicted of sin is at once cheered with the hope of forgiveness, and the earnest seeker of pardon is clearly pointed to the Cross, and told to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

Equally clear, too, are the counsels and encouragements for the Christian to help him into that holier

sphere, where "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," and "perfect love casteth out fear."

5th. This dispensation is also exalted by the clearer and richer personal experience which it affords. Contrast here may be difficult, but there are two things sufficient to determine a fair and clear conclusion: (1) The greater measure of the Spirit given in this economy must imply a clearer and stronger conviction of sin, a clearer perception of Divine favour when forgiveness is experienced, and a clearer understanding and experience in the way of holiness. (2) The Gospel teaching concerning experience certainly represents a greater clearness than the Old Testament word. In the old economies the Spirit strove with men, but in the new He *convicts the world* in respect of sin; in the old economies men were admitted into the *favour* of God, but in the new they are admitted into the *family* of God; in the old economies men were received as *servants*, but in the new they are received as *sons*; in the old economies the Holy Spirit was *with* men, but in the new He is *in* men; in the old economies, men who trod the sublime heights of holiness *walked with God*, but in the new they *dwell* IN God.

This contrast upon the line of experience is also before us in the closing verses of the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

In this chapter is recited the memorial of their faith whose holy lives were as incense before God; and then we are told, "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect"—better things for us in the experience of *Gospel grace* than these best and bravest men enjoyed under darker dispensations.

There is also a contrast of experience under the dispensations of John and Christ set before us in two

paragraphs of the Acts of the Apostles, already referred to in this paper. Here Apollos and the twelve disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus passed from the experience under the baptism of John into the happier and richer experience of *Holy Ghost power* in the baptism of Christ. But the most impressive evidence of the better inheritance under the Gospel is afforded in that contrast made by Christ Himself, in which He exalts the little one of the Christian kingdom above the greatness of His own herald: "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he."

6th. It is the glory of this dispensation that its provisions are universal. It knows no national bounds, for "in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him;" and lest the prejudice of men should hedge it in, the charge was explicitly given, that this "glad tidings of great joy" should go "into all the world, and to every creature."

7th. Another glory of this dispensation is the material advantages which accrue at its shrine. Under the shadow of the Cross the earth has poured forth her increase, and the flocks have multiplied in the field: The mine has yielded her treasures for mint and furnace, and trade and commerce have exchanged the products of every land. The arts and sciences have grown till men float over oceans in palaces, and ride over continents in Pullmans, and talk through wires with distant friends, and turn midnight to moonlight by the electric flame. And painting, and poetry, and sculpture, and architecture, and music, and literature, and travel, pour their ceaseless streams of pleasure on the soul, till human life is loaded with benefits, and filled with raptures that patriarchs never knew and Israelites never imagined. And yet this is

but the morning of the Gospel. Human genius is on the track of greater triumphs. Science will solve greater problems. Human thought will go down deeper into the mystery of life ; but those who lead the procession of thought into the deeper depths of matter and of spirit must be lighted thither by the Gospel lamp.

The truth as it is in Jesus embraces all truth, and men are learning more truly that Christ is the fountain of nature's forces, the spring of all life, and "the light of the world." He that came "from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozra," is to-day "travelling in the greatness of His strength ;" and art, and science, and literature are chariots in which He speeds His way, and from which He scatters His benedictions.

The Gospel is triumphant. Christ is enthroned. And the voice of nature, subdued by the hand of peace ; and the voice of Christian civilization, enriched by the hand of beneficence ; and the sweeter voice of Christian experience, filled with the Holy Ghost, unite their exultations in the grand acclaim, "THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL OF THE BLESSED GOD."



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