

DISPENSATIONS

Law

The fifth dispensation in our study is called the Law. God gave Moses the covenant of the Law shortly after their departure from Egypt. This was called the Mosaic Covenant and is recorded in Exodus 20. The Mosaic Covenant was conditional, because the blessings from it were dependant upon Israel's obeying what was written in the Law. Also, it was a temporal covenant. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17) The events which occurred under the dispensation of the Law are recorded in Exodus 19 through John 19.

The Law consists of three parts: 1. Ten commandments: These commandments express the righteous will of God. 2. Judgments: The judgments governed the social life of Israel. 3. Ordinances: These governed the religious life of Israel.

The people of Israel were camped by Mt. Sinai when God gave them the Law. They remained there for one year, during which time they were organized into a nation. The people were numbered and arranged as to their tribes. Also, they made and erected the Tabernacle where God met with them, and from where they offered sacrifices unto the Lord. As they traveled towards the land which God had promised to them, He guided them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

When Israel came to Kadesh-barnea, which was the border of the land God had promised to them, Moses sent twelve spies in to check out the land (one man from each of the tribes). Only two of these men came back with a good report. Ten of them saw that the land was a very fruitful and desirable land, but they were fearful of the inhabitants of the land. They did not have faith that God could do what He had promised to do—that is, drive out the inhabitants before them.

Because of their unbelief, Israel had to wander in the wilderness forty years, until that generation died. Only the two men who had brought a good report, Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to enter the land along with the younger generation.

God used Joshua to lead Israel into the promised land. There, they were ruled by judges, until they became dissatisfied and demanded to have a king over them **as the other nations had**. This was a serious step in rejecting God's order. But God allowed them to have their desire in this and had Saul anointed to be their first king. Saul ruled Israel forty years. He was followed by David, who ruled forty years, and then by David's son, Solomon, also reigning forty years.

The reign of Solomon has been called the "golden age of Israel." While there were many battles fought during Saul's and David's reign, Solomon's reign was a time of peace and glory. Solomon began his rule by following and obeying God. He was the wisest and most wealthy man to ever live. However, I Kings 11:1-8 records the beginning of his downfall. In disobedience to God, he had many wives and concubines from many different nations, and they turned his heart away from His God. Because of this, and because of the wickedness of Israel, God caused the kingdom to be divided. After Solomon's death, there was a civil strife, with only the tribe of Benjamin remaining with Solomon's son, Rehoboam (who was of the tribe of Judah). The other ten tribes separated themselves, choosing Jeroboam (Solomon's servant) to be their king. The two tribes became known as Judah, and the ten were known as Israel.

During the following approximately 250 years, Israel was ruled by many kings, all of which were evil, not following God. Therefore God allowed them to be taken captive by the nation of Assyria.

Judah (the two tribes) had some evil kings, but also many who obeyed God and followed His ways. Because of this, they remained as a free nation about 135 years longer than Israel. However, over a period of time, they also became very rebellious, which caused their captivity by Babylon. They remained in Babylon for seventy years, as predicted by Jeremiah in chapter 25:11. Then they were given permission to return to their land. About 50,000 returned to build their temple and their city, even though the majority of them remained in Babylon.

Thus, the Old Testament ends with Israel in two great divisions: Many of them living throughout the Persian Empire, and a few of them back in their land. Their temple worship had been established again, but there was no real working unity in the nation. There were about 400 years between the Old and New Testaments. At the beginning of the New, the Romans had become the ruler of the world.

Jesus was born during the time of the Roman rule. As He was growing up, the Law was still in effect, along with offering sacrifices, etc. The Law demanded death as penalty for disobedience (Romans 6:23). Jesus paid that penalty for all mankind by His death on the cross (Galatians 3:13, 14). Therefore, the dispensation of the Law ended with judgment, as did the others. However, this judgment fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ instead of on all mankind! What a wonderful Saviour!