

## Dispensationalism

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### What is 'the dispensation of the fullness of times' in Ephesians 1:10? (pt 1)

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Part one of a series.

Here is the phrase from our reader's question, in context:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in ***the dispensation of the fullness of the times*** He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him.  
(Ephesians 1:7-10)

These verses describe the ultimate, glorious climax of God's eternal plan of redemption in Christ. In the "dispensation of the fullness of the times" God the Father will "gather together in one all things in Christ." What exactly does this mean?

As we read these words in context, we're confronted by some terms that require careful study:

- What does Paul under divine inspiration mean when he speaks of a "dispensation"?
- What does he mean by "the fullness of times"?
- What does it mean to "gather together in one"?
- What does he mean by "all things"?

We need to understand the terms Paul is using in order to understand "the mystery of His will" - God's ultimate purpose in the plan of redemption. Otherwise, we may miss the point and draw wrong conclusions.

It will be helpful for us to subdivide our reader's question into the four subsidiary questions above, answer each one, and then step back and look at the sum of them. Today we begin that process.

### **What is a Dispensation in this Context?**

So we begin with the word "dispensation". Paul uses the Greek word that's translated "dispensation" twice in Ephesians. One of those is in the passage we're considering, in verse 10. We also find this word in Ephesians 3:2, where Paul speaks of the "dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery."

[Note: Some translations use Greek source texts that also have the same word in Ephesians 3:9 in the phrase that is translated "the fellowship of the mystery" in the KJV and NKJV. In other versions it is variously translated "dispensation" (ASV), "administration" (NASB and NIV), or "plan" (ESV). But the most reliable Greek manuscript (the Received Text which is used to translate the KJV and NKJV) has a different word in the Greek, *koinonia*, which in fact means "fellowship" and not "dispensation".]

The word translated "dispensation" in Ephesians 1:1 and 3:2 is the Greek word *oikonomia*, which literally means "house order". It's the word from which we get our English word "economy". A dispensation, simply put, is 1.) a plan, or 2.) the carrying out of a plan. How the word is used in the original Greek of the Scriptures - sense number one or sense number two - depends on the point of view. The first usage of dispensation (1:10) is sense number one, from the standpoint of someone who is in

authority, someone who makes a plan, who establishes the way that something will operate. The second usage (3:2) is sense number two, from the standpoint of a person who is under authority, who is given the responsibility or stewardship of carrying out some part of the plan.

In chapter three, Paul is speaking from his perspective. He's saying that God has given him a share in the responsibility of carrying out His plan. Paul also uses *oikonomia* in the same sense in Colossians 1:25, where he says that God has made him a minister of the Gospel "according to the *dispensation* (KJV, "stewardship" in the NKJV) of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God."

But in Ephesians 1:10, Paul is clearly speaking of things not from his perspective as an appointed steward carrying out God's plan, but from God's perspective as the author of the eternal plan. So when Paul uses the word "dispensation" in the phrase "the dispensation of the fullness of times" he is talking about God's plan for the ages, established and settled "before the foundation of the world" (1:4), centered in Jesus Christ, and now approaching its culmination.

[Next: What is "The Fullness of the Times"?](#)

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In the original Greek, this passage tells us that God will "re-gather together in one all things in Christ."

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