

Sunday, January 22, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 54 Darby's Dispensational System: An Overview

JND and the Two-Fold Purpose of God

- The glorification of Christ in all things is the reason for the existence of all things according to JND.
 - “The first grand and capital point is to have the end and design of God clearly and settledly in mind, so that it should be constantly before us as the key and test of all. For "no prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation . . . but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." **The divine glory is ever the end of all things; but I speak now of the effect of divine counsels in which God glorifies Himself. Now this is altogether in Christ, known in the various glories in which He is revealed.** In the church the office of the Holy Ghost, who moved the holy men of old, is to take the things of Christ and shew them to us. Hence, though Jerusalem, or Israel, or even the church, may be that in connection with which Christ may be glorified, it is only as connected with Him that they acquire this importance. So of the word even of the Old Testament scriptures: they are all to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. On the other hand, as it is evident that this alone gives, to whatever subject may be mentioned, its true and just importance, so, if Jerusalem is connected with Christ, with His affections and glory, Jerusalem becomes important; and I get in its connection with Christ, so far as I understand His glory, the key to interpret all that is said of it. It has, in the mind of God, its development in connection with the manifestation of His glory.” (*Collected Writings*, 2:41)
- “There are two spheres for the display of God’s glory in Christ, the heavenly sphere and the earthly sphere. In the dispensation (or, administration) of the fullness of times, i.e., the millennium, Christ will head up both (Eph. 1:10). Associated with Christ in this headship are two special companies. Though there are some spiritual blessings both companies possess in common (for example, the new birth) they form two distinct companies in most respects. One company is heavenly and the other company is earthly. In this connection JND wrote the following on Colossians 1:” (Huebner, 1-2)
 - “You thus see the truth about the double headship of Christ - His being Head of the church, and His being Head over all things; and then the double reconciliation, the present reconciliation and redemption of the church through grace, and then the reconciliation of all things in heaven and in earth. Now we see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Him by faith, sitting at the right hand of God, until His enemies are made His footstool. And when that time comes, and they are all put under Him, **He will take possession, according to the character given to God in the appellation used by Melchisedec when he came out to bless Abraham - "The most high God, possessor of heaven and earth."** Thus, when Christ becomes in all its fulness the King and Priest upon His throne, God will have that title.
 - **We come then to the next thing, which I will just state - I do not know how far we may be able to go through it this evening. Taking these two statements, that He is to reconcile everything in heaven and earth, and again, that He is to gather together in one, all things which are both in heaven and on earth; we also see, in several of the passages which I have quoted, that the church, or the saints who compose it, are joint-heirs with Him. What I have been seeking to shew you is, that the church of**

God (all the saints whom in this present time God is gathering by His grace in the gospel) are being associated with Christ, as the centre of blessing; that they get the central place with Himself, under whom all possible existences are to be placed. But the time for this which the scripture speaks of is when Christ receives the kingdom and returns, when the dispensation of the fulness of times comes. Then everything will be brought into order and blessedness under the authority of Christ. When God the Father has put everything under His feet, He will bring everything into order, and will then deliver up His kingdom. But the central thing during the dispensation of the fulness of times in the heavenly places will be the church, and the central thing in earthly places will be the Jews.

- **This brings in what are the two great subjects of holy Scripture, after personal redemption. The church is that in which He displays sovereign grace, bringing its members to share the glory of Christ. The Jews are those in whom He reveals as a centre the government of this world.** These are the two great subjects in Scripture after personal salvation. The Scripture speaks of the church of God as those who are associated with Christ, who are the heirs of Christ's glory. But the moment we say this, we cannot but think how wondrous it is that poor wretched creatures like us should be brought into the same glory with Christ - should be brought into the same place with Himself. And the work of reconciliation is to embrace all things in heaven and on earth.” (*Collected Writings*, 11:228-229)
- According to JND the heavenly and earthly sphere each possess its own governing characteristic. Respectively, grace is seen as applying to the heavenly sphere while government is viewed as corresponding with the earthly sphere.
 - “. . . after the question of personal salvation or relationship to God, **two great subjects present themselves to us in Scripture: the church, that sovereign grace which gives us a place along with Christ Himself in glory and blessing; and God's government of the world, of which Israel forms the centre and the immediate sphere.** Only we have to remember that in this government grace must have a part, or it would not be the government of God. It would be simple judicial condemnation, and impossibility of blessing. These ways of God are revealed in Exodus 32, 33, 34, and Deuteronomy 32. **The prophets, founding themselves on the law given in Horeb, are sent in grace to seek the fruit which the vine of the Lord's planting ought to have borne. They reproach Israel with not producing it; and solemnly warn the people of the consequences in judgment.**
 - But as God, and therefore grace, was at work, there were the purposes and will of that grace to be revealed: only that it was not in **Israel's case made effectual in a simple sovereign gift to the divine glory in a new creation, but in a display of God's ways in divine government in connection with the responsibility of man.** This grace must be in Christ, for He is the centre of all God's ways. He is the Messiah, then, of the Jews, the King that is to reign in righteousness, and to display fully and in perfection God's immediate government. (See Psalm 101.) Hence there is a double test applicable in the ways of God in government in Israel. Have they profited by and glorified God in the privileges, in the enjoyment of which they were originally placed? Are they in a condition to meet Jehovah in glory, coming in the Person of Christ? These two questions may be seen treated in Isaiah 5 and 6. (*Collected Writings*, 11:125)

- JND does not clearly teach that the government of the heavenlies will be carried out through the Church. Rather he seems to limit the concept of governance to Israel on the earth.
 - **“The reason is evident to one who knows what the church is. It is not of the world. It, as such, sits in heavenly places in Christ, where prophecy reaches not. It never will be established on earth, as the Jews. It is not its calling. The government of God will never settle it there in peace. His blessing for it will be to take it away from earth, to be with the Lord in the air. A partial application of the Apocalypse to what has the name of the church, but is the power of evil in the world, I do not deny; but this does not make the church a subject of prophecy. Accordingly, we find, as we have said, the church in heaven at the end in connection with the earth, when all is united in Christ; but no account of any dealings of God to establish it, or a progress towards a result of any kind. She is to reign with Christ, and suffer with Him.**
 - The remaining spheres of the display of the glory of the blessed Lord are the Jews and Gentiles, subjects in different degrees of His earthly government, as the church was the full exhibition of His sovereign grace in redemption, which places her in heavenly places in Christ, that in the ages to come God might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. This distinction is full of interest. Man is not governed in introducing him into the church. He is taken as a rebellious lost sinner, a hater of God, a child of wrath, be he Jew or Gentile, and set in the same place as Christ. This is not government, it is grace. The Jews are the centre of God's immediate government, morally displayed according to His revealed will. The Gentiles are brought to recognise His power and sovereignty displayed in His dealings with them. I speak of the thing, properly speaking, in its revealed character; for every sinner in all ages, is saved as such, individually, by grace, and every Christian is under the immediate government of the Father as of the heavenly family; but even so the object of government is different. With the Christian, it is to prepare him for heaven; with the Jews, on the contrary, it is to display God's righteousness on the earth: I speak of them as a body or people. Christ and the church suffer for righteousness, and reign. The Jews, as a people, suffer for sin, and the result of their history will be, "Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily, there is a God that judgeth the earth."” (*Collected Writings*, 11:46-47)

JND's Basic Dispensational Scheme

- Charles C. Ryrie (*Dispensationalism Today*, 75), Arnold D. Ehlert (*A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism*, 50), and C. Norman Kraus (*Dispensationalism in America*, 29) present JND's basic dispensational system as follows:
 - Paradisiacal State, to the Flood
 - Noah
 - Abraham
 - Israel:
 - Under the Law
 - Under the Priesthood
 - Under the Kings
 - Gentiles
 - The Spirit
 - The Millennium

- JND made the following general statement regarding the nature of dispensations in *The Apostasy of the Successive Dispensations*:
 - “This, however, we have to learn in its details, in the various dispensations which led to or have followed the revelation of the incarnate Son in whom all the fulness was pleased to dwell. . . The detail of the history connected with these dispensations brings out many most interesting displays, both of the principles and patience of God's dealings with the evil and failure of man; and of the workings by which He formed faith on His own thus developed perfections. **But the dispensations themselves all declare some leading principle or interference of God, some condition in which He has placed man, principles which in themselves are everlastingly sanctioned of God, but in the course of those dispensations placed responsibly in the hands of man for the display and discovery of what he was, and the bringing in their infallible establishment in Him to whom the glory of them all rightly belonged. It is not my intention to enter into any great detail, but to shew simply how, in every instance, there was total and immediate failure as regarded man, however the patience of God might tolerate and carry on by grace the dispensation in which man has thus failed in the outset; and further, that there is no instance of the restoration of a dispensation afforded us, though there might be partial revivals of it through faith.**” (*Collected Writings*, 1:124)
 - “. . . οἰκονομία does not mean headship of creation at all, but administration; and that it cannot mean it in the passage referred to, because there is another word (ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι) which does precisely mean it, and which states that that is the particular form of the οἰκονομία, or administration, here ordained of God. Nor does it mean, by any transition, a period, for another word (καιρῶν) is used to express that also. I give the passage literally: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself for the administration of the fulness of times, [namely] to head up all things in Christ, the things in heaven and the things on earth, in Him in whom also we have an inheritance," etc. Now, here οἰκονομία, administration, is as simple a word as possible. The *particular kind* of administration is heading up all things in Christ.” (*Collected Writings*, 13:154)

The Three Administrations

- In *J.N. Darby's Teaching Regarding Dispensations, Ages, and Administrations*, R.A. Huebner summarizes JND's dispensational structure as follows. “There are a number of subjects, upon which JND laid heavy emphasis in connection with the development of God's ways for the bringing out of Christ's glory, that I wish to bring to bear in connection with what is called ‘dispensational truth.’ These are:
 - “With Noah, we begin the course of dispensations, or of the manifestations of the ways of God for the final bringing out of the full glory of Christ.”
 - A dispensation is ‘a dispensed order or system by which God acted as governing the earth.’ I will call this administration, rather, in order to distinguish this from such dispensations as priesthood, judges, and kingship, which, observe, are not time periods.
 - The calling of God (introduced through Abraham).
 - The combination of government and calling (in Israel).

- The testing of the first man ended at the cross.
- Consequently, the mystery of Christ and the church, unforeseen by the O.T. prophets (Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26; Eph. 3:9), is presently unfolded as a heavenly system of grace.
- And, all wherein man failed shall be made good to God's glory, by Christ, in the administration of the fullness of times (Eph. 1:10), when Christ will head up both the heavenly and earthly, glorifying God in government and calling, as part of the headship of earthly things."
- According to Huebner two principles affected JND's dispensational scheme: **1) government, 2) calling as they pertain to the earth.** Thus the first dispensation begins with the institution of human government under Noah after the flood. The second administration begins when the principles of government and calling (first instituted with Abraham) were combined. "And during the time that Israel was recognized as Jehovah's people, there were other subsidiary dispensations, such as priests and kings. These were additional ways in which God placed himself in relation to the people. Priesthood and Kingship were institutions dispensed by God in connection with His government in the earth in the called nation under the covenant of the law. They were subsumed under the administration which combined government and calling in Israel, which continued from Moses until the times of the Gentiles began." (Huebner, 18-19)
- Consequent upon Israel's failure, government was transferred to Gentile empire (Dan. 2) and thus **an earthly parenthesis of judgment upon Israel occurred.**
 - **The event of which we speak *changed the whole state of the earth*, by separating the *government* from the *calling* of God - two things which had long been united in the Jewish people under responsibility: a union which (having failed through the unfaithfulness of man, when God Himself ruled over them) had been propped up, and established afresh, under the reign of a man who was a chosen type of Christ. From the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the throne of David, the government of the world was in the hands of the Gentiles; and the times of the Gentiles commenced (see Dan. 2: 37, 38) under a responsibility, the effects of which are described in the book of Daniel, the Apocalypse, and Zechariah, and which are characterised in Daniel 4. The four great empires which, by their pride and in God's providence, successively seized on the supreme power, and consequently brought themselves under this responsibility and failed, are well known. All the time of their dominion, Israel has been *Lo-ammi*, "not my people." (Collected Writings, 2:149)**
- "But with this change the Gentiles did not have calling; nor did Israel any longer have government committed to the nation by God. AS so there was no longer an administration. The first man had failed in carrying out the administration of government and calling. The next administration, in the sense in which we have been speaking of it, is when Christ will make good, to God's glory, this failure of the first man when He administers the fullness of times (Eph. 1:10); i.e., the millennial reign." (Huebner, 19)
- "At the cross, representatives of the called people (Israel) and the Gentile government (Romans) cast out the Christ of God. Thus ended the trial of the first man. Consequently, God brought out the great secret, the mystery, hid from ages and generations (Col. 1:26; Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:9),

as a heavenly parenthesis, a heavenly system of grace, between Pentecost and the Rapture. After this work is completed Daniel's 70th week will take place. But now, the saints have calling but not government. There is now no dispensation (i.e., administration)." (Huebner, 19)

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