

Hugo Bouter

The seven dispensations of Scripture

*The truth concerning the house of God,
and dispensational teaching*

Oikos en oikonomia

'I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth'.

1 Timothy 3:15

What is the meaning of the expression 'the house of God', and some related words that have been derived from the Greek word 'oikos' (= house) in the Bible? The words 'house' and 'household' are closely related. God's household is now the Christian Church. It is the place, the palace or the temple where He dwells by His Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22).

There are some important expressions derived from the Greek word 'oikos' (= house). The words 'oikonomos' and 'oikonomia' occur several times in the New Testament, for example in Luke 12 and 16. These words have been rendered as steward and stewardship respectively in the English versions. Our words economist and economics are derived from this.

However, in Ephesians 1:10 the word oikonomia has been translated by the word dispensation ('the dispensation of the fullness of the times'). Hence the term the dispensation, or the economy of grace. This sheds light on so-called dispensational truth, which divides the history of mankind into certain times or households in which God supervises the affairs of His people and His house in a certain, agreed upon manner (Gr. oikos and related words). After all, He is the Lord of the house,

who governs His house or household according to His rules, or lets someone else – a steward – take care of the management of His possessions. The apostle Paul was such a steward (1 Cor. 4:1-2; Eph. 3:2-9).

Although there is a great deal of disagreement among God's children about this, it is true that most of them agree that there are at least two dispensations, namely that of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament, respectively the dispensation of the law and the dispensation of grace. Ephesians 1:10 clearly speaks of a dispensation yet to come, namely that of the fullness of the times, in which everything in heaven and on earth will be gathered together under one Head in Christ. This is the rule of Christ in the millennial Kingdom of Peace, the center of which will be the restored people of Israel and the heavenly bride, the Church of the living God.

A further subdivision of the Old Testament timeframe is as follows:

1. the period of innocence in paradise (innocence);
2. that of conscience until the flood (conscience);
3. the principle of human government since Genesis 9 (government);
4. the time from the calling of Abraham till Israel's deliverance from Egypt (promise);
5. the time from the introduction of the law of Moses at Mount Sinai (law).

I have always added the English keywords under which the dispensations are known. The sixth dispensation is the present period of grace, and the seventh will be the coming Kingdom of Peace. In this context I also refer to my book in Dutch on the mysteries and secrets in the New Testament, entitled 'De onthulling van Gods geheimen' (The Revelation of God's Secrets).

OudeSporen 2020

