



January 17, 2010

*The Patriarchal Dispensation*

The scriptures reveal that there are three distinct periods characterized by the way in which God revealed himself to mankind. The first of these is known as the *Patriarchal* period or dispensation. During this period God spoke directly to the heads of households. When God created man he determined roles and ordered the society of humanity. This can be seen in statements made to Adam and Eve as the Lord established the first family. To Eve, God stated, “...*thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.*” (Gen 3.16). From this point on God spoke to the fathers, or patriarchs, placing the spiritual responsibility of guiding the family with men. This is not to discount the role of women. There are notable examples of faithful women who stood for what was right when men failed. Over time these patriarchs drifted further and further from listening to God until the world was filled with evil (Gen 6.5-6). This is a trait common to mankind. Paul notes this in his letter to the Romans stating that they did not like to retain God in their knowledge (Rom 1.28). Eventually God destroyed all of mankind with the exception of Noah how found grace in his sight (Gen 6.8). The family of Noah repopulated the Earth following the flood and it is logical to conclude that they carried with them the spiritual commands of God which form that basis of moral and ethical codes found in the ancient world and which continue today. Marriage is one example of these commands which was instituted at the very beginning as Christ also stated when he was on the Earth (Matt 19.4-6). It is also logical to conclude, based on the scriptures that the awareness of God was not entirely lost as man once more digressed and forgot the Lord. One example of this is Melchizedek, the king of Salem, who blessed Abraham after the battle of the kings and received tithes from the patriarch (Gen 14.18-20). Melchizedek is described as a priest of God over four hundred years before the children of Abraham became the nation of Israel. Abraham himself was a Chaldean who apparently knew who God was and followed the commands of the Lord to depart from his homeland (Gen 12.1-2). Abraham is later described as being a man who would “... *command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment...*” (Gen 18.19). Another individual who knew who God was is Balaam (Num 22) who Balak tried to hire to curse the Israelites as they passed through the land. The moral codes, or laws, including the institution of marriage and penalty for murder, emanated from God. Although mankind corrupted the knowledge of God these laws remained fixed in the mind of humans. This is a phenomenon that social scientists and archaeologists continue to discuss and some conclude that they evolved from within the various social structures with one culture borrowing from another. The Bible however shows that God remained active in the affairs of all of mankind. This point becomes obscured as attention becomes focused on the Israelites and the law of Moses later on. The Gentile world however continued under this patriarchal law until the coming of the Gospel when the Gentiles were brought under the family of God. Paul speaks about this in his explanation of what faith is to the Romans. “*For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;*” (Rom 2.14-15). Elements in the law of Moses, such as the prohibition against adultery, stealing and murder, are not unique to the Mosaic covenant but are parallels to the commands that God had given to all mankind. Paul, as stated above, refers to the fact that the moral laws would guide the conscience just as the law of Moses would for the Hebrews. God did not forget the rest of the world and allowed the majority of humans to stray. Only when they went so far that there was no hope did God intervene, destroying nations and judging them.

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