

Keys to the Word

Understanding the Bible

by Gregg Bing

Published by



Grace Bible Church

Speaking the Truth in Love

1450 Oak Hill Road
Fort Worth, Texas 76112-3017
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This book is lovingly dedicated to

my Mom and Dad

*who led me to Christ at an early age and
who brought me up in “the nurture
and admonition of the Lord.”*

*Thank you for your love, support, and
encouragement throughout my entire life.*

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INTRODUCTION

Why is there so little agreement among people about what the Bible teaches? Though the Bible is still the most widely distributed book in the world, it is also the most misunderstood. Is it really that difficult to understand the Bible? Why would God provide a book for us, and yet make it so difficult that we couldn't understand it?

While it is true that the Bible is not a simple book, it is **not** impossible to understand. In the book of Deuteronomy, we find God, through His prophet Moses, preparing the children of Israel to enter into their promised land. He reminds them of their past failures and lack of faith in Him. He instructs them that obedience to Him will bring blessing, but that disobedience will bring judgment. He stresses the importance of living their lives in accordance with the things He has revealed to them in His Word.

“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deut. 29:29)

God does not tell us everything. There are secret things that belong to Him alone; things that we may never understand because we are not, and never will be God! However, the Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His plans and purposes to mankind. The things that He has revealed in His Word belong to us and to our children forever; that is they are ours to know and understand. They are not written to keep us in the dark, but to give us light. The Psalmist wrote,

“The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.” (Psalm 119:130)

One of the main reasons people do not read and study the

Bible is because they do not understand it. It is our intent in these studies to provide some guidelines to help you understand the Bible, ultimately, so you will be encouraged to study it on your own. The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 provides some general guidelines for Bible study. Part 2 demonstrates the importance of these guidelines as we study through the Scriptures together. While it is hoped that these studies will aid you in understanding the Bible, ultimately true understanding comes from another source.

Before He was crucified, Jesus told His disciples that He must suffer many things, be put to death, and then be raised after three days (Matthew 16:21). The disciples did not understand these things at the time (John 20:9), but after He was raised from the dead, Jesus reminded the disciples of the things He had taught them and,

“He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:45)

The Bible cannot be understood by man apart from the Lord. It is the Lord who gives understanding. It must be the Lord that opens our understanding. Paul told Timothy,

“Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.” (II Tim. 2:7)

We would ask you to do the same. Carefully consider what is said in these studies. Take special care to read, study, and meditate upon the Scriptures that are referred to, and “may the Lord give you understanding in all things.”

Part I

**Guidelines
for
Bible Study**

Chapter 1

Why Study the Bible?

Why is it important that we study the Bible? Unlike all other books, which are merely the words of men, the Bible is

THE WORD OF GOD

It is God's revelation of Himself to mankind. II Timothy 3:16 tells us that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." The expression "given by inspiration of God" is a single word in the Greek that means "God-breathed." II Peter 1:21 tells us that holy men of God wrote the Scriptures as they were "moved by the Holy Spirit." As we approach our study of the Bible, we must receive it as the Thessalonian believers did.

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." (I Thess. 2:13)

Being the very Word of God, the Bible is also

THE WORD OF TRUTH

In II Timothy 2:15 Paul says, “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” We need to spend time and effort diligently studying the Bible because it is the only source of absolute truth. When we read other books, we cannot be sure that what we read is true, because these books are the words of men. But when we read and study the Bible, rightly divided, we can be sure that its words and teachings are true. This is not to say that we cannot learn things and get help from books written by men, but we must take the same precautions that the Berean believers did. They received the words which Paul taught, but then they “searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11).

Finally, we must read, study, and come to understand the Bible because it is

THE WORD OF LIFE

Hebrews 4:12 states that,

“The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

The Bible is a life-giving book. It shows us that we are all sinners separated from God (Rom. 3:23) and that the penalty that must be paid for sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but it also declares that God loves us, in spite of our sin, and sent His only Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for our sin (Rom. 5:8). The Bible is the record that,

“God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things have I writ-

ten to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.” (I John 5:11-13)

Once we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life, the Bible then instructs us how to live each day for Him. It teaches us, reproves and corrects us, and instructs us in righteous living, that the man of God “may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Tim. 3:17).

The Bible is a unique book. It is God-breathed. It is absolute truth. It is life-giving. It is not a book to be approached in a casual manner. It is not a book to be read once or twice and discarded. We should approach the Bible as Ezra the priest did.

“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.” (Ezra 7:10)

Ezra prepared his heart to do three things with God’s Word: (1) to seek it, (2) to do it, and (3) to teach it. May we each see the need to follow his example.

Chapter 2

Someone to Show the Way

“Behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority ... who had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, Go near and overtake this chariot. So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, Do you understand what you are reading? And he said, How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:27-31)

This passage illustrates the problem that many people have with the Bible. They simply don't understand what they are reading. The Ethiopian eunuch was wise enough to know that he needed someone to guide him or literally, to show him the way. The question is, “Who?”

There is great danger in depending on the wrong guide or guides. In Matthew chapter 15, the scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem to see Jesus and said to Him, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.” Jesus answered them by saying, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God

because of your tradition?” He further told them, “You have made the commandment of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” The disciples were concerned because the Pharisees were offended by what Jesus said to them, but Jesus responded by saying, “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch” (Matthew 15:1-14).

There are several key points to notice about this passage. First, these Jewish leaders were more concerned with the traditions of men than they were with the Word of God. By “traditions” we do not mean simply established ways of doing things. These “traditions” were contrary to the Word of God because they caused the scribes and Pharisees to “transgress the commandment of God” (verse 3). The Pharisees concentrated so much on Jewish traditions that they “made the commandment of God of no effect” (verse 6). These types of traditions are dangerous teachings.

Too many people today are following the teachings and traditions of men rather than studying what God’s Word says. Even though the men they follow may be “religious” leaders, too many are like the Pharisees; people who draw near to God with their mouths and honor Him with their lips, but whose hearts are far from God. Their “religious” worship of God is vain and empty, because it is insincere. The real harm in following these men is that they teach the commandments of men as substitutes for the truths of God’s Word.

Jesus called these people “blind leaders of the blind.” The scribes and Pharisees were blind in that they did not even know God. They were spiritually blind and were leading others astray with their false teaching. The result, Jesus said, is that, “both fall into a ditch” (verse 14). We can see that Satan is at the root of this problem, for it is he who blinds men’s minds to the truth of God’s Word (II Cor. 4:3-6).

Just as the Ethiopian eunuch, we need a guide to show us

the way, but we must be careful that our guide is not a false teacher; a hypocrite who does not even know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This is the danger of following the teachings of men.

You may ask, “But wasn’t Philip the one who guided the eunuch and showed him how to understand God’s Word? Don’t we read that ‘Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him’” (Acts 8:35)? Yes, Philip was certainly used of God to help this man understand the Scriptures.

Throughout history, God has chosen to use men as His instruments to preach and teach His Word. In the Old Testament, God spoke through the prophets. In the New Testament, God spoke through His Son and through the apostles. Even today, though there are no apostles and prophets, God has given men to be evangelists and teaching pastors to faithfully proclaim His Word (Eph. 4:11). These men preach and teach so that the saints may be equipped for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

Certainly we can benefit from the teaching and preaching of godly pastors and teachers, just as the Ethiopian eunuch benefited from Philip’s preaching, but we must take careful notice of three things. First, Philip preached **Jesus Christ** to the eunuch. A faithful preacher or teacher is one who preaches and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, Philip preached to the eunuch **from the Scriptures**, not from the traditions of men. Third, if you look at the complete account in Acts 8, Philip was **led by the Holy Spirit** of God.

In Acts 8:26 we read, “Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Philip obeyed and found the Ethiopian eunuch sitting in a chariot reading the Scriptures. In verse 29, “the Spirit said to Philip, Go near and overtake this chariot.” After the eunuch believed the Word of God concerning Jesus, and was baptized in water, when they came out of the water, “the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more” (verse 39).

These verses make it clear that the Holy Spirit of God led Philip to preach Jesus to the eunuch from the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit was the one who really showed the eunuch the way and gave him an understanding of the Scriptures. This One who guided the Ethiopian eunuch is the same guide we need today.

“But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” (I Cor. 2:9-13)

The Bible records the things which God has prepared for those who love Him, but they are only revealed to us by His Holy Spirit. It is not the teaching of man’s wisdom which is important, but the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He must be our guide, because these things are only discerned spiritually (I Cor. 2:14).

When Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, He called Him “the Spirit of Truth” and told His disciples that “when He has come, He will guide you into all truth. ... He will tell you things to come. ... He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13-15).

The Bible cannot be received and understood by man apart from God. It must be spiritually discerned. The “someone” the Ethiopian eunuch needed to guide him was the Holy Spirit. The “someone” we need today to “guide us into all truth” is that same Holy Spirit of God. Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers

Chapter 2

that God would give them “the **spirit** of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph. 1:17). He prayed for the Colossians that they might be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and **spiritual** understanding” (Col. 1:9).

We need to spend more time studying the Word of God and allowing the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and spiritual understanding, and less time depending on the teachings and traditions of men. We must be careful to heed the warning of Colossians 2:8.

“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”

Chapter 3

The Key to Understanding

Following His temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returned to the city of Nazareth, where He had been brought up. He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day and stood up to read. He was handed the book of Isaiah and He read from what we know as Isaiah chapter 61, verse 1 and the first part of verse 2, which states,

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, ...”

Jesus closed the book, sat down, and declared, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” In doing this, Jesus illustrated a principle which is **the key** to understanding the Bible; Jesus “rightly divided the word of truth.”

The latter part of Isaiah 61:2 states, “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Jesus was very careful to note that “the ac-

ceptable year of the Lord” and “the day of vengeance of our God” referred to different events which were to occur at different times. Jesus said, “**Today** is this Scripture fulfilled in your hearing.” It was **not** “the day of vengeance of our God,” but it was “the acceptable year of the Lord.”

In II Timothy 2:15, the apostle Paul was led of the Spirit to declare the importance of this principle of Bible study.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved unto God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The expression “rightly dividing” is from a Greek word which means, “to cut straight.” It is sometimes used to refer to cutting a straight path. This is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament, however, the word is found in the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament in Proverbs 3:6, where it says, “and He shall **direct** your paths.” To rightly divide the Word of God is to cut or divide it correctly; to cut straight paths through God’s Word.

If we are to understand the **truth** of God’s Word, we must rightly divide it. If we are to stand before God as **approved** and **unashamed**, we must rightly divide His Word.

In order to understand a little better what it means to “rightly divide the Word of truth,” let’s look at what it is not. First, it does not mean to omit Scripture. We cannot discard any part of the Bible. We cannot take only the parts of the Bible which we want (or which support our preconceived ideas). Second, it does not mean that some portions of the Bible are more inspired than others. Some people have the mistaken idea that the earthly words of Jesus (which are printed in red in many Bibles) are more important than other portions of Scripture. The Old Testament prophets often wrote, “Hear the Word of the Lord,” because that is exactly what is recorded by them. The apostle Paul stated that the words that he wrote he received by “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12), thus he referred to them in I Timothy 6:3 as “the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We read in II Timothy 3:16-17 that,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

All of the Bible is God-breathed. It is His Word (John 17:14) and it consists of His words (John 17:8). Furthermore, all of the Bible is profitable for us; for our teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteous living. We have no right to discard any portion of God’s Word.

To “rightly divide the Word of truth” also has nothing to do with human divisions of the Bible. For instance, the division of the Bible into chapters and verses was done by men, not by God. While these divisions are very helpful to us in locating passages of Scripture, they should not be used as the basis for any doctrinal or theological conclusions about what a passage of Scripture means. In addition, many people have the mistaken idea that the headings which we often find over chapters or sections of Scripture are part of God’s inspired Word. They are not! These were added by human editors or publishers, and they reflect the views of these men and women; not necessarily the views of God. Even the division between what we call the Old and New Testaments is a misleading division (as we shall see later in this study).

There is an old song which states, “Every promise in the Book is mine.” The lyrics of this song are simply not true. We cannot take all of the Bible as being written directly to us today. This includes its promises as well as its instructions. If it were all written directly **to** us, then we should be building an ark and we should be offering animal sacrifices. The fact of the matter is, it is impossible to try to do all that the Bible says, because God has spoken to different people, using different programs, over different periods, for different purposes.

We can see the need to rightly divide the Word by looking at a couple of examples from Scripture. For instance, in Luke

9:1-5, Jesus instructs His twelve disciples to go out and preach the kingdom of God. In verse 3, He specifically instructed them to “take nothing for your journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece.” Then, when we turn to Luke 22:35-38, we find Him giving them different instructions. “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything? So they said, Nothing. Then He said to them, **But now**, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: *And He was numbered with the transgressors*. For the things concerning Me have an end.”

The key expression in this passage is, “but now.” At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 10:7), **but now** (in Luke 22), the King has been rejected, and in anticipation of His crucifixion (being “numbered with the transgressors”), He gives His disciples different instructions to prepare them for the opposition they will face in their future ministry. Hence, we see different instructions for different times and circumstances.

For another example, let’s compare three passages of Scripture. In Matthew 10:5-7, Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, but He was careful to tell them, “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, ... but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” In Romans 1:16, written during the Acts period, we read that the gospel of Christ is, “... the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Gentile).” Finally, in Colossians 3:11 we find that today, “there is neither Greek (Gentile) or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” These verses indicate significant differences in God’s attitude toward Jew and Gentile. How can we understand these differences and why they exist? We must “rightly divide the word of truth.”

These three passages of Scripture describe three distinct plans and purposes of God, which obviously could not all be in

effect at the same time. To “rightly divide” the Word of truth means to take notice of the differences in God’s plans and purposes as He has revealed them in His Word.

As we approach any passage of Scripture, we must take care to identify: (1) to whom or about whom God is speaking, (2) what God is speaking, being careful to study the passage in context (studying what goes before and what comes after), (3) when God is speaking, and (4) for what purpose God is speaking. It is only as we diligently study the Scriptures in this way that we are able to know and understand the truth of God’s Word.

Chapter 4

Dispensational Bible Study

Many people don't like the expression "dispensational" Bible study, but the fact is that the word "dispensation" is a Biblical word. We read in Ephesians 1:10 of "the dispensation of the fullness of times" and in Ephesians 3:2 of "the dispensation of the grace of God."

The Greek word that is translated "dispensation" is "oikonomia." It consists of two different Greek words: "oikia" which means house or household and "nomos" which means law, arrangement, order, or management. Hence, "oikonomia" refers to "the law or arrangement of a household." We get our English word "economy" from this Greek word. The word is also translated "stewardship" in the gospel of Luke in reference to the responsibility given to a house "steward" to take care of the management of his master's household. The steward managed the affairs of the household as directed by the master of that household.

A dispensation, as used in the Bible, refers to a particular order or arrangement of God (i.e. a plan or purpose) which He established for a given group of people. For example, the apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:25, describes a "dispensation" or

“stewardship” which was given to him by God for us (i.e. the church, the body of Christ—verse 24). This was a body of truth which revealed God’s plan and purpose for believers today. Though it was known in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), this dispensation of grace remained a mystery (or secret) until God revealed it to Paul, and then to us through Paul’s writings.

God also established other “dispensations” throughout the history of His dealings with mankind. These include God’s original plan and purpose for Adam and Eve when He placed them in the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:7-25), God’s plan and purpose for His chosen people, Israel, under the Mosaic law (Exo. 19:3-8), as well as many others. These dispensations are God’s divisions of the Bible, not man’s divisions. As we study God’s Word, we must “rightly divide” or distinguish between these different dispensations of God, so that we may know how God would have us worship, walk, and work for Him today.

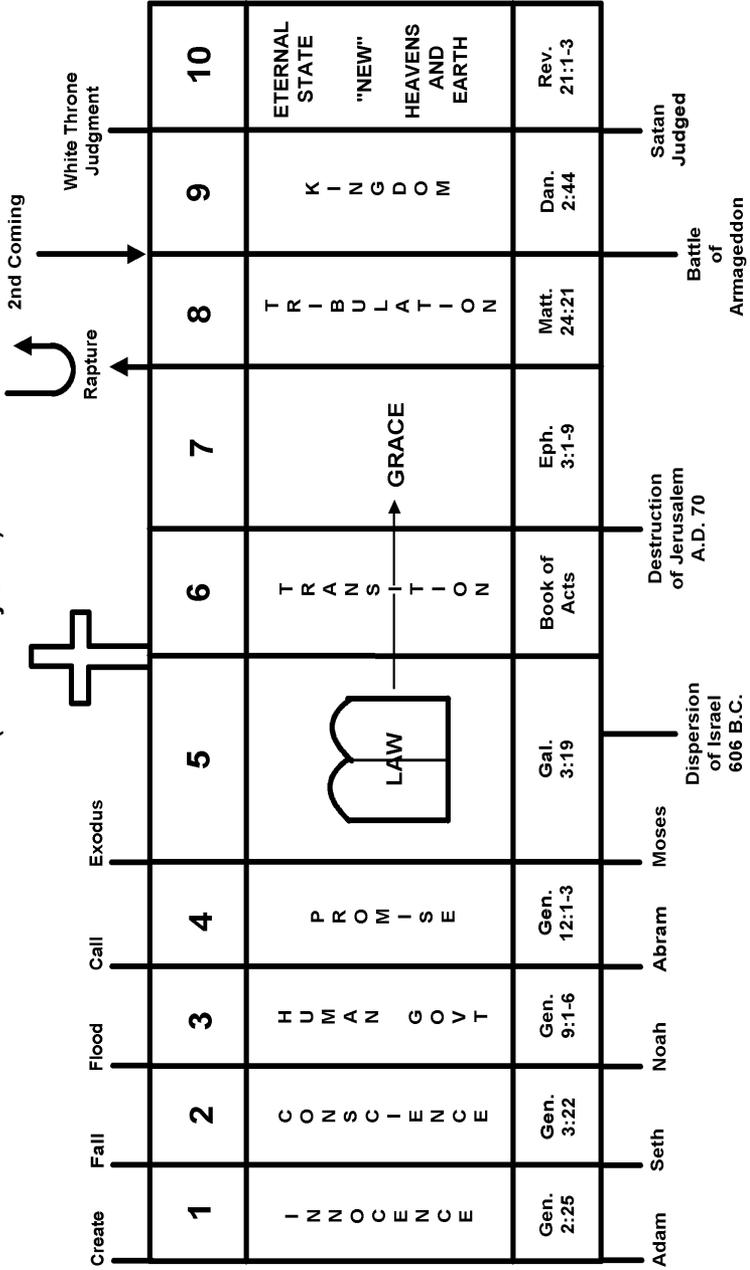
There are many different views of Bible scholars on how many actual dispensations there are. Some prefer to see things in more general terms. They look at basic differences in God’s programs and come up with a fewer number of dispensations. Others prefer to be more specific about the differences in God’s programs and therefore come up with a larger number of dispensations. The specific number is not as important as the principle of “right division” of God’s Word.

For the purpose of this series of lessons, we will use the chart shown on the following page, which depicts ten different dispensations. We will use this chart as we examine and discuss the different plans and purposes of God revealed in His Word.

Please keep in mind that a chart such as this is limited in the amount of information it provides. This is especially true in regard to Biblical truth. The truths of God’s Word are much too deep to be depicted on a simple chart. The chart is only intended to be a tool to help us visualize the relationships and distinctions between the different dispensations.

THE DISPENSATIONS

"Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth"
(II Timothy 2:15)



The Theme of the Bible

Why does God take only 2 chapters to describe the creation of the heavens and the earth, and then devote 50 chapters to the description of the tabernacle? Why does God spend only 9 verses reviewing approximately 1500 years of history (Gen. 4:16-24) and then use 14 chapters (Gen. 37-50) to detail the life of Joseph (who was not even in the bloodline to Christ)? Why does God make no mention of many great world leaders throughout history, such as Alexander the Great, and yet dwell upon the lives of men such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

The answer to these questions is found in the purpose of the Bible. The Bible is not a science textbook, as we think about science today. Though, the Bible is certainly a book of science (the word *science* simply means knowledge). The Bible is not just a history book, though it does contain historical records which are absolutely true and accurate in every detail. The Bible is not a biography of the world's most famous men and women, though it records the lives of many great men and women of faith. The purpose of the Bible is to reveal the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ! In John 5:39 Jesus told the Jews,

*“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which **testify of Me.**”*

Jesus spoke here of the Old Testament Scriptures. Following His resurrection from the dead, Jesus taught His disciples saying,

*“These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms **concerning Me.** Then He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:44-45)*

From these passages, we see that the purpose of the Old Testament Scriptures (Genesis to Malachi) was to testify about the Lord Jesus Christ. This explains why so much of the book of Genesis is devoted to the patriarch Joseph; because his life was a type of the life of Christ. Joseph was the beloved of his father who was sent unto his brothers (Gen. 37). He was the rejected servant; hated without a cause (Gen. 37-40). Finally, he became the exalted savior of his own family (Gen. 41-45).

The night before He was to be crucified Jesus told His disciples,

*“I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you ... When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. **He will glorify Me,** for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.” (John 14:16-17,26; 16:13-14)*

The New Testament Scriptures, as the Holy Spirit led its writers, also testify concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

The person (or character) of Jesus Christ never changes (Heb. 13:8). He is the eternal God of glory. He is all-knowing and all-powerful. He is righteousness, life, love, grace, and truth.

However, as we study the Bible, we see that the presentation of Christ in the Word changed as God's different plans and purposes were progressively unfolded throughout time. We must take note of these changes if we hope to understand the Bible.

- In the Old Testament Scriptures God dealt primarily with His chosen people, Israel. These Scriptures present Christ in promise, picture (or type), and prophecy as Israel's coming Messiah, anointed of God as Prophet, Priest, and King.
- In the gospel accounts, Christ became a man and came unto His own people, Israel, proclaiming the kingdom of heaven was "at hand." He proved Himself to be their Messiah and King, but they rejected Him and crucified Him on the cross of Calvary.
- During the Acts period, the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus, sent the Holy Spirit into the world, and working through the apostles, the King and Kingdom were officially offered to the nation of Israel (Acts 3:19-21). Once again, Israel, as a nation, rejected God's offer, and the kingdom was postponed (Heb. 2:8). Following the stoning of Stephen in Acts chapter 7, God raised up a new apostle, Paul, through whom He would reveal a new plan and purpose concerning the church, the body of Christ. This purpose of God remained a mystery (or secret) throughout the ages until God made it known to Paul.
- In the epistles of Paul, we find Israel's kingdom postponed. Their rejected King, the Lord Jesus Christ, is exalted and made Head over all things to the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). In the early epistles of Paul, written during the Acts period, he mentions the truth of the mystery (I Cor.

2, 12, Rom. 12, 16, I Thess. 4, etc.), but God's plan and purpose for the church of this present age of grace is not fully revealed by Paul until we come to his later epistles, commonly referred to as the "prison epistles" (Eph. 3, Col. 1).

- In the Hebrew epistles (Hebrews through the Revelation), we find God preparing Israel for their coming kingdom and encouraging them to endure patiently until Christ returns to earth to establish it. In the last of these epistles, the book of the Revelation, we see the King returning in power and great glory to judge and to claim His throne. We see His kingdom established upon the earth and we see all promise and prophecy concerning Christ finally fulfilled.

The key thing to remember when we approach the study of the Bible is that it reveals the most wonderful person in the world, the Lord Jesus Christ. When we read and study the Bible we should not concentrate on just filling our minds with history, or prophecy, or even doctrine. It is important to know what the Bible says, but it is even more important to know the One whom the Bible makes known: Christ! When we read, study, and meditate upon the Word of God, let us fill our minds, hearts, and lives with "the excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord" (Phil. 3:8). This is why Paul admonishes us in Colossians 3:16 to,

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

The Bible is a life-giving and a life-changing book, not just because of what it says, but because of the One it makes known to us. "Christ is our life" (Col. 3:4). May we share the same desire the apostle Paul expressed in Philippians 3:10,

"... that I may know Him."

Part II

Studying through the Bible

Chapter 6

God's Perfect Creation

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1:1)

God's Word begins with this simple statement, but what a wealth of truth is taught in this verse! It teaches us that God is eternal. In the beginning, God already existed. He brought into existence the heavens and the earth and all the host of them; things that had never existed before. “Scientists” throughout the history of man have sought for an explanation for the existence of the heavens and the earth; an explanation which leaves God out, but their search has been in vain. The world did not come into existence through purely natural means, but by supernatural creation. The Bible tells us that “God spoke” and things which “were not” suddenly “were.”

As we look at the beauty and vastness of the world we live in, we cannot help but see that it was designed and created by God. The Psalmist wrote,

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech,

and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” (Psalms 19:1-4)

It is incredible that people who can see and experience the wonder of the world we live in, from the vast expanse of the heavens to the intricate detail of the living creatures here upon the earth, can conclude that all of this happened by chance through natural processes and mechanisms of gradual change (i.e. evolution). Paul warned Timothy to beware of such conclusions, which are “falsely called knowledge (science),” and to realize that by professing it “some have strayed concerning the faith” (I Tim. 6:20-21). Paul gave a similar warning in Romans, chapter 1.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, ...” (Rom. 1:18-22)

While we can come to know something of the power and glory of God through the things He has created, we must realize that the heavens and earth we see today are not in the same condition as when God created them. God designed and created a perfect world.

In Genesis chapter 1, we find God’s record of the six days of creation; beginning with light on the first day and progressing to land animals and man on the sixth day. Upon the completion

of God's work of creation on the sixth day, we read,

“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Gen. 1:31-2:3)

Everything that God created, formed, and made was perfect; the light and the darkness, the land and the sea, the plants, the sun, moon, and stars, the fish, the birds, the animals, and the man and woman. In addition to these things, which are mentioned by name in Genesis 1, there were other things created as well. Genesis 2:1 states that God finished “the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them.” The word “host” no doubt includes the beings described in the Bible as angels, cherubim, seraphim, etc. These were also created beings (Heb. 1:7).

Even Satan, who was an angelic being, was created. In Ezekiel 28 we read of messages from the Lord God to two individuals: the prince of Tyre (verses 1-10) and the king of Tyre (verses 11-19). The prince of Tyre was no doubt an earthly king; a man, but the king of Tyre, because of the nature of his description, could not have been just a man. The king of Tyre is described thus,

“Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, Thus says the Lord GOD: You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were cre-

ated. You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.” (Ezek. 28:12-15)

This passage does not picture a mere man, even an earthly prince or king. It pictures a powerful angelic being; a being who was “prepared,” “established,” and “created” by God. This is a picture of Lucifer (Isa. 14:12), as he was created by God; not evil and sinful, but “perfect,” up until iniquity was found in him, and he became Satan, the adversary of God.

GOD’S PATTERN FOR MAN

“Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gen. 1:26-27)

Adam and Eve were created in the likeness and image of God. This does not mean they were equal with God or were themselves, gods, but, they were perfect and without sin, therefore they were “innocent” before God. We read in Genesis 2:25 that “they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” This gives us the name of the first dispensation on our chart, the dispensation of INNOCENCE.

GOD’S PURPOSE FOR MAN

God gave certain responsibilities to Adam. “The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. ... The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend (work) and keep (watch,

care for) it” (Gen. 2:8,15).

Along with these responsibilities, God also placed certain restrictions upon Adam. “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

Adam heard the Word of God, regarding both the responsibilities and the restrictions. At the time he heard these instructions, Adam was without sin. He was innocent before God.

Chapter 7

God's Creation Marred by Sin

The Scriptures teach that, in the beginning, God created all things, and that He created all things perfect (Gen. 1:26). His creation included the material universe, plant life, animal life, human beings, and even angelic beings. Yes, even Satan himself was originally created perfect in all his ways (Ezek. 28:12-15).

Scriptures also teach that God's perfect creation did not remain that way. Sin entered and God's creation was marred.

Sin against God originated with Satan. This angelic creature was originally called Lucifer, which means “light-bearer” or “shining one.” He was called the “son of the morning” and the “anointed cherub.” He was “full of wisdom” and “perfect in beauty,” but his heart became lifted up with pride because of his beauty and he corrupted his wisdom because of his splendor. He said in his heart five times, “I will,” (Isaiah 14:13-14), thus setting his will against the will of God. As a result, Lucifer fell from heaven (Isaiah 14:12), being cast out of the mountain of God (Ezek. 28:16). Please take note of the fact that God did not create him as an evil being, but God created him with the capability of choosing whether he would serve God or not. Lucifer's

heart was lifted up with pride and he tried to exalt himself above God. It was because of this choice to sin against God that he became Satan, the “adversary” of God.

Adam and Eve were also created perfect. They were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26) so that God could have fellowship with them (Genesis 3:8). They were **innocent** of any sin and therefore enjoyed the very presence of God.

God set them in the beautiful garden of Eden and laid upon them one requirement,

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

Now the fact that God gave this requirement to them, implied that they also had the capability of choosing whether they would obey God or not.

THE CAUSE OF SIN (Genesis 3:1-6)

The cause of sin was Satan, the adversary of God. Satan's **tactics** were deceit and trickery. He approached the woman, Eve, as a serpent, a creature who was “more cunning than any beast of the field.” Satan began by questioning God's Word: “Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” He then proceeded to contradict God's Word: “You will not surely die.”

Eve's **troubles** began when she listened to and talked with the serpent. As soon as this creature questioned God's Word, she should have recognized his opposition to God and turned away from him, but she did not know God's Word as well as she should have. She demonstrated this lack of knowledge by mishandling God's Word three different ways. First, she took away from God's Word: “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden” (she omitted the word “freely”). Second, she added to God's Word: “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it” (God said nothing about “touching” the fruit). Third, she corrupted

God's Word: "lest you die" (God had said, "you shall surely die").

Satan's **temptation** of Eve appealed to the same area which had caused his own fall: pride. He told the woman,

"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

Satan is called "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). As such, he uses the things of this world to tempt people to disobey God. I John 2:16 says that "all that is in the world" is the:

- **Lust of the flesh.** Eve saw that the fruit forbidden by God was "good for food."
- **Lust of the eyes.** Eve saw that the fruit forbidden by God was "pleasant to the eyes."
- **Pride of life.** Eve saw that the fruit forbidden by God was "desirable to make one wise."

Both Adam and Eve were put to the **test** and both failed. Eve was thoroughly deceived by Satan (II Cor. 11:3), took of the fruit and ate. Adam was not deceived by Satan (I Tim. 2:14). He knowingly disobeyed God and ate also.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SIN (Genesis 3:7-13)

Immediately, Adam and Eve became conscious of their nakedness and their sin. This is evidenced by the fact that they tried to cover their nakedness with fig leaves, they tried to hide themselves from God because they were afraid of Him, and then they tried to blame someone else for what they had done. Adam blamed Eve and God by saying, "The **woman** whom **You** gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate." Eve blamed the serpent saying, "The **serpent** deceived me, and I ate."

By Adam and Eve's disobedience, sin entered into the world. From the dispensation of INNOCENCE, mankind moved

into the dispensation of CONSCIENCE. The man and woman, who had been innocent before God, were now made conscious of the fact that they had sinned against God by disobeying His Word.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN (Genesis 3:14-18)

The entrance of sin resulted in grave consequences. God pronounced judgment upon the serpent (vs. 14-15), upon the woman (vs. 16, 22-24), upon the man (vs. 17, 19, 22-24), upon the creation itself (vs. 17-18, Rom. 8:20-22), and upon all mankind (Rom. 5:12-14). The grave consequences were no surprise. God had stated them up front: "You shall surely die."

The entrance of sin brought both physical death (Gen. 3:19, Heb. 9:27) as well as spiritual death (Gen. 2:17, Rom. 6:23); consequences which passed upon all men (Rom. 5:12).

THE CONQUEROR OVER SIN (Genesis 3:15)

God is a God of love, mercy, and grace. Along with the pronouncement of these judgments, God gave the first promise of the One who would eventually conquer sin and death and redeem mankind from the curse of sin. This promise is given in Genesis 3:15,

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

The Seed of the woman is the Lord Jesus Christ, who would one day suffer a bruise to His heel by the hand of the serpent (i.e. Satan). This bruise occurred when Jesus was crucified on the cross of Calvary, but that very same death on the cross was when Christ bruised the head of Satan. Hebrews 2:14 states that through His death, Christ destroyed "him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Although he is still active, even today, Satan's ultimate end will be the lake of fire where

he will remain for eternity (Rev. 20:10).

THE COVERING FOR SIN (Genesis 3:21)

Adam and Eve's attempts to cover their nakedness and sin were futile. God provided the required covering for their sin by making coats of skins for them. This act by God introduced the requirement He placed upon man for this new dispensation; the shedding of blood to cover man's sins (Heb. 9:22). This requirement was to remain in effect until the promised Redeemer came; the One who alone could take away sins (Heb. 10:10-14).

Enmity Against the Promised Seed

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” (Gen. 3:15)

This verse not only promised the coming of mankind’s Redeemer, but it also foretold the enmity (i.e. enemy relationship) and struggle that would occur throughout history between Christ and Satan.

From this point on, the Scriptures unfold God’s plans to bring the promised Seed of the woman into the world. We see this enmity between the seeds demonstrated in Satan’s continual attacks against the promised Seed. The first of these attacks is found in Genesis 4, where we find Satan’s attempt to kill the seed.

THE WONDER OF CAIN

God gave Adam and Eve a son, whom they named Cain (Gen. 4:1). Eve was filled with wonder at the birth of Cain and she exclaimed, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” She

may have thought this child could be the very Seed she was promised, but that was not the case.

THE WAY OF CAIN

God gave Adam and Eve another son, Abel (Gen. 4:2). When the two brothers reached a certain age, they both brought an offering unto the Lord. Cain, being a tiller of the ground, brought of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel, who was a keeper of sheep, brought of the firstborn and of the fat of his flock to the Lord. The Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. It was not because Cain did not bring his best unto the Lord, he probably did. It was because Cain chose to disobey God's instructions on what He required as an offering for sin.

After Adam and Eve had both eaten the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked. Realizing the sin they had committed against the Lord, they tried to cover themselves with leaves sewn together, but this was not sufficient. We find, in Genesis 3:21, that the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed Adam and Eve, thus showing them that the shedding of blood was required in order for their sins to be covered (Heb. 9:22). God required that offerings brought to Him to cover sins must involve the shedding of blood. Nothing else would do, regardless of the quality of what was brought. No doubt, Adam and Eve taught this requirement to both their children.

Abel's offering was considered superior to Cain's offering, because he chose the way of faith. Abel heard the Word of God, believed it, and obeyed it (Heb. 11:4, Rom. 10:17). Cain, on the other hand, went his own way (Jude 11). Cain chose to bring the "works" of his own hands unto the Lord. This is the "way of Cain," the way of "religious works," and sadly, most people today are following this same way. They try to work and earn their salvation, but Galatians 2:16 makes it very clear that

"... a man is not justified by the works of the law but by

faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

THE WICKEDNESS OF CAIN

When Cain saw that God respected Abel’s offering, but did not respect his own offering, he became angry and it showed in his face. He was jealous of Abel and angry with him and with God. Even when God gave him another opportunity to bring the required offering, Cain refused (Gen. 4:6-7). Instead, he rose up against his brother, Abel, and killed him.

What led Cain to commit such a wicked act? He had the opportunity to obey God, just as Abel did, but he refused. Instead, he chose to follow the leading of Satan. We read in I John 3:12 that Cain was “of the wicked one” and therefore murdered his brother. Cain did so because his own works were evil and his brother’s were righteous.

Even though Cain was the firstborn, God had chosen Abel to be the one through whom the promised Seed would come into the world (Gen. 4:25). Here, then, is Satan’s first attack against the promised seed. He sought to destroy the seed by killing Abel, but God foiled this attempt by appointing another seed, Seth, to take the place of Abel (Gen. 4:25). As we shall see, in every attempt of Satan to disrupt God’s plans and purposes, God always overrules. He is sovereign. He is in control.

THE WORLDLINESS OF CAIN

We see in these children, the two seed lines described in Genesis 3:15. Cain was the spiritual seed of Satan. He was “of the wicked one.” He had no remorse or repentance following his murdering of Abel (Gen. 4:9). We read in Genesis 4:16 that Cain actually “**went out from the presence of the Lord** and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.” We read further, in verses 17-24, that Cain built a city, and he and his descen-

Chapter 8

dants, being separated from God, sought their pleasure in the things of the earth and the things of the world. They followed after Satan who is “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31) and “the god of this age” (II Cor. 4:4).

In Abel, originally, and then in Seth later, we see the seed line of the woman; the line through whom the promised Seed, Christ, was to come into the world. In contrast to the descendants of Cain, the descendants of Seth began “to call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26). We see the faith of these descendants demonstrated in men like Enoch (Gen. 5:21-24, Heb. 11:5-6) and Noah (Gen. 6:8-9, Heb. 11:7).

With which seed line do you identify? Are you walking “according to the course of this world” and “according to the prince of the power of the air (i.e. Satan), the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2)? Are you going in the “way of Cain,” trying to please or appease God by your own works? If you are, then you are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins and are therefore separated from God (Eph. 2:1, Rom. 3:23).

Have you heard the gospel of the grace of God? Do you realize that you are a sinner and cannot save yourself (Rom. 3:23)? Do you see that Christ died for your sins, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day (I Cor. 15:3-4)? Do you realize that you cannot be saved by works, as Cain tried to be, but that you are saved only by the grace of God? Have you put your complete faith and trust in the shed blood of Jesus Christ to save you from your sins (Eph. 1:7, 2:8-9)? If so, then you are alive “in Christ” (Eph. 2:5-6), and you are admonished by the Lord to so walk “in Him” (Col. 2:6).

A Worldwide Flood

In order to protect and preserve the seed of the woman, God required that there be purity in the bloodline which began with Seth. This requirement became the area of Satan's next attack upon the promised Seed. In Genesis 6 we find Satan's attempt to corrupt the seed.

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. ... There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown. Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’” (Gen. 6:1-2,4-7)

We read in these verses that “the sons of God” took “the daughters of men” as wives of their own choosing (vs. 1-2). The offspring of these marriages became “mighty men” and “men of renown” (i.e. men of their own name or men who made a name for themselves). As a result, “the wickedness of man was **great** in the earth, and **every** intent of the thoughts of his heart was **only** evil **continually**.” The emphasized words “great,” “every,” “only” and “continually” serve to show just how evil mankind had become. We read further in verses 11-13 that the earth was “corrupt before God” and “filled with violence” for “**all** flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.” Who was behind this corruption? Satan, the evil one himself.

There are many fine Bible scholars who teach that “the sons of God” mentioned in verse 2 are fallen angels who married “the daughters of men,” who were earthly women, and that “the mighty men” who were produced from these marriages were superhuman, abnormal beings. As I understand this passage, the emphasis is upon Satan’s corruption of the godly line of Seth, and the “sons of God” refers to those in Seth’s lineage, while “the daughters of men” refers to those in the ungodly line of Cain.

Satan’s temptation of these “sons of God” follows the same pattern that he used with Eve. In verse 2 it states that “the sons of God **saw** the daughters of men” (the lust of the eyes) that “they were **beautiful**” (the lust of the flesh) and “they took wives for themselves of all whom **they chose**” (the pride of life). In all of this, they did not seek the Lord’s leading in any way. In fact, they directly went against His requirement to keep the bloodline pure.

In Matthew 24:36-51, Jesus compares the days of Noah to the days before His second coming. In His indictment of the wickedness that was in the earth just before the flood, Jesus stated that “they were eating and drinking, **marrying and giving in marriage**.” It was this inter-marriage between the godly line of Seth and the godless line of Cain which caused the Lord to be “grieved in His heart,” to be “sorry that He had made man on the earth,” and to decide to “destroy man from the face of the

earth” (Genesis 6:6-7).

From these verses, it appears at first that Satan’s attempts to completely corrupt the seed of the woman had succeeded, but this was not the case.

“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. And Noah begot three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” (Gen. 6:8-10)

Just as God appointed another seed, Seth, to take the place of the murdered seed, Abel, once again, God raised up a man of faith, Noah (Heb. 11:7), who heard the Word of God, believed it, and responded in obedience to God’s requirements. It is stated in these verses that Noah found “grace” in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was not a perfect, sinless man, therefore, God had to deal with him on the basis of His grace. We do read that Noah was a “just” man, meaning he did what was “right” in God’s sight. Further we read that Noah was “**perfect** in his generations.” The word “perfect” literally means “complete, sound, whole, or without blemish.” In what area was Noah “without blemish?” In his generations! That is, in his lineage, or his descendants. The importance of this fact is seen in that up front we read, “This is the **genealogy** of Noah.” In contrast to the rest of mankind, Noah had **not corrupted** his generations. Satan’s attempt to corrupt the seed had failed.

What was God’s retribution upon the earth and mankind for the corruption, evil, and violence which filled it? God told Noah,

“The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.” (Gen. 6:13)

We read further down in verse 17 that God would destroy the earth with a flood. But, back in verse 14, God also told Noah,

“Make yourself an ark of gopherwood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and outside with pitch.”

Genesis 6 describes the ark, God’s provision to save Noah and his family (i.e. his wife, his three sons and their wives) as well as all animal life. Genesis 7 describes the flood, which was far worse than just a local flood. It was a global cataclysm, in which the whole earth was “overflowed with water” (II Pet. 3:6). As we look at the language of Genesis 7, it describes just such a worldwide flood.

- vs. 11 “**all** the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened,”
- vs. 12 “rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights,”
- vs. 17 “the ark rose high above the earth,”
- vs. 18 “the waters prevailed and greatly increased on the earth,”
- vs. 19 “the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and **all** the high hills **under the whole heaven** were covered,”
- vs. 21 “and **all flesh died** that moved on the earth,”
- vs. 22 “**all** in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, **all** that was on the dry land, died,”
- vs. 24 “and the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.”

When Noah and his family came off the ark, God established a covenant with them. God promised never to destroy the earth again with water and He put a rainbow in the sky as a token of this promise (Gen. 8:21-22; 9:8-17).

As part of this covenant with Noah and his sons, God established new guidelines for man to live under. These guidelines, described in Genesis 9:1-7, included: (1) God commanded them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. (2) God changed animal nature and put the fear of man on the animals. (3) God expanded man’s food resources to include not only plant life, but now animal life. (4) God gave man the authority to pronounce judgment upon other men (i.e. if a man shed another man’s

blood, the same was required of him).

This marked the beginning of a new dispensation, commonly referred to as HUMAN GOVERNMENT, because of the nature of the changes God instituted. Though a new dispensation had begun, there were aspects of the previous dispensation of CONSCIENCE which continued. Man's consciousness of his sin continued into the new dispensation as well as into each subsequent dispensation. Even today, during the dispensation of GRACE, man is still conscious of his sins.

Once again, God's plan and purpose to bring the promised Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, into the world was protected and preserved by God through Noah and his family. No matter how close it seems Satan comes to accomplishing his evil purposes, God's purpose will always prevail. It prevailed through the provision of Seth, and it prevailed through the provision of Noah and his family.

"The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, 'Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand.'" (Isa. 14:24)

Chapter 10

The Tower of Babel

Satan didn't waste any time in making his third attack upon the Seed of the woman. Ham, one of Noah's sons, showed total disrespect for Noah and for his faith in God by committing a shameful sin against him (Gen. 9:20-27). It was through the lineage of Ham that Satan initiated his attempt to turn the seed from God.

Satan used an interesting approach in trying to destroy the lineage of God's promised Seed. He sought to unite all mankind against God.

ONE LEADER

Satan began his plan to unite mankind against God by raising up a leader from the descendants of Ham. Ham gave birth to a son named Cush and Cush gave birth to a son named Nimrod.

“Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.’ And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel.” (Gen. 10:1-10)

We read two interesting things about Nimrod's character.

First, he was a “mighty one in the earth.” Remember, we read in Genesis 6:4 that the children of the ungodly marriages during Noah’s day were “mighty men” and “men of renown.” Nimrod was much like these men. He was a powerful man who was well known and respected by men. We know he was also a leader of men for we read in Genesis 10:10 that he began a kingdom. The realm of his power was “on the earth.”

Second, Nimrod was a “mighty hunter before the LORD.” It could be that he acquired his reputation with men because of his prowess at hunting animals, which were now given by God as food for man (Gen. 9:3), however the qualifying expression, “before the LORD,” indicates that his hunting may have been of a much more serious nature. The expression may sound positive as translated in the English, but it actually means that Nimrod set himself in **defiance** against the Lord. More than just a hunter of animals, Nimrod was very possibly a hunter of men’s souls; one who sought to turn men away from God. As we study Nimrod, his kingdom and his wicked purpose in building the tower of Babel, we find that he is a type of the Antichrist.

ONE KINGDOM

Verse 10 of Genesis 11 tells us that Nimrod began a kingdom called Babel. The very fact that Nimrod began a kingdom, implies that his people refused to be ruled by God. Nimrod’s kingdom, Babel, was the beginning of Babylon, the wicked city which has set itself against God and His people throughout its history (i.e. under Nebuchadnezzar). Babylon will have a similar purpose when it is rebuilt in the future (Rev. 17,18).

ONE LANGUAGE

The situation that existed in Nimrod’s day is described in Genesis 11:1.

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.”

Everyone on the earth at this time spoke the same language, thus there were no problems communicating between the peoples of the earth.

ONE PEOPLE

We read further in verse 2,

“It came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.”

All of mankind journeyed together to the land of Shinar and dwelt there. The action of these people appears to be in direct opposition to the Lord’s command in Genesis 9:1 to “be fruitful and multiply, and **fill the earth.**” Instead of filling the earth, the people all stayed together in one place.

ONE PURPOSE

*“Then they said to one another, ‘Come, **let us** make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, **let us** build **ourselves** a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; **let us** make a name for **ourselves**, lest **we** be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’” (Gen. 11:3-4)*

The people, under the direction of Nimrod, were intent on one purpose, “to make a name for themselves.” The total emphasis is upon themselves, instead of upon the LORD. They were totally self-centered, “let **us** make bricks,” “let **us** build **ourselves** a city and tower” and “let **us** make a name for **ourselves.**” They sought to build according to their plan, not God’s. They sought to build a city and a tower for themselves, not for God. The tower was, in all likelihood, a religious tower which was to be used to worship the creation rather than the Creator

(Rom. 1:21-25). The expression “whose top is in the heavens” may even have reference to a worship of the heavens (i.e. astrology). Finally, they sought to make a name for themselves. They did not want to call upon the name of the LORD, nor did they wish to be called by the name of the LORD.

ONE WORLD GOVERNMENT

The situation that existed here and the purpose intended by the people here is very similar to the one world government that Satan will establish during the future tribulation period. It, too, will be established here upon the earth. It will be headed up by Satan’s man, the Antichrist (cf. Nimrod). It’s sole purpose will be to turn men from God so that they will worship Satan (Rev. 13:4-8,11-15).

What was the final result?

“But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.” (Gen. 11:5-9)

We notice several key statements in this passage. We see that the people had only **begun** to do this, but they had **proposed** or imagined to do much more (i.e. to eventually worship other gods). If they were not stopped, they would be **unrestrained** in what they wanted to do. To restrain them, the LORD **confounded** their **one** language so they could not understand

Chapter 10

each other. He **scattered** the **one** people upon the face of the earth so they could not continue building the city and tower. In effect, God brought total **confusion** to Satan's plan, hence the name of the city was called, Babel, which means "confusion."

A Nation Set Apart For God

One of the questions that people often ask about the Bible is, “Why did God choose the nation of Israel to be His special people?” Up until Genesis chapter 12, we find God dealing with mankind as a whole. What led God to select one man, Abraham, from the midst of many nations, to be the progenitor or father of one nation, Israel, and then begin to deal with them almost exclusively?

The answer to this question can be seen in looking at Satan’s three major attacks against the promised Seed of the woman. We see an immediate attack within the family of Adam, as Satan leads Cain to kill his brother, Abel. In Cain’s descendants we see the beginnings of a people and a civilization which “went out from the presence of the Lord” and sought to satisfy their own fleshly desires. The Lord overruled Satan’s attack and raised up another seed, Seth, to take the place of Abel.

During the days of Noah, we see Satan at work again in instigating the intermarriage of the ungodly descendants of Cain with the godly line of Seth. The result was a corruption of almost all flesh upon the earth and a world that was filled with violence. Once again, God’s promises and purposes did not fail.

Chapter 11

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Noah did what was right in the sight of the Lord. His lineage was without blemish, meaning that he and his family did not intermarry with the ungodly line of Cain. Hence, God preserved mankind through Noah's family.

Although Noah and his family believed God and were preserved through the flood (Heb. 11:7), they began, almost immediately, to follow their own fleshly desires (Gen. 9:20-25). The Gentile world, or the nations which were descended from Noah's sons following the flood, are listed in Genesis 10, but their true **characteristics** are found in Romans 1:21-32.

- Pride in Human Reasoning (vs. 21-22). They knew God, but did not glorify Him as God. They became futile in their reasonings/thoughts. Their hearts were darkened. They professed themselves to be wise, but they became fools. This same philosophy has existed throughout history and is known today as **secular humanism**.
- Idol Worship (vs. 23-25). They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. They exchanged the truth of God for the lie (of Satan) and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator. This is the same type of religious worship commonly referred to today as the "**New Age**" movement.
- Unnatural Sexuality (vs. 26-27). They changed God's natural plan and purpose for marriage between men and women (Gen. 2:21-25) and committed shameful acts with one another: women with vile passions toward other women, and men burning in their lust for other men. **Homosexuality** is a blatant disregard for God's design for marriage and family and it is becoming more and more prevalent in our society today.
- Turning from God to Evil (vs. 28-32). They did not like to retain God in their knowledge and thus became filled with unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, etc. They actually became haters of God. They knew the righteous

judgment of God, but continued in their wicked practices and encouraged these practices in others. This type of **ungodliness** is certainly characteristic of the perilous times we are living in today (II Tim. 3:1-9).

The **culmination** of the Gentile world came with Satan's attack upon the promised Seed in attempting to unite the whole world and turn them against God. This was accomplished through Nimrod and the building of the tower of Babel. The result was that God **condemned** the Gentile world, confused their language, and scattered them upon the face of the earth.

Out of this ungodly Gentile world, God selected one of its own children, a man named Abram, to continue to carry out His plan and purpose to bring the promised Redeemer, the Seed of the woman, into the world. When God called Abram, he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees (which was probably very near the area where the tower of Babel was built). We read in Joshua 24:2 that Abram and his family "served other gods." They were idol worshippers, just as the people who were building the tower of Babel. Why, then, did God choose Abram? It wasn't because of his lifestyle. It was because of his faith (Heb. 11:8, 17). When Abram heard God's Word and received God's call, he believed God and obeyed His command. This is exactly what Paul meant in Romans 10:17 when he wrote,

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

GOD'S PARTING OF ABRAM

We read in Genesis 12:1-3 of God's call of Abram while he still dwelt in the land of Mesopotamia (cf. Acts 7:2).

"Now the LORD had said to Abram: Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you." (Gen. 12:1)

God separated Abram from idol worshippers. He was told to get out of his country, which worshipped idols. He was told to leave his kindred, who worshipped idols. He was told to leave his father's house, where idols were worshipped (Josh. 24:2). God chose Abram in order to **separate** a people for His own purposes.

“I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:2-3)

GOD'S PURPOSE IN ABRAM

God chose Abram to be the father of a new nation, Israel. It was through Abram's seed and this new nation that the promised Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) was to be brought into the world. This is clear from Romans 9:4-5,

*“Who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and **from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came**, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”*

God selected Abram to father a nation which He would separate from the Gentile nations (Exo. 33:16) and would purify for His own special purpose (Deut. 14:2)—to bring the Lord Jesus Christ into the world (Gal. 3:16).

GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAM

God promised to make Abram a great nation (i.e. Israel), to bless Abram, to make his name great, to make him a blessing to others, and to bless all families of the earth through him and his Seed (i.e. Christ). We find in Genesis 12:7, that once Abram had

departed from his homeland and come into the land that God showed him, then God promised to give that land (i.e. Canaan) to Abram's seed or descendants.

Because of the ungodliness of the Gentile world, God chose one nation, Israel, to be His special people. He separated them from all other nations to accomplish His great purpose of redemption through the promised Seed, Christ.

Chapter 12

The Promised Seed Through Israel

When God called Abram out from among the Gentile nations to be the father of a new nation, Israel, He made many promises to Abram (Gen. 12:1-8). This call and these promises marked a significant change in God's dealings with mankind, hence, we mark this as the beginning of a new dispensation; that of PROMISE. Once again, we must note that many of the conditions which existed under the dispensations of HUMAN GOVERNMENT and CONSCIENCE continued into the new dispensation.

SON OF ABRAHAM

The key promise made to Abram was that of a "seed" through whom God would bless all families of the earth (Gen. 12:3). In fact, in Genesis 17:5, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, because he was to be a "father of many nations." Though Abraham gave birth to a son, Ishmael, by his wife's handmaid, Hagar, God told him that he and his wife, Sarah, would have a child who would be called Isaac. At the time this promise was made, Abraham was ninety nine years old and

Sarah was eighty nine years old. Abraham's initial response to God was, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!" God's answer to Abram was,

*"... No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an **everlasting covenant**, and with his descendants after him."* (Gen. 17:19)

The expression "everlasting covenant" shows that the promised seed extended beyond just Isaac, and pointed to the ultimate Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is called in Matthew 1:1, "the Son of Abraham."

The Lord Jesus Christ was not only the promised "Seed" of the woman (Gen. 3:15), which indicated that He was to become a man, but He was also to be the Seed of (i.e. descended from) Abraham (Gal. 3:16).

NATION OF ISRAEL

As we trace the descendants of Abraham, we find the lineage of Christ to be through Abraham, then through Isaac, the child of "promise" (Rom. 9:9), and then through Jacob, Isaac's second son (Gen. 27-28). In Genesis 32:28, we read that God changed Jacob's name to Israel and blessed him. We read in Genesis that Jacob, or Israel, gave birth to twelve sons, from which sprang the twelve tribes of Israel.

LION OF JUDAH

In Genesis 49, we find Jacob (Israel), from his death bed, blessing each of his twelve sons, as well as Joseph's two sons. These blessings were also prophetic, for they indicated what would be the future for the tribe that would come through each of his sons. In blessing his fourth son, Judah, he made the following prophetic statement,

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.” (Gen. 49:10)

The word “Shiloh” means “peace or rest.” It is clear from the next phrase, “and to **Him** shall be the obedience of the people,” that Shiloh refers to a Person; a Person who is to be descended from the tribe of Judah. The prophecy states that Judah will not cease to be a tribe and a royal line until “Shiloh” comes. But who is this “Shiloh?” The answer is found in Isaiah 9:6 where we see “the Christ” referred to as the “Prince of Peace.” This prophecy indicated that the promised “Seed” of the woman and the “Seed” of Abraham was to come through the tribe of Judah. He is called in Revelation 5:5 “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (cf. Gen. 49:9).

SON OF DAVID

When the angel appeared to Mary announcing the coming birth of the Lord Jesus, he made the following pronouncement:

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:32)

This announcement answers to the promises given to David back in II Samuel 7:12-16, where God promised to set up David’s seed after him and to establish his kingdom. This promised seed was to build a house (i.e. the temple) for the Lord and the throne of his kingdom was to be established forever. The “seed” refers initially to Solomon, who was used of God to actually construct the first temple, but ultimately the “Seed” refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, who will one day sit upon the throne of His father David (Matt. 1:1) and rule and reign forever.

The Christ, the promised Seed, was to be descended from

the nation, Israel, the tribe of Judah, and the family of David.

SON OF GOD

*“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a **virgin** shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isa. 7:14)*

Here, the prophecy is made that the Christ will be born to a virgin. The importance of this prophecy is seen in the angel’s announcement to the virgin Mary in Luke 1:31 and 35.

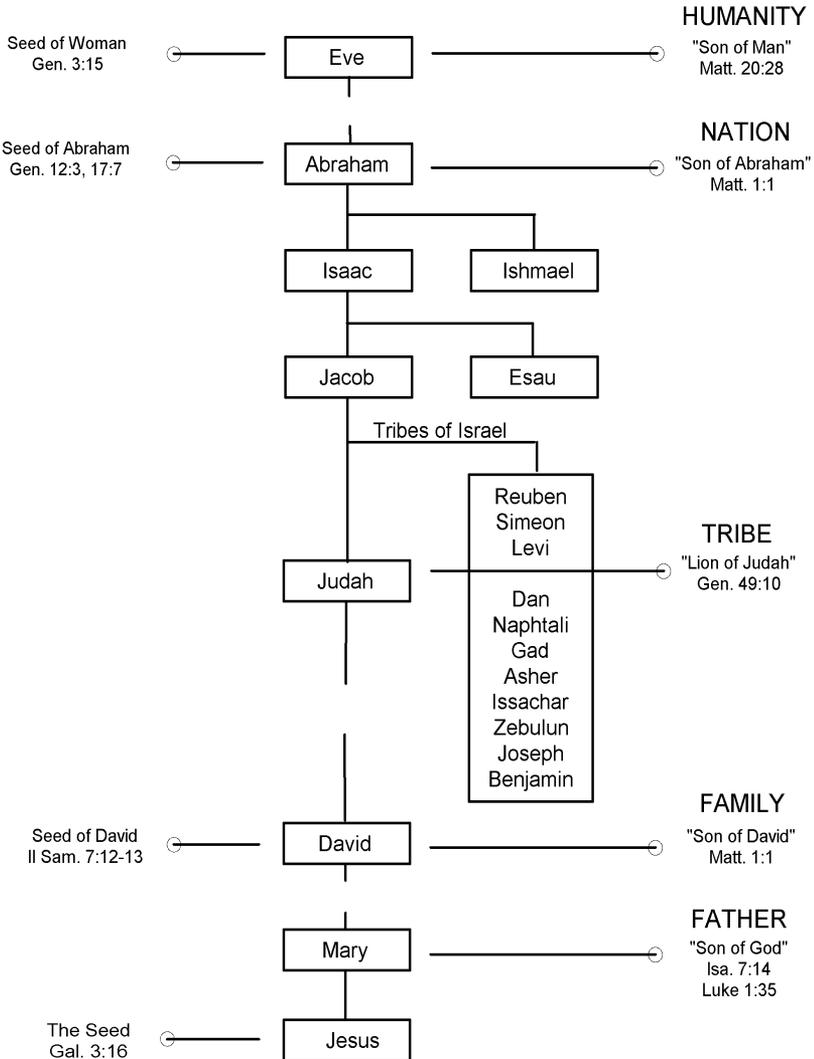
*“And behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. ... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the **Son of God.**”*

While it is true that the Lord Jesus would become a man (John 1:14), He did not receive a heritage of sin from an earthly father, for His Father was God in Heaven; therefore it could be said that He was “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3) and “yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). His sinlessness made it possible for Him to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (Heb. 9:14).

The Promised Seed - Through Israel
(Romans 9:4-5)

Promised Seed

Messianic Line



Chapter 13

The Law

PREPARATION FOR THE LAW

It is interesting to find that 14 chapters of the book of Genesis, chapters 37 through 50, deal with Jacob's son, Joseph. It is interesting because Joseph was not the son/tribe through which the Lord Jesus Christ, the promised Seed, was to come. Why then all this attention to Joseph? Primarily for two reasons. First, Joseph's life is a striking picture or type of the Lord Jesus. He was the beloved son of his father (Gen. 37:3-14), the servant rejected by his brethren (Gen. 37:4-20) and, finally, the exalted savior of his own (Gen. 41:14-55). Second, Joseph was used of God to preserve his family, and thus the nation of Israel, through seven years of famine that struck the earth during that time. God used Joseph to prophesy the seven years of famine as well as the seven years of plenty that would precede it (Gen. 41:25-32). He also used Joseph to propose the solution to the famine (Gen. 41:33-36). God raised up Joseph to an exalted position in Egypt so he could carry out the plans to save, not only the people of Egypt, but Joseph's family as well (Gen. 41:37-44). We read in Genesis 46 that Jacob and his whole family journeyed and went down into Egypt, where they were preserved through the seven years of famine. We read in verse 3 that God said to Jacob,

“I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there.”

The book of Genesis ends with the death of Jacob, and then his son, Joseph. The book of Exodus opens telling us that while in Egypt, Jacob’s family, which originally numbered in the seventies, “were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them” (Exo. 1:7). What had begun as one man’s family had grown to become a large and mighty nation, even “more and mightier” than the Egyptians (Exo. 1:9). At this time there arose a new pharaoh (or king) which did not know Joseph. He became fearful that the people of Israel might fight against the Egyptians along with their enemies and go up out of the land of Egypt. This would mean the devastating loss of a huge workforce for Egypt, so Pharaoh set taskmasters over them, afflicted them, and forced them to do hard labor. Under this great bondage, the people of Israel cried out unto God for deliverance. We read in Exodus 2:24 and 25 that

“God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.”

In response to their cries for help, God raised up a man called Moses to be their deliverer. We read of this great deliverance in Exodus, chapters 5 through 12. This deliverance was accomplished by God bringing ten plagues upon the land and people of Egypt; the last plague being the death of the firstborn. As a result of this final plague, Pharaoh commanded Moses to go and take the children of Israel up out of Egypt (Exo. 12:31-51). We read further of God’s mighty deliverance of Israel through the Red Sea, with Pharaoh’s army in hot pursuit of them (Exo. 14). They journeyed from there to the Wilderness of Sinai and camped there before the mountain. It was here that God

spoke to the people of Israel through His servant, Moses, and established a covenant with them; the covenant of law.

“And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles wings and brought you to Myself: Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, All that the LORD has spoken we will do. So Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD.” (Exo. 19:3-8)

From the words which the LORD spoke through Moses, we can see that this was a conditional covenant. He told them, **“If** you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, **then** you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people ...” Their relationship with God and their blessings from Him were dependent upon their obedience to His Word (i.e. the law). With the establishment of this covenant, a new dispensation of LAW was entered.

PARTS OF THE LAW

When most people think of the Mosaic Law, they envision Moses going up on Mount Sinai and receiving the ten commandments written on tablets of stone by the finger of God, but the law was more than just the ten commandments. The law actually consisted of three different parts: the commandments, the judgments, and the ordinances. The commandments, recorded in

Exodus, chapter 20, governed the moral life of the people of Israel. The judgments, recorded in Exodus, chapters 21 through 24, governed the social life of the people. The ordinances, recorded in Exodus, chapters 24 through 31, governed the religious or spiritual life of the people of Israel. The Law also provided a dwelling place for God among His people (Exo. 29:45). God gave Moses specific instructions for the construction of the tabernacle, which was the place where God would dwell (Exodus 25-27). He also gave instructions for the Levitical priesthood, who would offer service to God (Exo. 28-29, Leviticus), as well as the offerings which were to be made in behalf of the people of God to cover their sins (see the book of Leviticus).

PURPOSE OF THE LAW

When we turn to the book of Galatians, we find that the apostle Paul makes some interesting statements concerning “the law.”

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ ...” (Gal. 2:16)

“... if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” (Gal. 2:21)

“For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse ...” (Gal. 3:10)

“But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith.” (Gal. 3:11)

“And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to

Abraham by promise.” (Gal. 3:17-18)

In response to these statements, the following question naturally arises,

“What purpose then does the law serve?” (Gal. 3:19)

The apostle Paul gives the answer in the subsequent verses of chapter 3 and the first verses of chapter 4. He begins by pointing out the

Restrictions of the Law

“It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.” (Gal. 3:19-21)

- Limited in Scope

The law was **added** to (or “laid beside”) the promise made to Abraham. The law was added **after** the promise by some 430 years (Gal. 3:17). It did not **annul** (or “unconfirm”) the promise, nor did it **abolish** the promise (Gal. 3:18). God “promised” Abraham an inheritance. The addition of the law did not make the receipt of the inheritance dependent upon works. The law also was not **against** (or contrary to or opposed to) the promise (Gal. 3:21). “Certainly not!”

- Limited in Purpose

The law was added “**because of transgressions.**” The word “because” means “for the sake of.” It gives the idea of the

cause or reason for the law's existence. The word "transgressions" means to "overstep a boundary," in this case the boundary is the law itself. The law was never given to provide righteousness (2:21), justify men (3:11), impart life (3:21), or redeem Israel (Rom. 4:13-16). The law was given to address the area of transgressions.

- Limited in Duration

The law was added "**until** the Seed should come, to whom the promise was made." The "Seed" referred to here is the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). In Romans 10:4 we read that Christ was "the **end** (Gr. telos) of the law." The law remained in effect until the Seed came and then died on the cross (Heb. 8:13; 9:13-17). "**Before** faith came we were kept under guard by the law" (3:23), but "**after** faith has come we are no longer under a tutor (i.e. the law)" (3:25). The law continued until "the **time appointed** by the father" (4:2). "When the **fullness of the time** had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (4:4-5).

- Limited in Arrangement

The law was appointed (or dispensed) through angels and handled through a mediator (i.e. Moses). By way of contrast, the promise made to Abraham was given to him directly by God.

- Limited in Ability

The law was limited in what it was able to do. It had **no** power to "give life" (3:21). It had **no** power to justify men (3:11). It had **no** power to make one righteous (2:21). The law "could not do" these things because it was "weak through the flesh" (Romans 8:3-4). The righteous requirements of the law could not be kept by those who were in the

flesh, for the flesh is sinful by nature.

As we look at all these restrictions of the law, we might be led to ask questions about the nature of the law. “Is the law then against the promises of God?” (Gal. 3:21). “What shall we say then? Is the law sin?” (Rom. 7:7). Paul’s response to both of these questions is a very strong, “Certainly not!” He goes on to say in Romans 7:12 that, on the contrary, “the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” God had His own special reasons for giving the law.

Reasons for the Law

- Communicate God’s Righteous Requirements

The Mosaic law spelled out God’s holy and righteous requirements for man. The law was not given to make it possible for man to attain righteousness by keeping the law, but to demonstrate that man was not capable of living up to God’s standards. We read in Galatians 3:10, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in **all things** which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” James 2:10 states that “Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is **guilty of all.**” It’s not that the law is sin. On the contrary, Romans 7:12 points out that “the commandment is holy and just and good.”

- Clarify Sin

Galatians 3:19 says that the law “was added because of transgressions,” that is, it was given to show man’s transgression of the law. The word “transgression” is from the Greek word “parabaino” which means to “go beside.” Hence, to transgress the law is to go beside or go over the boundaries established by the law. The law provided the boundaries God established to clarify what was transgression or sin. Paul stresses this fact throughout the book of

Romans; “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20), “Where there is no law there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15), “The law entered that the offense might abound” (Rom. 5:20), “I would not have known sin except through the law” (Rom. 7:7), and finally, “That sin through the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom. 7:13).

- Conclude All Sinners

Galatians 3:22 states that the Scripture has “concluded (or confined or shut up together) all under sin.” Romans 3:19 declares that the law was given so that “**every mouth may be stopped**, and all the world may become **guilty before God**.” The law caused all men, both Jew and Gentile, to be confined as prisoners of sin and therefore under the judicial sentence of God, which is death. Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 6:23 goes on to say that “the wages of sin is death.” In the face of God’s law, no one may boast of his or her own righteousness. Romans 3:10 states that “there is none righteous, not even one!”

- Child-conductor

Galatians 3:24 says that “the law was our tutor (schoolmaster) to bring us to Christ.” The Greek word for “tutor” or “schoolmaster” is “pedagogue” which means “child-conductor or child-leader, a guide, or guardian.” It was a title given to household slaves who were entrusted with the responsibility of supervising the morals and conduct of Greek and Roman boys up until they reached the official age of manhood. The emphasis of this responsibility was not so much on imparting knowledge as it was on discipline and supervision. It might be characterized as enforced obedience. It tended to be strict, stern and severe. In looking at the law as a child-conductor, we need to consider

the following areas:

(1) **Protection of the Child.** Galatians 3:23 says that “before faith came, we were **kept** under guard by the law.” The word “kept” actually means “guarded or protected.” The child-conductor was there to protect the child until he reached the age of manhood. The law also performed this same service. So many of the things which were integrated into the Mosaic law, were there for the protection of God’s chosen people. The restrictions and stiff penalties of the law disciplined the people of Israel to avoid sinful practices which would lead them away from God and into a life of idolatry.

(2) **Position of the Child.** Galatians 4:1-3 describes the position of the child who was the heir in the family. As long as he was an infant or a minor (Greek “nepios” 4:1 and 4:3), he was no different from a slave. He was under the supervision of guardians and stewards until the time appointed by his father. Those who were under the law were in bondage under the “elements of the world.” They were no better than slaves under the bondage of the Mosaic law.

(3) **Period of Childhood.** Galatians 4:2 states that a minor child was under the child-conductor until “the time appointed by the father.” The law was in effect until “the fullness of the time had come” and “God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5). The word “adoption” means to be placed in a position as a privileged son and heir. The law was in effect until the Seed came and died for the sins of the world (Gal. 3:19). It was in effect until “faith came” (Gal. 3:23). After “faith came” those who were under the child-conductor of the law, were “no longer under a tutor” (Gal. 3:25), but were given the full privileges of a son and heir.

(4) **Purpose of Child-Conductor System.** The purpose of the law was not to provide the inheritance, but to protect the heir. It pointed to the Christ, the One who would redeem God's people, Israel (Heb. 10:1).

PERIOD OF THE LAW

From a dispensational perspective, we know when the law began, but it is not as easy to determine when the law ended. To make this determination, we need to distinguish between three different things: (1) the dispensation of the law, (2) the principle of law and (3) the observance of the law.

Dispensation of the Law

The dispensation of the law is the period during which God dealt with His people, Israel, under the Mosaic Covenant (Rom. 9:4). The starting point of this dispensation is not difficult to determine. We find it described in the book of Exodus, beginning in chapter 19 with the conditions of the covenant (vs. 5-8) and continuing into chapter 24, where Moses sprinkled blood upon the people (vs. 7-8) thus signifying the dedication of the covenant of law (Heb. 9:18-20).

This covenant of law was between God and the nation of Israel. The Gentiles (nations), "did not have the law" (Rom. 2:14). In fact, the Gentiles were not part of any of the covenants God made with Israel, for they were "strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:11-12).

Today, we are living under a different dispensation, the dispensation of the grace of God (Eph. 3:2). The "law of commandments contained in ordinances," which was a "middle wall of separation" between Jew and Gentile, has been abolished by the cross of Christ (Eph. 2:13-18). Therefore we are "not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). The question still remains, exactly when did the dispensation of law end and the dispensation of grace begin?

Principle of Law

We must also consider that there is a principle of law which is distinct from the dispensation of law. We have already shown that the Gentiles were not under the covenant of the Mosaic law, but we do read in Romans 2:14-15 that

“When Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law unto themselves, ...”

There was a principle of law in effect for the Gentiles, even if they were not actually under the Mosaic law. Paul concluded in Romans 3 that both Jews and Greeks (i.e. Gentiles) were “all under sin” (vs. 9). The law was given that “all the world may become guilty before God” (vs. 19).

Observance of the Law

The final area to consider is the actual observance of the Mosaic law. You might ask, “Wouldn’t the period of the observance of the law coincide with the dispensation of the law?” This is where the question becomes difficult.

We read in Matthew 5:17 that Christ came to “fulfill the law.” This verse might have reference to the fulfilling of all the promises, prophecies, and pictures of the Christ that were presented in the Law and the Prophets (vs. 18), or it might refer to the fact that Christ was “the end of the law for (literally “unto”) righteousness” (Rom. 10:4). Galatians 3:24-25 states,

“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come we are no longer under a tutor.”

Isn’t this what was signified when Jesus died on the cross and we read that “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:50-51)? Paul alludes to this in II Corin-

Chapter 13

thians 3:14 where he speaks of the veil of the Old Testament (i.e. the law) being “taken away in Christ.”

These verses indicate that the law was abolished at the death of Christ, but when we turn to the book of Acts, we see that the nation of Israel continued to observe the Mosaic law throughout this book (Acts 2:46; 21:20), and even the apostle Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, observed the law at times (Acts 21:21-26, I Cor. 9:19-23).

How do we reconcile this seeming contradiction? We will pursue this question in the next chapter as we look at “*The New Testament.*”

The New Testament?

Most people see only two divisions of the Bible: the Old Testament, which is viewed primarily for Israel, and the New Testament, which is viewed primarily for the Church. This viewpoint demonstrates a failure to “rightly divide the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15). Dividing the Scriptures into only two dispensations is insufficient, and dividing between Malachi and Matthew is incorrect.

It’s true that there is a 400 year gap between events of the Old Testament and the events of the New Testament. It’s also true that the Old Testament is written in Hebrew and Aramaic while the New Testament is written in Greek. To understand this issue, we need to look at what the terms “old testament” and “new testament” mean as used in the Scriptures.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word “testament” simply means a covenant or an agreement. When God miraculously delivered the nation of Israel out from under Egyptian bondage, He brought them to Mount Sinai. God told them,

“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure

to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.” (Exo. 19:5)

The covenant He was referring to was the Mosaic Law which He then proceeded to give through His servant, Moses. It is this covenant, the Mosaic law, that is called in Scripture, the “old covenant” or the “old testament” (II Cor. 3:14-15). It is also referred to as the “first” or “former” covenant (Heb. 8:5-7) and it stands in contrast to the “new covenant” or “new testament” (Heb. 8:8-13).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The “new covenant” or “new testament” is prophesied in Jeremiah 31, verses 31-33,

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

God promised to make this covenant with “the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,” not with the church, the body of Christ. Both the “old covenant” and the “new covenant” were for Israel, not for the church of this age.

According to the two-fold division of Old and New Testaments, you would assume that the New began with the birth of Jesus, but that is not true. We read in Galatians 4:4-5,

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent

*forth His Son, born of a woman, **born under the law**, to redeem those who were under the law ...”*

The birth of Jesus did not signal the end of the covenant of law. He was born “under the law.” We read in Luke 2:27 and 39 that Joseph and Mary did for Jesus “according to the custom of the law” and “performed all things according to the law of the Lord.” They circumcised Him (2:21), presented Him to the Lord (2:22), and offered a sacrifice for Him (2:24).

The real basis for the new testament was not the birth of Jesus, but His death. We read in Hebrews 9:15 that Jesus Christ was

“... the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death.”

Just because the death of Christ was the basis for the new covenant, this point in time did not necessarily mark the full realization of the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:34 says,

“No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD ...”

This verse describes an aspect of the new covenant which has never been realized; that all Israel “shall know the LORD.” The new covenant still awaits its fulfillment.

Chapter 15

The Gospels Period

If the birth of Jesus did not mark the beginning of a new “covenant” or a new program of God, then what was God doing during the period of time covered by the four gospels (Matthew - John)? What was the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ all about? The apostle Paul sums up the ministry of Christ while He was here on earth in Romans 15:8,

“Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made to the fathers.”

From this verse we see two key facts. First, Jesus Christ became a servant or a minister to “the circumcision,” a term which refers to God’s chosen people, Israel. The sign of circumcision was given to Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel (Gen. 17:9-14). This physical sign set the people of Israel apart from other nations, who were thus referred to as the “uncircumcision” (Eph. 2:11-12). Jesus’ ministry was not to begin a new program or a new “covenant” for all people. His ministry was directed specifically to Israel. Jesus Himself declared,

*“I was not sent **except** to the lost sheep of the **house of Israel.**” (Matt. 15:24)*

When He sent out His disciples to minister, Jesus commanded them,

“Do **not** go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the **house of Israel.**” (Matt. 10:5-6)

It was “the acceptable year of the Lord” for the people of Israel (Luke 4:19). It was Israel’s “day” (Luke 19:41-42). It was their opportunity to accept their promised Messiah, but, as the Scriptures record, they were “not willing” (Matt. 23:37-39).

The second fact we find in Romans 15:8 is that the message Jesus proclaimed was not a new revelation, but it was “to confirm the promises made to the fathers;” the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the promises made to David; the promises that were set forth in the Old Testament prophets. What were these promises? To Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God promised a seed, a nation, and a land. To David, God promised a seed, a house, and a throne. In both cases, the promised “seed,” in one sense, referred to their immediate descendants, but ultimately, the promised “Seed” referred to the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Israel was promised a coming “Messiah” (Dan. 9:25-26), which means literally “anointed one.” This Messiah was to be the fulfillment of all the promises made to Abraham and to David. Jesus of Nazareth was “the Christ” (which also means “the Anointed One”). The opening verses of the book of Matthew trace His lineage showing Him to be “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1). All the promises and prophecies made about Israel’s coming Messiah and King were fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

What about the message that was proclaimed? John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, proclaimed,

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 3:2)

When Jesus began His public ministry, He proclaimed the very same message that John the Baptist proclaimed (Matt. 4:17). When Jesus sent forth His disciples to minister and preach, He commanded them to preach this same message (Matt. 10:7). The “kingdom of heaven” is the very kingdom that was promised to David (II Sam. 7) and was spoken of by the prophets (Dan. 7:26-27). This kingdom originates from “the heavens,” but it will be established upon the earth (Dan. 9:27; Matt. 6:10). This kingdom was proclaimed to be “at hand” or “drawing near” because the King was present on earth (Luke 1:31-33).

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the Passion Week was His official proclamation to Israel as their Messiah and King. This event, which is recorded in all four gospel accounts, was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, *“Behold your King is coming to you ...”*

Jesus’ message to Israel, was not a new message of “the gospel of the grace of God,” but was instead “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 4:23).

An integral part of Jesus’ ministry was the use of miracles, signs and wonders. We read in Acts 2:22 that Jesus of Nazareth was

“... attested (or approved) by God to you (Israel) by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst ...”

These miracles and signs were performed that the people of Israel might “believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,” and that believing they might have life through His name (John 20:30-31). Why signs? Because the Jews have always requested signs from God (Luke 11:29-30; I Cor. 1:22) and God has always dealt with them using signs (i.e. Abraham—the sign of circumcision, Gen. 17:11, Moses—signs that the people would believe him, Exo. 4:8). When you find God dealing with the people of Israel, you see the use of miracles, wonders, and signs. God is not working today using miracles and signs because dur-

ing this present age of grace the nation of Israel has been set aside.

What do the teachings of Jesus mean to us today? Are they directed to the church or not? We will seek to answer this question in the next chapter.

Chapter 16

Jesus' Earthly Teachings

How do we view Jesus' teachings while He was here on earth? Are they for us today? Certainly we believe that all Scripture is profitable for our study (II Tim. 3:16), but were Jesus' instructions to His disciples and to the people of His day also intended for believers during this present age of grace?

We must remember the following facts: (1) Jesus lived during the dispensation of law (Gal. 4:4-5), (2) Jesus' ministry was to the circumcision, or Israel (Rom. 15:8, Matt. 15:24), (3) Jesus' message was the gospel of the kingdom, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17), and (4) Jesus performed many signs during this time as proofs to Israel (Acts 2:22). We must look at His earthly teachings in this context.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Consider Jesus' so-called "Sermon on the Mount," which many Christians try to live out today. Notice some of the things Jesus says. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**" (Matt. 5:3). "Blessed are the meek, for they shall **inherit the earth**" (Matt. 5:5). "Blessed are those who are

persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**" (Matt. 5:10). Jesus was teaching the people of Israel principles for living in anticipation of the establishment of His earthly kingdom, a kingdom which was promised specifically for that nation (II Sam. 7:12-16, Jer. 30:4-12, Luke 1:32). The hope of an earthly kingdom does not belong to the church, the body of Christ (Col. 1:27). Though we can learn from and even take applications from these passages, they are not directed to us as members of His church today.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Another passage of Scripture which many try to incorporate into their lives today is the so-called "Lord's Prayer." This is actually not the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ, but was a pattern for prayer that He taught His disciples. Look carefully at what was included in this prayer and how it relates specifically to Israel and their promised kingdom. "**Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven**" (Matt. 6:10). "Give us this day our **daily bread**" (Matt. 6:11). This petition will have great meaning to the people of Israel who go through the terrible tribulation period (Matt. 24:15-22) which precedes the establishment of Christ's kingdom. They will face great famine (Rev. 6:5-6) and be restricted on buying and selling food by the Antichrist (Rev. 13:16-17). Contrast Matt. 6:12-15 with Eph. 4:32. The instructions regarding forgiveness in these two passages are very different. How is it possible to follow both? Finally, praise is offered to the Father for His is "**the kingdom and the power and the glory forever**" (Matt. 6:13). This prayer was never intended as the pattern for our prayer life during the age of grace.

THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

In Matthew 13, Jesus spoke many things to the people in parables. He did so because it was given to the disciples to understand "the mysteries of the kingdom" but it was not given to

the multitudes of Israel (Matt. 13:10-17). Because the word “mystery” is used here, many people equate what is said here to the mystery revealed to Paul (Eph. 3:1-9), but these two passages of Scripture deal with two very different truths. The mysteries or secrets Jesus revealed to His disciples through parables had to do with the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13:11), the earthly hope of Israel, which was made known by the prophets (Matt. 13:17). The mysteries or secrets of the kingdom concerned the fact that this earthly kingdom was to be postponed because the word of the kingdom had been rejected by the majority of the people of Israel (i.e. the parable of the sower). The mystery Paul speaks about was **not the subject of prophecy**. This mystery was not made known by Jesus, because Paul says it was kept secret until the Lord Jesus revealed it directly to him (Eph. 3:3-5). It was the mystery regarding the church of this age (Eph 3:6). We must be careful not to confuse these two mysteries.

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

In Matthew 24, as they sat upon the Mount of Olives, Jesus answered His disciples’ questions concerning the destruction of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, the sign of His coming, and the end of the age. Many people look at the signs that Jesus describes in verses 4-14, including wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, and try to use them today to determine when the end of the world will occur. This discourse does not relate to the current age of grace, which we live in today. It concerns an **age** in which God is dealing exclusively with His earthly people, Israel. The signs of verses 4-14 are followed by a description of the great tribulation, an event that was **prophesied** in Daniel 9 and specifically determined upon God’s people, Israel, and their holy city, Jerusalem. The **coming** the disciples were concerned about was not Jesus’ coming to catch His church up into glory, but His coming to establish His kingdom upon the earth, an event which will follow immediately after the great tribulation (vs. 29-31).

The Cross of Christ

As we come to the close of the four gospel accounts in the New Testament, we find recorded the single greatest event of all time; the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is **the key event** upon which all of God's plans and purposes for all people of all dispensations hinges. The cross of Christ fulfilled God's promise to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. By His death, the promised Seed of the woman bruised the head of the serpent (Satan) and sealed his doom (Heb. 2:14). The cross of Christ made possible the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that through his seed, all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). The cross of Christ dedicated the new covenant which God promised to establish with the nation of Israel (Heb. 8:6-13; 9:15-17). The cross of Christ made it possible for both Jew and Gentile to be justified in God's sight and thus reconciled to God (Rom. 3:9, 19-20, 21-30). The cross of Christ made it possible for the middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile to be broken down and for the two to be joined together as one new man in the body of Christ (Eph. 2:14-16).

Many people feel that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, along with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), marked the beginning of God's plan and purpose for believers today (i.e. the birthday of the church, the body of Christ), but, this is **not** what the book of Acts is about at

all. Look closely at Ephesians 2:16.

*“And that He might reconcile them both (i.e. Jew and Gentile) to God in one body (i.e. the church) **through the cross ...**”*

The word “through” in this verse is the Greek preposition “dia” which means “by or through.” It is used to identify the **cause** or the **agency** by which something occurs. The cross was the “agency” through which Jew and Gentile were made one body in Christ, but this did not become a reality “**at the time**” of the cross. The fact that Jew and Gentile were to be joined together as one new man in the body of Christ was a mystery or secret until it was made known to the apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-6; Col. 1:24-27). Since Paul was not saved until Acts chapter 9 and the truth of the church was kept secret until God revealed it to him, how could the day of Pentecost mark the beginning of this church?

If Pentecost was not the beginning of the church, the body of Christ, then what is the book of Acts all about?

When Jesus hung upon the cross of Calvary, He cried out, “Father, forgive them for **they do not know what they do**” (Luke 23:34). The pronouns “them” and “they” in this verse refer to the people of Israel, who crucified their Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus’ prayer of intercession for Israel was because of their “ignorance” in crucifying Him (Acts 3:17). He prayed for them to be given another opportunity, **as a nation**, to repent and receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts — A Time of Transition

The book of Acts is one of the most misunderstood books of the Bible. Many sincere Bible students believe that it records the beginning of the church, the body of Christ. The primary reasons for this belief are that (1) the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ marked a significant change in God’s dealings with mankind (2) the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost marked a new relationship as God came to dwell within the heart of man and (3) the references in the latter part of Acts 2 to the “church” (i.e. Acts 2:47 “the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved”). Looking carefully at the book of Acts, we find that its purpose is not to record the beginning of the church, but to record God’s continued dealings with His chosen people, the nation of Israel.

In Acts 7:52, Stephen recounts the history of the nation of Israel, from the time that God called Abraham (Gen. 12) up to that present time. He brings an indictment against the nation of Israel for their rejection of God throughout their entire history. In the Old Testament Scriptures, we read how they persecuted and killed the prophets who were sent by God to foretell the coming of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 23:29-36; Acts 7:52), thereby rejecting God the Father. In the gospel accounts, we read how the people of Israel refused to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah and King (John 1:11; John 19:15). They became

His betrayers and murderers, putting Him to death on the cross of Calvary (Acts 2:22-23; 3:14-15; 7:52), thereby rejecting God the Son.

As Jesus hung on the cross of Calvary, the first words He uttered were, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Jesus interceded to the Father on behalf of the nation of Israel. Though they had taken him by wicked and lawless hands and crucified Him, still He prayed for mercy for His people, because they had done these things “in ignorance” (Acts 3:17). As a result of Jesus’ plea for mercy, Israel was given another opportunity, as a nation, to be saved.

In the Old Testament, God the Father spoke through the prophets. In the gospels, God the Son became flesh and spoke directly (Heb. 1:1-2). In the book of Acts, God the Holy Spirit spoke to Israel through the apostles (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). Stephen brought his indictment against Israel in Acts 7:51,

*“You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!
You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.”*

Then Stephen, “a man full of faith **and the Holy Spirit**” (Acts 6:5), proceeded to accuse them of betraying and murdering the Lord Jesus Christ. Having heard these things, the leaders of Israel

“... were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. ... Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him” (Acts 7:54-57).

Just before he died, Stephen prayed for his people, Israel, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” This was similar to the prayer that Jesus prayed from the cross, with one difference: Stephen did not say “for they do not know what they do.”

They had now rejected the witness of the Father, the Son,

and the Holy Spirit. As a result, God began to set aside, temporarily, His plan and purpose for the nation Israel (Rom. 11:25-27). Following the stoning of Stephen, God saved and called the apostle Paul, who was to receive a new plan and purpose for a new body of believers, the church, which is the body of Christ. The book of Acts is represented on our dispensational chart as a separate dispensation which we have labeled TRANSITION, because it records how the transition between these two different programs of God took place. However, the emphasis in the book of Acts is on Israel's rejection, their subsequent blinding, and how they were set aside.

An outline of the book of Acts is given in Acts 1:8. Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus told His disciples, "... you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Chapters 1-7 record the ministry of Peter and the twelve to the Jew only in Jerusalem and Judea. Chapters 8-12 record the events which followed the stoning of Stephen. The ministry moved out to Samaria and was opened up to the Gentiles as well. These chapters show the transition that began to take place, from the ministry of Peter and the twelve to that of the apostle Paul. Chapters 13-28 record the ministry of the apostle Paul to the Jew first and then to the Gentile; a ministry that extended unto the end (uttermost parts) of the earth.

Chapter 19

Peter's Ministry to the Jew Only

“ ... And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea ...” (Acts 1:8)

Following the ascension of the Lord Jesus, the apostles waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:12-14). As they waited, they followed the leadership of the Lord to select Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth apostle (Acts 1:15-26). It was important and significant that their number remain at twelve, because it was the number associated with Israel, the nation toward which their ministry and apostleship was directed.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues (languages). They were heard and understood by Jews and proselytes from every nation, who were in Jerusalem to celebrate this Jewish feast day (Acts 2:1-13). As some of the people began to mock them and to accuse them of being full of wine,

Peter stood and declared to the people of Judea and Jerusalem, “*This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel*” (Acts 2:13-21). What they were witnessing was a prophesied event.

Peter then proceeded to preach the Word of God to the men of Israel (Acts 2:22). He declared that they had crucified Jesus of Nazareth by lawless hands, but that God had raised Him from the dead (Acts 2:22-24). His resurrection was in full accord with the prophecy uttered by David in the 16th Psalm (Acts 2:25-28). This prophecy declared that God would raise up the Christ to sit on the throne of David (Acts 2:29-31). Peter concluded by saying that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, which they had just seen and heard, was proof that God had made this same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32-36).

Please notice the following facts about this passage. The place where this occurred was **Jerusalem**, the capital city of the Jews. The event was the day of **Pentecost**, a Jewish feast day. The people witnessed **signs** (i.e. tongues) which were specifically directed to the Jews (I Cor. 14:20-22, Isa. 28:11-12, I Cor. 1:22). The people who were present for this feast were **Jews and proselytes**. The spokesman was the apostle **Peter**, whose apostleship was directed toward the circumcised (i.e. Jews) (Gal. 2:7-9). The events which occurred were **prophesied** by Joel (Joel 2:28-32), who spoke concerning God’s purposes for the people and land of Israel. The message Peter preached was the gospel of the **kingdom** (Acts 2:30,36), a message which was directed to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:5-7; 15:24).

The events of Pentecost stand in sharp contrast to God’s plan and purpose today for His church, the body of Christ. Consider the following three key differences:

- The events that occurred on the day of Pentecost specifically concerned the Jews. Paul states that in the church there is no Jew or Gentile (Col. 3:11); the distinction between them has been abolished (Eph. 2:11-18).
- The events that occurred on the day of Pentecost were prophesied by Joel. Paul states that the truth concerning the

church, the body of Christ was unprophesied (Eph. 3:1-9). It was a “mystery” which “in other ages was not made known.” Paul calls it the “unsearchable riches of Christ” and declares that it was “hidden in God.”

- God’s spokesman on the day of Pentecost was the apostle Peter. The truth of the church, the body of Christ, was not made known except through the apostle Paul (Col. 1:24-27).

When we consider these basic differences, it seems clear that Pentecost did **not** mark the beginning of the church of today.

When Peter had finished speaking, the people asked him what they should do. Peter said, “Repent, ... and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Carefully compare this statement with the message preached by John the Baptist in Matt. 3:2, Mark 1:4-5, and Luke 3:3. Though Peter’s statement was directed to individual Jews, it was also a message for the nation as a whole. Israel was a nation who had once been in covenant relationship with God, but because of the sin of idolatry, needed to repent and turn back to God. Hence, we see John the Baptist’s message to them to repent. As a nation, they had crucified their promised Messiah, the Son of God, and they needed to repent of this terrible sin. Therefore, we see Peter’s call to them to repent.

THE KINGDOM OFFERED

The condition of the nation of Israel, at this time, was illustrated by the first miracle performed by Peter in the book of Acts. In Acts chapter 3, we find Peter and John going to the temple to pray. As they approached the gate of the temple, a man who had been lame from birth asked them for alms. This poor, lame beggar is a picture of the nation of Israel at that time; spiritually lame—unable to walk or even to stand. As the man fixed his attention upon Peter and John, expecting to receive something, Peter commanded him, “in the name of Jesus Christ

of Nazareth, to rise up and walk.” The result? The man was lifted up and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping and praising God (Acts 3:1-9).

This man's hope rested in the **name** and **power** of Jesus Christ. The same was true for the nation of Israel. If they would look in faith to Jesus Christ, they too could be restored to walk, leap and praise God!

Peter then proceeded to show these very truths to the people; to show them that in crucifying Jesus of Nazareth, they had denied the Holy One of God and killed the Prince of Life; to show them that God had raised Him from the dead; to show them that this lame man had not been healed by their power, but had been made whole and strong through faith in the **name** of Jesus Christ; to show them that they had crucified Jesus through ignorance and had thus fulfilled the Scriptures which foretold His sufferings (Acts 3:12-18).

Having said all this, Peter exhorted them to “repent and be converted” that their sins might be blotted out **and** that “times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). What did this mean? Peter was making a genuine offer of the kingdom of heaven to the nation of Israel, **if** they would repent. This is seen in the very next verse where he says, “and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before” (Acts 3:20). Send Him where? Where was He? Look at verse 21, “whom **the heaven** must receive until the times of restoration of all things which God had spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Jesus Christ was in heaven, thus Peter was saying that God was prepared to send Jesus Christ back to the earth to establish His kingdom, if Israel would repent, as a nation. Here was their opportunity. How would they respond?

THE KINGDOM REJECTED

Please notice what Peter said in Acts 3:17, “Yet now, brethren, I know **you** did it in ignorance, as did also your **rulers**.” Israel's national repentance was dependent upon both the people

and their rulers. The rulers of Israel were representatives and leaders for the people of Israel. The rulers spoke for the nation, therefore, their directives and their decisions were made in behalf of the entire nation of Israel.

In Acts chapter 4, we find the first reaction of the Jewish rulers was to try to **suppress the truth**. They put Peter and John in custody, being disturbed that they taught and “preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2). They could not deny the miracle that had been performed on the lame man, so they sought to keep the matter from spreading any further among the people by commanding Peter and John “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:16-18). What was the response of Peter and John? “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we **cannot** but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20). They continued to speak the Word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).

As Peter and the twelve continued teaching, preaching, and healing in the name of Jesus Christ, the Jewish leaders “were filled with indignation” and put the apostles in prison (Acts 5:17-18). When Peter and the other apostles accused them of murdering the Lord Jesus, the rulers became furious and plotted to kill them, but Gamaliel intervened. Having failed in their attempts to suppress the truth, the Jewish leaders resorted to **oppressing those who preached the truth**. They called for the apostles, beat them, commanded them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go (Acts 5:33-40).

The apostles departed, rejoicing that they “were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name,” and they continued daily **in the temple** (publicly) and **in every house** (privately) teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (Acts 5:41-42).

The rulers of Israel demonstrated their final decision in Acts chapter 7. They seized Stephen, “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit,” who was performing “great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:5-8). They set up false witnesses against him, just as they had done with the Lord Jesus, and then they allowed him to speak. Stephen reviewed the history of

God's dealings with the nation of Israel and their rejection of Him. He concluded by accusing these rulers of being "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit!" He declared that they were just like their fathers, who killed God's prophets, but, in their case, they had become the betrayers and murderers of the Just One, the very Son of God (Acts 7:51-53)!

When the rulers of Israel heard these things, "they were cut to the heart" (Acts 7:54). As Stephen continued speaking, they "cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord" (Acts 7:57). They cast him out of the city and stoned him (Acts 7:58).

As Stephen prayed for them, he asked the Lord not to charge them with this sin, but he **did not** say they were still ignorant of what they were doing. Remember, "they were cut to the heart" and "stopped their ears." This was an act of their own will. They **willfully rejected the Holy Spirit of truth.**

Chapter 20

Transition from Peter to Paul

The stoning of Stephen in Acts chapter 7 marked a significant turning point in God's plan and purpose. Although we don't see a major change take place immediately (i.e. from the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 to the beginning of Paul's public ministry in Acts 13 is about 14 years), several events occur which signal a transition from the ministry of Peter and the twelve in Jerusalem and Judea to the ministry of Paul unto the end of the earth. We see changes in: (1) the area where the Word of God is proclaimed, (2) the apostle who is to be the chief spokesman for God, (3) the people to whom the Word is preached, (4) the center from which the ministry originates, and finally (5) the fact that the ministry of the twelve apostles diminishes in importance.

ACTS 8 — A NEW AREA

Before the Lord Jesus ascended back into heaven, He told His disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the

earth” (Acts 1:8). The first seven chapters of the book of Acts record the ministry of Peter and the other apostles in Jerusalem, but following the stoning of Stephen, we read that “a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (8:1). This marked the beginning of the next phase of Acts 1:8.

Acts chapters 8 through 12 record the ministry of Philip, Peter, and John in Judea and Samaria. They ministered in such cities as Samaria, Azotus, Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea. While they continued to preach the gospel of the kingdom to Israel, the fact that they were no longer focusing on Jerusalem, where the Jewish leaders resided, is significant and certainly marks a transition.

ACTS 9 — A NEW APOSTLE

At the stoning of Stephen we meet the man who is to be the key figure throughout the remainder of the book of Acts; the apostle Paul. When we first meet him, his name is not Paul, but Saul of Tarsus, and he is not a disciple of the Lord Jesus, but a persecutor of all those who call on His name. While the Jews stoned Stephen, Saul of Tarsus stood and watched, in full agreement with what they were doing, even guarding the coats of those involved (Acts 7:58-8:1).

When the persecution arose against the church, it was Saul who became the chief persecutor, “making havoc of the church” (Acts 8:3), and “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1). Saul was a Pharisee who had been trained in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 26:4-5). In persecuting the church of God he believed he was serving God (Acts 22:3), thinking that he “must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9-11).

Acts chapter 9 describes how Saul obtained letters from the high priest giving him authority in Damascus to bind any he found to be of “the Way” (i.e. followers of the Lord Jesus Christ) and to bring them back to Jerusalem. As Saul traveled

the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, he was struck down with a blinding light from heaven and a voice spoke to him saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Saul responded, “Who are You Lord?”, and the Lord answered, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Saul of Tarsus came to see and believe, that very day, that Jesus of Nazareth was both the Christ and the Lord. God saved Saul and chose him for a special purpose; to bear the name of the Lord Jesus Christ “before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

From Acts chapters 13 through 28, the chief spokesman for God was no longer Peter or one of the twelve, but the apostle Paul, whose primary ministry was to be “a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (II Tim. 1:11).

The conversion and call of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus is one of the key events recorded in Scripture; an event which paves the way for an important change in God’s plan and purpose.

ACTS 10 — A NEW PEOPLE

As we move on into Acts chapter 10, we find Peter still the primary apostle in view, but we see a significant change take place in his ministry. A centurion named Cornelius (a Gentile) was told in a vision from God to send men to Joppa to find Simon Peter and bring him back to Cornelius’ house. As the men journeyed, Peter fell into a trance and saw a vision from God telling him to rise, kill, and eat certain animals which were declared “unclean” by the Mosaic law. Peter at first refused, but God declared to him that what He had cleansed must not be called “common” or “unclean.” As a result of all this, Peter was brought to the house of Cornelius, ministered the Word of God to his household, and was amazed when they, upon hearing the Word of God, began to speak in tongues and magnify God.

The salvation of this Gentile, along with his household, was definitely something new. Up to this point, the Gentiles were considered strangers and foreigners from God and from God’s people. The people of Israel were instructed in the Mosaic law

to keep themselves separate from other nations (Deut. 7:1-6). When Jesus spoke of His own ministry He said, “I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). The only way for a Gentile to be saved was to become a proselyte, that is, to embrace the Jew’s religion (i.e. circumcision, keeping the law, etc.).

Cornelius, an uncircumcised Gentile, had obviously received the gift of the Holy Spirit, for he was able to speak in tongues (Acts 10:45). Peter realized that these Gentiles had been saved, just as the Jews had, so he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:46). When Peter returned to Jerusalem, the believing Jews argued with him about going to the Gentiles, but as he related to them the vision he had received from God and the events that happened at Cornelius’ house, the Jews “became silent; and they glorified God, saying, Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life” (Acts 11:18).

One thing worth noting about this event is that though it represented a significant change, it was something that had been prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures (Acts 15:7-11, 13-18 with Amos 9:11-12). It was **not** a mystery. It was **not** a new revelation. It was simply another phase in God’s prophetic program.

ACTS 11 — A NEW CENTER

When the persecution arose against the church at Jerusalem following the stoning of Stephen, many who were scattered “traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch preaching the word to no one but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). Some of them, when they came to Antioch, also began preaching the Lord Jesus to Greeks (Gentiles) as well. (*Note: Some Greek manuscripts read “Hellenas,” which refers to Greeks or Gentiles, while others read “Hellenistas,” which refers to Greek-speaking Jews. While not being dogmatic on this subject, we believe the context of the passage indicates that Greeks or Gentiles are in view here*). The result was that “a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). When news of this

reached Jerusalem, Barnabas was sent to Antioch. When Barnabas saw how God's grace was working in this city, he went to Tarsus to find Saul and brought him back to Antioch. The two of them stayed there and taught for a whole year and "the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

While the city of Jerusalem was the center for the ministry of the twelve apostles, the city of Antioch (a place containing both Jewish and Gentile believers) became the center for the apostle Paul's ministry. Paul was initially sent out from Antioch, and as he traveled preaching the Word of God, he always returned to Antioch.

ACTS 12 — MINISTRY OF THE TWELVE DIMINISHES

The opening event of chapter 12 is Herod's killing of James, the brother of John. Apparently, he is the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred. What is interesting and significant is the fact that James was not replaced. When Judas fell from his position of apostleship due to his transgression, Peter and the eleven were led by the Holy Spirit to replace him with Matthias (Acts 1:15-26). As the apostles prepared to continue proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom to Israel, and as they still anticipated the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth, it was important for their number to remain at twelve. Now that Israel's leaders in Jerusalem had, once again, rejected the Lord Jesus, the anticipation of the kingdom was diminished, and thus James was not replaced.

Acts 12:2 is the last mention of the apostle John in the book of Acts. Though we see him still used of God in writing the gospel of John, the epistles, and the book of the Revelation, we do not see him again in the book of Acts.

Following the killing of James, Herod saw that the Jews were pleased with what he had done, again showing their clear rejection of the apostles' message. Herod arrested Peter, intending to hold a public trial and execute him as well. When an angel of God miraculously freed Peter from prison, we see Peter

depart from public view. This is in stark contrast to what he and the other apostles did when they were miraculously freed from prison back in Acts 5. There, they went and stood in the temple and taught the people of Israel. Why the difference? The stoning of Stephen demonstrated the rejection of the Lord Jesus and of His apostles by the Jewish leaders and the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea. When Peter is freed this time, the Holy Spirit does not direct him to continue his public ministry to Israel. In fact, we only find the apostle Peter mentioned one more time in the book of Acts, and that is in Acts 15, at the council at Jerusalem, where Peter testifies before the council in support of Paul's ministry.

The final verse of Acts 12 takes our thoughts away from Peter and the twelve apostles and moves them to Barnabas and Saul (i.e. Paul) as they return from Jerusalem to Antioch and prepare to begin their ministry.

Chapter 21

Nature of Paul's Acts Ministry

In Acts 13, we find Paul and Barnabas separated by the Holy Spirit to begin a ministry that would eventually carry Paul to the “uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

What was the nature of Paul’s ministry, as recorded in the book of Acts? The first recorded events provide the pattern for his entire Acts period ministry.

*“And when they arrived in Salamis, they preached the word of God **“in the synagogues of the Jews.”**” (Acts 13:5)*

The first city Paul preached in was Salamis, on the island of Cyprus. As soon as he arrived there, he went to the synagogue of the Jews and preached the word of God. This was the case each time Paul entered a city for the first time, he always went first to the synagogue of the Jews or, if there was no synagogue, then to the place where the Jews met for worship (cf. Acts 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1-2,10; 18:4-5; 19:8).

The Scriptures teach that Paul’s primary ministry was to the Gentiles (II Tim. 1:11), but chronologically, during the Acts pe-

riod, Paul's ministry was "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16).

"Now when they had gone through the island to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith" (Acts 13:6-7).

This "certain Jew" was characteristic of the majority of the Jews Paul encountered throughout his ministry. The man's name was "Bar-Jesus" which means "son of Jesus." This should have been the Jew's relationship with the Lord Jesus (Exo. 4:22, John 8:19), but it was not, for they had rejected the Word of God (John 5:38-47). Bar-Jesus was also known as Elymas the "sorcerer," and was characterized as a "false prophet."

With this "certain Jew" was a Gentile whose name was Sergius Paulus. He called for Paul and Barnabas and desired to hear the Word of God. Elymas, the Jew, withstood Paul and Barnabas and sought to turn away this Gentile man from the faith. This opposition from Elymas was typical of what Paul experienced from the Jews in nearly every place he ministered. The Jews were given the first opportunity to hear the Word of God, but they rejected it. Afterward, when Paul proclaimed the truth of God to the Gentiles, the Jews actively opposed him, seeking to turn the Gentiles away from the faith (cf. Acts 13:42-52 and I Thess. 2:14-16).

"Then Saul, who also is called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun

for a time. And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand.” (Acts 13:8-11)

Paul brought a stinging indictment against Elymas, just as he was later to bring similar indictments against the Jews he encountered in each city. He declared that Elymas was not, as his name implied, a “son of Jesus,” but was instead a “son of the devil” (cf. John 8:41-44), an “enemy of righteousness” (Rom. 10:1-4), and willfully corrupted the right ways of the Lord.

Paul then pronounced a judgment of blindness upon him; a blindness that was: (1) From the hand of the Lord, (2) Pronounced through the apostle Paul, and (3) Temporary (“for a time”).

This is exactly what we find throughout Paul’s Acts period ministry. As the Jews of each city rejected the Word of God, Paul pronounced a judicial, spiritual blindness upon them; a blindness which remains, even today, but one which is only temporary (Rom. 11:25-26).

“Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord.” (Acts 13:12)

Having pronounced blindness upon this Jew, Paul turned his attention to Sergius Paulus, the Gentile. When Sergius Paulus saw what was done and heard the Word taught, he believed and was saved. His response typified the Gentiles’ response to Paul’s ministry throughout the book of Acts.

Paul Turns to the Gentiles

In the previous chapter we saw how the first recorded miracle performed by the apostle Paul demonstrated the nature of Paul's Acts period ministry: to preach to the Jew first, and as they rejected the Word of God, to pronounce blindness upon the Jew, and then to turn to the Gentile with the message of salvation. In this chapter, we look at three key points in Paul's ministry where he "turned to the Gentiles."

ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

The first of these turning points is recorded in Acts, chapter 13, where we find the first recorded message Paul preached. Upon his arrival in the city of Antioch in Pisidia, Paul did what he did every time he entered a city for the first time; he entered the synagogue of the Jews on the Sabbath day. Following the reading of the Law and the Prophets, Paul was asked by the rulers of the synagogue to say a word of exhortation for the people (Acts 13:14-16).

Paul stood and addressed his message specifically to the people of Israel and those who feared God (vs. 16). He re-

counted the history of the people of Israel from the Exodus to the establishment of David's kingdom (vs. 17-22). He then declared that God had raised up a Savior for Israel from David's seed — Jesus Christ (vs. 23). Israel's rulers, not knowing Christ, "nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath," fulfilled the Prophets by rejecting and crucifying Jesus Christ (vs. 27-28). After three days, God raised Him from the dead, and in so doing, He fulfilled the promise God had made to the fathers of that nation (vs. 30-37). Throughout his message, Paul quoted extensively from the Old Testament Scriptures (vs. 22, 33, 34, 35, 41). Paul concluded by saying,

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man (i.e. Jesus Christ) is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39).

When the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged Paul to preach these very same words to them the next Sabbath (Acts 13:42).

"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." (Acts 13:45)

The reaction of these Jews in Antioch in Pisidia was just like that of Bar-Jesus, back in verse 8 of this same chapter. They rejected what the Word of God had to say to them, choosing instead to focus upon the fact that Paul was also preaching the Word of God to the Gentiles; something which they refused to tolerate. Paul's reaction to these Jews followed the same pattern as his reaction to Bar-Jesus.

"Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, It was

necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13:46)

Paul declares to these Jews that it was **necessary** that the word of God be preached to them first. The word “necessary” means it was required or “a must” specified by God that the Jews have the Word of God declared to them first (cf. Rom. 1:16). Paul had fulfilled this “necessary” portion of his commission (cf. Acts 9:15) by his clear message of salvation to Israel (Acts 13:26,38-39).

The Jews, as a whole, “rejected” (literally “cast or put away from”) God’s Word and judged themselves to be “unworthy of everlasting life.” Therefore, Paul said, “Behold, we turn to the Gentiles,” just as the Lord had commanded them according to Isaiah 49:6.

In response to this, the Gentiles “were glad and glorified the word of the Lord” and many believed (vs. 48), but the Jews “raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region” (vs. 50). Paul and Barnabas “shook off the dust from their feet against them” (vs. 51 compared with Luke 9:5) and departed to Iconium.

CORINTH

On Paul’s first journey, which he took with Barnabas, his travels were limited to the areas of Cyprus and Asia Minor. On his second journey, which he took with Silas, Paul’s travels extended beyond Asia Minor to Macedonia and Achaia (which is modern day Greece). During this time he came, by himself, to the city of Corinth, where he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla.

Paul began his ministry in this city, as he did in every other city, by reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath, persuading both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) (Acts 18:4). When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia to join Paul, he was “compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the

Christ” (vs. 5).

“But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).

The second key turning point in Paul’s ministry occurred because the Jew, once again, rejected the Word of God as proclaimed through the apostle Paul.

ROME

Paul’s final journey, as recorded in the book of Acts, took him all the way to Rome, where Paul, for the third and final time, turned from the Jews to the Gentiles. If you look at a map, you can see that these three turning points move gradually farther and farther away from Jerusalem and Judea unto “the uttermost parts of the earth” (cf. Acts 1:8). While Peter’s ministry to the Jews was primarily focused in Jerusalem and Judea, Paul’s ministry to the Jews was mainly to those Jews who were dispersed. Here in Rome, Paul directed his message to “the Jew first” for the last time.

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was taken to a rented house where he was allowed to dwell with a soldier guarding him. After three days in Rome, Paul called the leaders of the Jews together and they arranged a time for Paul to speak to them. Notice, once again, as Paul comes to Rome for the first time, what does he do? He goes to the Jews first! When they had appointed him a day, the Jewish leaders came to Paul at his lodging where Paul ...

“... explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” (Acts 13:23)

The Jews' reaction was just as it had been in every place Paul went, some were persuaded and some disbelieved (vs. 24). When they did not agree among themselves, they began to depart. Before they could leave, Paul spoke one final word to them, pronouncing blindness upon them, just as was prophesied in the book of Isaiah (Isa. 6:9-10). Paul concluded by saying,

“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” (Acts 28:28)

When Paul had said these words, **the Jews departed**, disputing greatly among themselves.

Israel is Set Aside

“The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying — Go to this people and say: Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them. — Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!” (Acts 28:25-28)

With these words the apostle Paul pronounced blindness upon the nation of Israel for the last time in the book of Acts. This is the third such pronouncement he made throughout his ministry in the book of Acts, and being the last, it is the most significant.

The quotation from the book of Isaiah, chapter 6, was God’s prophecy regarding the judicial, spiritual blinding of His chosen nation, Israel. This passage was quoted by the Lord Jesus during His ministry, as the people of Israel rejected Him, their Messiah and King (Matt. 13:14-15; John 12:40-41). We find it quoted here by the apostle Paul, after the people of Israel

had completely rejected the offer of the kingdom through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Having rejected God and His plan and purpose for them, the nation Israel was at this time set aside. Israel's long awaited kingdom and the blessings it would bring was to be postponed. When God set them aside, it did not mean that they would never experience their promised kingdom on earth, for the Scriptures plainly teach that one day they will. What God has promised, He will do! We read in Romans 11:25,

“For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

The blindness upon Israel was only “in part.” In the context of this verse, the expression “in part” means that it was only temporary. It would last “until” the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Paul goes on to say in Romans 11:26,

“And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.”

With the setting aside of Israel and the postponement of God's kingdom program for them, many changes occurred. The apostle Paul, who had been called by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles and to receive a special revelation from God concerning a new plan and purpose for them, began to write a number of letters from his prison house in Rome. These letters, commonly referred to as the prison epistles, fully revealed the blessed truth which Paul referred to as “the mystery” (Eph. 3:1-9). Prior to this time, Paul had made reference to some portions of the mystery (Rom. 12:4-5; I Cor. 2:6-8; I Cor. 12:12-13; etc.), but he had not fully revealed it. It is possible that up until this time the apostle Paul himself did not fully know all of the truth

of the mystery, but may have received the rest of it while in prison in Rome. Acts 26:16 seems to indicate that God revealed truth to Paul progressively, not all at once.

God revealed to Paul that He was no longer dealing with Israel as a nation. All saved people would be added to a body of believers called the church, the body of Christ (Col. 2:24) in which there is no distinction made between Jew and Gentile (Col. 3:11).

With Israel set aside and the truth of the mystery now being fully revealed, the need for sign gifts, such as healing, tongues, and prophecy, ceased to exist. Therefore, we see their use gradually fade away until it ceased all together (I Cor. 13:8-11).

In addition, the practice of the Mosaic law, which was continued by the nation of Israel throughout the Acts period (Acts 21:20), ceased as well (Col. 2:14-17).

Chapter 24

The Mystery of Christ

“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!”

With these words the apostle Paul, while imprisoned in Rome, pronounced blindness upon the nation of Israel for the final time. From his prison house in Rome, Paul then began, in a number of letters he wrote, to reveal a special message God had given to him, which Paul referred to as “the mystery of Christ.” These letters, or epistles, that he wrote, are commonly referred to as the prison epistles and include the New Testament books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. While Paul’s early epistles, written during the Acts period, contained references to the truths of the mystery (Rom. 16:25-26; I Cor. 2:6- 8; I Cor. 12:12-13; Gal. 3:26-29; I Thess. 4:13-18; etc.), it is in Paul’s prison epistles that we find the full revelation of the mystery—God’s plan and purpose for us as believers today during this present dispensation of grace.

THE MYSTERY — A NEW REVELATION

This special message that was committed unto Paul is described in detail in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter 3 of this letter, Paul describes how and why it was revealed to him by God.

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles — if indeed you have heard 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 (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” (Eph. 3:1-5)

The truth given to Paul concerns a new dispensation, called the dispensation of the GRACE of God. God has dealt with mankind in various ways throughout history. Throughout most of the Old Testament Scriptures, God dealt specifically with the nation of Israel. The Gentiles (or “nations”) had no part in God's program during that time (Eph. 2:11-12). From Exodus, chapter 20, up to the death of Christ on the cross, Israel lived under the dispensation of law. Today, God is dealing with mankind on the basis of His grace, and we are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

The message for this new dispensation was committed to a new apostle, Paul. Paul says this dispensation was “given to me for you” (Eph. 3:2). It was not made known to “the twelve” (Gal. 2:6-10), whose ministry was primarily directed to the Jews, but was instead committed to a new apostle, Paul, who was especially the apostle to the Gentiles (II Tim. 1:11; Eph. 3:1).

Paul goes on to say that the truth concerning this dispensation of grace was made known to him by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:3; Gal. 1:11-12). Until that time, this truth

was a “mystery,” a secret, kept hidden in the mind of God (Eph. 3:9) until He chose to make it known to and through the apostle Paul. This mystery was “not made known” to men of other ages (Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26), but was kept hidden. This does **not** mean that the truth was simply hidden in Scripture, and that no one understood it yet. Paul declares that the mystery concerned the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). The word “unsearchable” literally means “untrackable or untraceable; not leaving any footprints that can be traced or tracked out.” We find no mention of this truth in the Old Testament Scriptures, in the earthly teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, or in the ministry of the twelve during the Acts period. It was certainly in the mind of God, even before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and was in accordance with “the eternal purpose of God” (Eph. 3:11). Being the very Son of God, the Lord Jesus certainly knew this truth, but He did **not** reveal it while here on earth. He chose to wait and reveal it to Paul from heaven at His own appointed time.

THE CHURCH — A NEW CREATION

The basic truth of the mystery is that today, during the dispensation of grace, God is no longer making a separation or distinction between Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles, in time past, had been far off from God.

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Eph. 2:11-12)

During this current age of grace, the Gentiles have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13). Through the cross, God made it possible for the middle wall of separation

that existed between Jew and Gentile to be broken down (Eph. 2:14). When Christ died on the cross, He abolished the “law of commandments contained in ordinances;” the law which had instructed the Jews to keep themselves separate from the Gentiles. Christ’s death made it possible for God to create, in Himself, a new body of believers, from the two (i.e. Jew and Gentile) — the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:24).

The creation of this new body, the church, was accomplished “through” the cross, but this does **not** mean that it occurred at the time of the cross. When we read the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul written during this period, we see God was still making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom. 1:16; I Cor. 9:19-23). Remember, that the truth of the formation of this body was not made known until it was revealed to Paul.

Returning to Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 6, we find that the truth of the mystery was

“... that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.” (Eph. 3:6)

This verse does **not** refer to the Gentiles being blessed along with Israel or just sharing in Israel’s promised blessings (i.e. land, nation, kingdom, etc.). The church, the body of Christ, is an entirely **new** creation, with a new makeup, a new calling, a new position, a new hope, and a new relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e. He is our Head). The Gentiles are on a totally equal footing with Israel; joint heirs in a joint body and joint partakers of God’s promises to His church in Christ. In God’s eyes, there is no Jew or Gentile in the church (Col. 3:11). Every person today is treated as an individual. Every person, whether Jew or Gentile, must be saved in the same way, “by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8-9).

In God’s eyes today, there is only one church, and that is the church, the body of Christ (Eph. 4:4). The church is **not** a man-made organization or denomination that you join, but a liv-

ing organism (which is why it is called “a body”) which you become a part of when you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. The moment you trust in Christ, God adds you to His church through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:12-13). God sets you in His church, as it pleases Him (I Cor. 12:18). Once you are part of His church, no man can remove you, for you are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise until the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13-14). What a glorious and secure position God has given us “in Christ!”

THE HEAD — A NEW RELATION

When God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and “seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ... He put all things under His feet ... and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:20-23). Today, with Israel temporarily set aside, God is calling out a body of believers which He refers to as His church. Every person, whether Jew or Gentile, who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior is added to God’s church through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:12-13,18). He is our **Savior**, but He also has a new relationship with believers today as our **Head** (Eph. 5:23).

Jesus Christ is the Head of His church. This is our special relationship with Him today, yet we see many Christians trying to relate to Him as their King. This seems to be the emphasis in so much of popular Christian music and literature. There is no question that the Lord Jesus Christ is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16), and we should acknowledge Him as such. We must “rightly divide the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15) and see that we have a different relationship with Jesus Christ than Israel had in the past and will have in the future. The truth concerning Israel’s relationship with the Lord Jesus was the subject of prophecy (Old Testament Scriptures, Jesus’ teachings, and the ministry of the twelve apostles). The truth concerning the church the body of Christ, and Christ’s relationship to His church as Head, was a mystery, hidden in God until He revealed

this truth through the apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-5; Col. 1:18-28).

About the same time the apostle Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, he also wrote a letter to the saints at Colosse, in which he answered two particular forms of false teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. The first of these false teachings was Gnosticism, which **denies the superiority** and deity of Jesus Christ. This sinister philosophy relegates the Lord Jesus Christ to a position on the same level as angelic beings. The second false teaching was Legalism, which **denies the sufficiency** of Jesus Christ as Savior and Head of His church, and relies upon a system of legal ordinances and good works for man's salvation.

Paul answered the Gnostics by declaring the superior person and position of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the **preeminence**. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell.” (Col. 1:15-19)*

Jesus Christ is the “firstborn” over all creation. This does **not** mean that He was the first created being, but that He has a superior or preeminent position over all creation. Jesus Christ was **not** created. He existed (“was”) in the beginning with God (John 1:1-2). He is the Creator of all things, both on earth and in heaven, including all the spiritual and angelic beings in the heavens. All things were created through Him and for Him, and in Him all created things consist (i.e. continue to exist or hold together).

Jesus Christ is also the “firstborn” from the dead (I Cor. 15:20-23). He has been raised, ascended, and seated at the right

hand of the Father, and been made Head over all things to the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:19-23).

The Gnostics taught that a succession of angelic beings existed between God and man that provided a means of access and communion. They used the Greek word “pleroma,” which is translated “fullness” in Colossians 1:19 and 2:9, to describe this angelic hierarchy. In their view, Jesus Christ was simply a part of this angelic hierarchy or “pleroma,” but Paul declared that there was no angelic hierarchy, but that “**all** the fullness (pleroma)” dwells in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19).

Paul answered the legalists by declaring the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for every area of our lives.

“Beware lest anyone cheat (spoil) you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.” (Col. 2:8-12)

The legalists taught that circumcision and keeping the Mosaic law was required for salvation (cf. Acts 15:5). Paul responded by declaring that we are “complete in Him (Christ), who is the Head of all principality and power.” In Him, we are circumcised, but with a circumcision “made without hands.” Hence, this must be a spiritual circumcision. We were buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through faith in “the working of God,” therefore the baptism is spiritual as well. The written ordinances of the law have been taken out of the way, having been nailed to the cross of Christ. The requirements of the law, which include food, drink, feasts, and Sabbaths, were

only a shadow of things to come. The substance, or the spiritual reality of these things, is Jesus Christ.

We must acknowledge and hold fast to the glorious truth that Jesus Christ is our Head.

*“Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and **not holding fast to the Head**, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.” (Col. 2:18-19)*

The Two Main Divisions of Scripture

As we stated earlier in the chapter on the New Testament, most people believe that the two main divisions of the Bible are the Old and New Testaments. Actually there are two main divisions of the Bible: prophecy and mystery. These two divisions are depicted in the chart on the following page.

PROPHECY

“Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” (I Pet. 1:10-11)

The apostle Peter makes reference here to the Scriptures of the Old Testament prophets. The subject of their writings was the salvation of God that was to be provided through Israel’s

The Two Divisions of Scripture

Prophecy and Mystery

| Law and the Prophets | Fulfilling of | |the Law and the Prophets |
|--|--|--|---|
| Matt. 11:13 I Pet. 1:10-11 PROPHECY OF CHRIST "testified beforehand" Gen. 3:15 Luke 24:27 |  birth | death LAST | Luke 1:32 Rev. 19:6 KINGDOM OF CHRIST "glory that should follow" Rev. 11:15 I Pet. 1:11 |
| | | | ▶ DAYS Acts 2:19-21 Tribulation |
| | | | Dispensation of Grace Eph. 3:1-9 Col. 1:25-29 (Postponed) MYSTERY OF CHRIST "unsearchable riches" Titus 2:11 II Tim. 2:15 Grace |
| | | Acts 2:16-18 2 13 28 Acts | |
| Old Testament | Gospels | Acts | Kingdom |

Christ (Messiah). These prophets are said to have inquired and searched diligently, seeking to understand what the Scriptures, which they were given to write, testified about the Christ. The problem they faced is that the prophecies presented two very different views concerning the Christ: (1) the sufferings of the Christ and (2) the glories that would follow. The prophesied programs of God are depicted on the chart with a white background.

The Sufferings of Christ

The sufferings of the Christ were prophesied in such passages as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, both of which present vivid pictures of the crucifixion of the Christ. The sufferings of Christ began when He became a man and took upon Himself the form of a servant (Phil. 2:5-8). They continued as He experienced the same trials and tribulations that any human being faces in life.

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Heb. 4:15)

Christ’s sufferings culminated when He died a cruel death on the cross of Calvary. He not only experienced the physical pain of such a death, but also the great humiliation that went with it. Yet, the greatest pain He faced on the cross came because of us; because of our sin. As He hung there on that cursed tree (Gal. 3:13), He bore the weight of the sins of the whole world in His body (I Pet. 2:24). He became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21). What did this mean for Jesus? It meant that He had to go through the agony of separation from God, His Father. This is why He cried out in agony, with a loud voice, saying, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46), words that were prophesied in Psalm 22:1.

After Jesus was raised from the dead, He met with His disciples and taught them, “opening their understanding, that they

might comprehend the Scriptures.” And He said to them,

“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day.” (Luke 24:46)

When Peter preached to Israel in Acts 3 he spoke to them of their crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he stated that what they had done, in ignorance, was used of God to fulfill, “those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer” (Acts 3:18).

The Glories to Follow

The Old Testament Scriptures speak of the glories of the Christ as well. The Christ is seen coming in power and great glory to execute judgment upon the earth and to deliver Israel from their enemies (Isa. 2, Zech. 14). The Christ is seen established as King over all the earth with Israel ruling and reigning with Him as a kingdom of priests (Psalm 2, 24, Isa. 9:6-7, Jer. 30:8-9, Ezek. 37:24-28).

These two different viewpoints of the Christ must have been confusing to those who lived in Old Testament times. When Jesus came, He was not what they expected in their Messiah. They weren't looking for a lowly, suffering Messiah, but for a powerful Messiah who could and would bring deliverance for Israel. He became “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (Isa. 8:14, I Pet. 2:8), “the stone which the builders rejected” (Psalm 118:22, Acts 4:11, I Pet. 2:7), but, as a result, He became “the chief cornerstone” (Isa. 28:16, I Pet. 2:6).

In Peter's message to Israel in Acts 3, he made reference to the fact that the prophecies concerning the sufferings of the Christ had been fulfilled (vs. 18). Based on this fact, he then could make the following offer to them:

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from

the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:19-21)

If Israel, as a nation, would repent of crucifying the Christ, and would turn back to the Lord, then “the times of refreshing” would come from the presence of the Lord and He would send Jesus Christ back to the earth to judge and to establish the long promised kingdom to Israel. Peter spoke of these things as “the restoration of all things spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” These events constitute what Peter calls in I Peter 1:11, “the glories that would follow.”

At the time Peter made this offer, there were no other prospects known. Nothing was known about the church, the body of Christ. At this time the church remained a mystery, or a secret, hidden in God (Eph. 3:1-9). The only things known at this time were those that were spoken about by the prophets: “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.” As far as Peter knew, the next events to occur were the “last days” that would result in Christ’s return and kingdom. In fact, when Peter explained the meaning of the events that occurred at Pentecost he stated, “This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). He then quoted Joel 2:28-32, which describes the “last days.”

The first portion of the book of Acts was the beginning of the last days. When Israel again rejected their Christ by persecuting and killing the apostles, then the fulfillment of the last days, and the glories to follow, were postponed.

MYSTERY

The mystery is that body of truth that was kept a secret, or hidden, until God chose to reveal it to His servant, the apostle Paul. We looked at this mystery in detail in the last chapter. Today we are living in this unprophesied period, which Paul refers

to as the dispensation of grace, a period in which God is dealing with the church, the body of Christ. This mystery program is depicted on the chart with a shaded background. God has postponed His prophesied program for Israel until He completes His church. When the church is complete and has been caught up into glory, then God will resume His dealings with Israel.

The last days that were begun in the book of Acts, will be resumed. Israel will experience a time of great tribulation which will be brought to a close by the return of Christ back to the earth. He will come in power and great glory to judge, make war, and establish His kingdom upon the earth. Once again, these events constitute what Peter calls, “the glories that would follow.”

Many of the problems people have today in understanding the Bible are caused by confusing these two divisions of Scripture. Many want to take things that were and will be a part of God’s prophesied program, which was directed to Israel, and apply them to God’s unprophesied program, the mystery, which is directed to the church of this age. This only results in confusion. This is why Paul stressed,

*“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the word of truth.**” (II Tim. 2:15)*

If we truly desire to be workers who are approved of God and who do not need to be ashamed, we must rightly divide the Word of truth. We must make this key distinction between prophecy and mystery. We must see and understand that we live in a unique dispensation, with unique promises and requirements. Only then can we live a life that accords with God’s purpose for us as members of His church today.

The Rapture of the Church

The dispensation of the grace of God (Eph. 3:2), which we are presently living in, will be brought to a close by what is commonly referred to as the rapture of the church. Although the term “rapture” is not found in Scripture, it is an appropriate word to describe the coming of the Lord for His church. The word comes from the Latin word “rapere” which means “to seize” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*), and thus can be used to refer to the time when the Lord will “catch up” or “carry away” His church into heaven. When the apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonian believers, they were experiencing much tribulation and persecution from the unbelieving Jews of their city (Acts 17:5,13; I Thess. 2:14-16). The apostle Paul made known the truth of the rapture to them to comfort and encourage them and to give them hope.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say unto you by the

*word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” (I Thess. 4:13-18)*

When we use the expression, “the coming of the Lord,” we must take care to distinguish between the two events this one expression refers to: (1) the coming of the Lord for His church and (2) the coming of the Lord back to the earth to establish His kingdom. These two events are distinct and occur at different times.

AN UNPROPHESIED EVENT

The coming of the Lord to the earth, when he was born of the virgin Mary, was prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures (Micah 5:2; Isa. 7:14). The coming of the Lord back to the earth a second time was also prophesied in -the Old Testament Scriptures (Zech. 14:4-7), as well as by the Lord Himself while He was here on earth (Matt. 24:27-31). The coming of the Lord for His church, was not the subject of Old Testament prophecy, nor was it mentioned by the Lord while He was here on earth.

Paul introduces the subject in I Thessalonians 4:13 with the words, “I do not want you to be ignorant,” indicating that Paul was about to reveal something to them they did not know. In writing to the Corinthian believers concerning this same subject, Paul refers to it as “a mystery” (I Cor. 15:51), something that was kept **secret** until God chose to reveal it. Since God’s plan and purpose for the church, the body of Christ was a mystery that was “hid in God” (Eph. 3:1-9) until He made it known to and through the apostle Paul, it follows that the rapture, which is

the “blessed hope” of the church (Titus 2:13), was also a secret until God made it known through Paul’s teaching and writing. The rapture is the unprophesied end to an unprophesied period.

OUR BLESSED HOPE

The rapture is the blessed hope of the church, the body of Christ. We have this hope because of the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:19-23). Just as God raised the Lord Jesus Christ up from the grave, even so, God will raise us up also.

In I Thessalonians, chapter 4, Paul wrote words of comfort to those whose beloved family members and friends had already died. There is no need for us to sorrow as those who have no hope, for we do have the blessed hope that one day the Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven with a shout and a trumpet call of victory—victory over death! When He comes, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then those who are still alive and remain on earth, will be caught up together with the dead in Christ, and we shall all meet the Lord in the air.

When we are caught up, we will meet the Lord “in the air” (I Thess. 4:17). When Jesus comes for His church, He will not come back to the earth, but will come (or appear) in the air. While Israel’s hope is His coming to earth to establish His kingdom, the hope of the church, His body, is in heaven. Colossians 1:27 describes it as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Colossians 3:4 says that, “when Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” Christ will descend in the air, catch us up to be with Him in glory, and “thus we shall always be with the Lord” (I Thess. 4:17). What wonderful words of comfort!

WE SHALL BE CHANGED

Before we can enter into the glorious presence of our Lord though, our bodies must be changed. The bodies we currently live in are bodies of flesh and still have a sin nature (Rom.

7:18), and as such, these bodies are not fit for glory or eternity. I Corinthians 15:51-54 describes the transformation that must occur before we can enter into glory.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’”

Our bodies of flesh were never intended to last forever. Paul describes them as a tabernacle, or a temporary dwelling place (II Corinthians 5:1). They are corruptible; that is, they are subject to corruption or decay. They are mortal; that is, they are subject to death. When the Lord Jesus Christ comes for us, He will

“... transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” (Phil. 3:21)

What a blessed hope we have—to be made like unto our glorious Lord and to dwell with Him forever. May we each look forward to that day with great expectation (Tit. 2:13).

The Judgment Seat of Christ

Many people have the mistaken idea that there will be one great day of judgment in which all people will stand before God to be judged for their lives here on earth. The Scriptures speak of many different judgments, at different times, for different groups of people.

The judgment that concerns us, as members of the church, the body of Christ, is the judgment seat of Christ. Though many of God's judgments are described in the book of the Revelation, the judgment seat of Christ is not mentioned there. The Revelation concerns itself with the fulfillment of God's prophesied plans and purposes for His chosen nation, Israel. The judgment seat of Christ is described in the writings of the apostle Paul, to whom was committed the truth concerning the dispensation of the grace of God, a body of truth that was a mystery (or secret) until God chose to reveal it to and through Paul (Col. 1:24-27).

In the book of Romans, chapter 14, Paul addresses the problem of believers judging their brothers in Christ.

“But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand

before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us shall give account of himself to God." (Rom. 14:10-12)

All believers will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The expression “stand before” literally means “to be placed beside or near.” We will be presented to the Lord and placed at His disposal for judgment. Not only will we worship and honor Him by bowing the knee to Him and confessing Him with our tongue, but we will also give account of our lives and our service to Him.

What is the nature of this judgment that believers will face? One of the keys to answering this question is found in the term used for “judgment seat.”

The typical word for “judgment” in the New Testament is the Greek word “krino,” which is often translated “condemnation,” and often used in reference to judging sin. For example, in Revelation 20:11-15, we read of the great white throne judgment, before which the unbelieving dead will be judged (Greek “krino”) according to their works. The final result of this judgment is eternal condemnation, for all who stand before this judgment will be thrown into the lake of fire.

The expression “judgment seat,” that Paul uses to describe the believer’s place of judgment, is from the Greek word “bema.” This word refers to a raised platform or seat, usually in an open court, on which a judge sits. The word is used in Acts 18:12,16 where the apostle Paul, while in Corinth, was brought to the judgment seat of Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. It is also used in Acts 25:6,10,17 where Paul, while being held in Caesarea, was brought to the judgment seat of the governor, Festus. This same word, “bema,” is also used to describe the judgment seat in Jerusalem, where Jesus was brought before the Roman governor, Pilate (John 19:13).

The fact that a different word is used indicates that the judgment seat of Christ is a different type of judgment. As believers in Christ, we will not be judged or condemned for our

sins at the judgment seat of Christ. We read in John 3:16-18,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

God’s purpose in sending Jesus Christ into the world, was not to judge or condemn (“krino”) the world, but to save the world through His substitutionary death on Calvary. Whoever does not believe in Him, already stands judged or condemned (“krino”), but, whoever believes in Him is not judged or condemned (“krino”). Paul states this in Romans 8:1,

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus ...”

By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, God judged or condemned sin in the flesh. Romans 6:23 teaches that the wages or payment of sin is death, but Jesus paid the penalty for our sins when He died on Calvary (I Pet. 2:24).

The apostle Paul mentions the judgment seat of Christ again in II Corinthians 5:1-10. Here Paul, writing to believers, describes the new bodies that God has prepared for us, “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (vs. 1). This wonderful promise is guaranteed by the presence of His Holy Spirit in our hearts (vs. 5, compare Eph. 1:13-14). He stresses that as long as we remain in our earthly body, we are absent from the Lord, but as soon as we die, and are thus absent from our earthly body, we enter into the presence of the Lord. Based on these truths, Paul concludes:

“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or ab-

sent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (II Cor. 5:9-10)

The King James version renders verse 9 as follows: “Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.” The expression “accepted of Him” has caused many people to believe that God’s acceptance of them, in regard to their salvation, is based on their labor or their works. The word “accepted” as used here in the King James text is from the Greek word “euairetos” which literally means “well pleasing.” It does not refer to God accepting us (i.e. salvation), but whether or not our lives, as saved individuals, are pleasing to Him.

We read in Ephesians 1:6, that God has “accepted” us in His beloved Son on the basis of His grace. The word for “accepted” here is a different Greek word altogether, “charitos,” which means “engraced or favored.” It is used in Luke 1:28 where Mary, who was to become the mother of the Lord Jesus, was said to be “highly favored.” We are not “accepted” by God on the basis of our works, but on the basis of His grace, and the gift of His grace, the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-10).

The judgment seat of Christ does not determine whether we are saved or not, but rewards believers based on their service for the Lord. Going back to II Corinthians 5, verse 10 states that we must all “appear” before the judgment seat of Christ. The word “appear” means “to make manifest what has been hidden or unknown, to bring to light, to make openly visible.” This is what will happen at the judgment seat of Christ. Every believer, individually, will give an account of what he or she has done while here on earth, and it will be made manifest whether it was good or bad, that is, if it was well pleasing to God or not. Paul describes this day of judgment in I Corinthians 3:13-15,

“Each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the

fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If any-one's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ on that Day, the work we have done will become clear (i.e. evident, known). God will test each one's work and reveal (i.e. uncover, unveil) every aspect of the work to determine "what sort it is." Any work that endures will be rewarded. Any work that is burned up will not be rewarded, and thus the person will "suffer loss" of that reward. This Scripture makes it very clear that, even if a person's work is burned and he suffers loss of reward, yet "he himself will be saved." That person will not suffer loss of salvation.

There are basically two criteria that God will use to judge the believer's works: (1) **What** you build and (2) **How** you build it.

WHAT YOU BUILD — THE RIGHT WORK

What you build is based on head knowledge. It involves knowing and doing the right work for God. I Corinthians 3:10-11 describes two requirements for building the right work.

"According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

The first requirement is that we must build on the proper foundation—the Lord Jesus Christ. This foundation has already been laid. Paul teaches that no one can lay "any other foundation." The word "other" in this expression means "another of the same kind." Many people try to lay other, different foundations

and then build upon them, but God will only accept that which is build upon the foundation of His Son, Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter, during his ministry in Jerusalem, made a similar statement,

*“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)*

The second requirement is that we must build according to the proper plans or blueprints. The apostle Paul describes himself in I Corinthians 3:10 as “a wise master builder.” Today we might call him “a wise architect.” He is wise in that he followed God’s plans. Paul was, and is, God’s architect for this current age or dispensation of grace. The truth concerning the dispensation of grace and God’s plan and purpose for the church, the body of Christ, was made known to Paul by revelation. It was a mystery or secret prior to this time. (Eph. 3:1-5). Paul is God’s steward or manager for this dispensation (Col. 1:25), thus Paul says that he “laid the foundation” (I Cor. 3:10).

Many people today are building upon the correct foundation, Jesus Christ, but are building according to the wrong set of blueprints. Many try to follow Jesus’ earthly teaching, such as the Sermon on the Mount, which was directed to the people of Israel (Matt. 15:24; Rom. 15:8). They are looking forward to, and some even trying to bring in God’s kingdom upon earth (Matt. 6:10), not realizing that our hope as believers today is not a kingdom here on earth, but a glorious home with Christ “in the heavenlies” (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Col. 1:27). God will surely hold accountable at the judgment seat of Christ, those who fail to see and understand what God’s plan and purpose is for today, and try to build according to the plans for another age and another body of believers. Paul sums up both of the requirements for what we build in Romans 16:25,

“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according

to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began.”

The foundation is “the preaching of Jesus Christ,” but today it must be “according to the revelation of the mystery.”

HOW YOU BUILD — THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

The second criteria that God will use to determine the quality of the believer’s work is **how** you build. How you build is not based so much on head knowledge as it is upon heart and attitude. It involves working with the right motive. This is one of the key things that will be manifest at the judgment seat of Christ.

“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.” (I Cor. 4:5)

When we do our works here on earth, people can see **what** we have done, but they may not know **why** we did these works. Our heart, which is the source for our motive and attitude, is hidden to them. At the judgment seat of Christ, the “counsels of the heart” will be brought to light. That which might have been hidden before men, will then be fully seen and known. The word “counsels” refers to our “resolve, will, or purpose.”

The guidelines for what our motive and purpose should be are given in Colossians 3:22-25. Although these instructions are directed specifically at those who were slaves or bondservants on earth, they certainly apply to us as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing

that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” (Col. 3:22-24)

He first gives the guidelines from the negative point of view: “Not with eyeservice as men-pleasers.” Our service should not be based on what other people see. Our motive should not be to glorify ourselves or to please men, but to please God, “who tests our hearts” (I Thess. 2:4-6).

On the positive side, whatever we do, we are to do “in sincerity of heart, fearing God.” The word “sincerity” literally means “singleness.” It refers to that which is done totally without pretense and without hypocrisy. It speaks of a genuine and sincere attitude of heart. Our attitude toward God should be that of “fear,” not particularly being afraid of God, but having a reverence and respect for the awesome God we serve. In addition, we are to remember that we will receive the reward, not from men, but from the Lord, for we “serve the Lord Christ.”

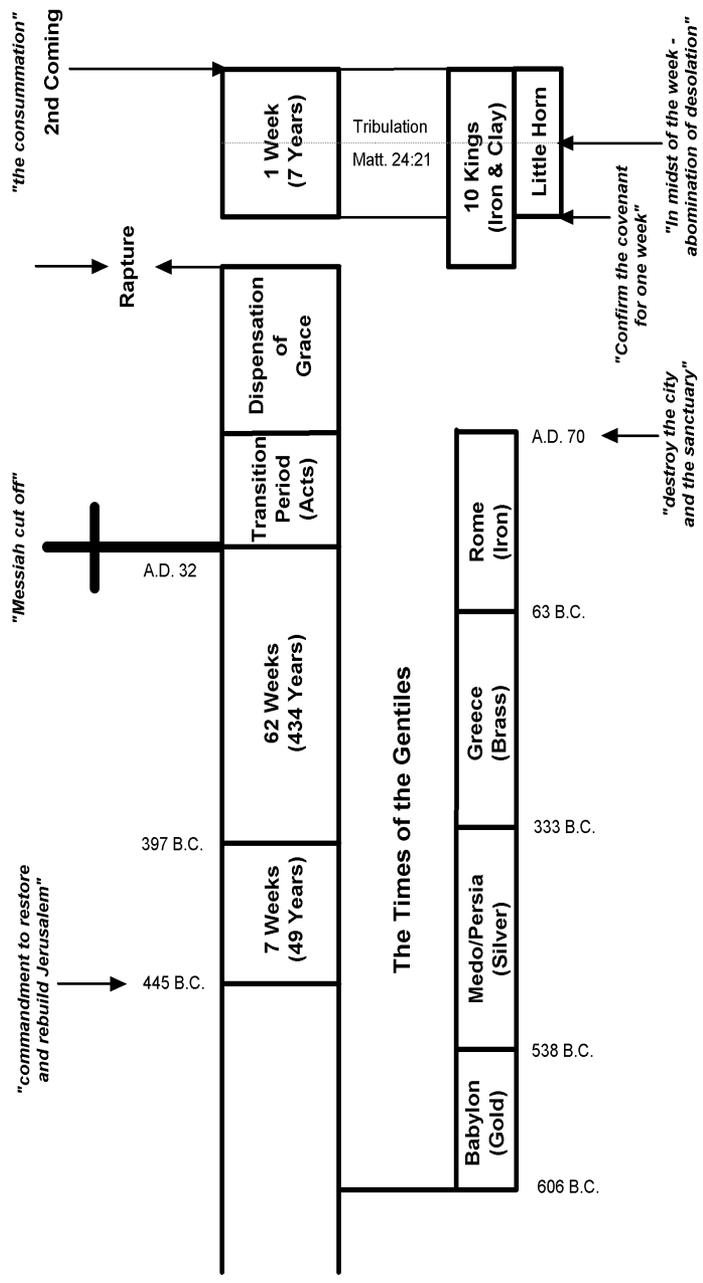
The Tribulation Period

Toward the end of Daniel's life, he received a vision from the Lord that seventy weeks or "sevens"(490 years) had been determined, or "marked out" for the people of Israel and for the holy city, Jerusalem. These seventy weeks determined how God would fulfill His future plans and purposes for His chosen people, Israel. The seventy weeks were divided into three periods: seven weeks (49 years), beginning from the time of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 2), sixty two weeks (434 years), which would last until the cutting off of Messiah the prince (i.e. the death of the Lord Jesus Christ), and one week (7 years), which is marked from the confirming of a covenant between the future Antichrist and the people of Israel. A chart depicting this prophetic plan is provided on the following page.

The prophetic program God has marked off for Israel and Jerusalem, is currently suspended to allow God to fulfill His plan and purpose for the church, the body of Christ. The first sixty-nine weeks (483 years) of Daniel's prophecy have already been fulfilled, but the remaining week (7 years) will not begin until God completes the church of this age, and takes us home to

The Three Periods of the Seventy Weeks Vision

(Daniel 9:24-27)



be with Him in glory.

Following the rapture of the church, God will resume His dealings with the nation of Israel, and events will be set in motion to complete all the prophecies that have been made throughout the Scriptures.

THE ANTICHRIST

Sometime after the church age closes (we do not know how long this will be), the “man of sin will be revealed” (II Thess. 2:3). This is Satan’s specially chosen man, commonly called the Antichrist. His rise is described in detail in such Scriptures as Daniel 7-8, where he is called “the little horn,” Daniel 11, where he is referred to as “a vile person,” and Revelation 13 and 17, where is described as “the beast.” In Daniel 9:26-27, he is the “prince who is to come.” As he rises in power, he will make a covenant with the people of Israel that is to last one week (7 years), allowing them to worship in their temple in Jerusalem (which will be rebuilt before these events take place).

THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

In the middle of this seven year period, that is after three and a half years, the Antichrist will break his covenant with Israel. He will “bring an end to sacrifice and offering” (Dan. 9:26) and he will place something in the holy temple in Jerusalem that will be an abomination to the Lord; something that will cause the temple to become desolate or empty. There is some difference of opinion as to what this abomination is. Some feel that the Antichrist will enter and seat himself in the holy of holies and proclaim himself to be God (II Thess. 2:4). Others believe that the image of the beast, that is described in Revelation 13:14-15, will be set up in the holy of holies and people will be forced to worship it or be killed. In either case, this event will begin a reign of terror by the Antichrist, as he is empowered by the dragon (Satan) and supported by the beast out of the earth (false prophet).

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

As Jesus spoke to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, He described to them what the last days of God's prophetic program for Israel would be like, and He warned them of this terrible event.

“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whosoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ... For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.” (Matt. 24:15-16,21)

These verses describe a time of tribulation and persecution for Israel unlike any they have ever experienced. Jeremiah calls it “the time of Jacob's trouble” (Jer. 30:7). The Antichrist will make war with the saints and will overcome them. People will be taken captive. Many will be killed with the sword (Rev. 13:7-10). They will be forced to worship the Antichrist and his image, or be killed. People will be forced to take the mark of the beast in order to either buy or sell. Despite all of this, God's future for the nation Israel is their salvation (Jer. 30:7; Rom. 11:26-27).

THE NEW COVENANT

“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah— ... I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ... for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34)

ISRAEL'S REDEMPTION

While Satan's plan is unfolding through the work of the Antichrist and the false prophet, God is in control of all the events we see happening. They only occur as God allows, and as God directs. This is seen as we read the book of the Revelation that was given through the apostle John. In chapter 1 we find God giving the revelation of all these events to John that they may be made known to God's servants, His people Israel. In chapters 2 and 3 we see God's solemn warnings and instructions to the people who will experience these events. In chapters 4 and 5 we see that God is on the throne and in control. We see the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world, take the seven-sealed book, which will unveil these end-time events, and open the seals. God initiates all the events described in the Revelation, including the time the Antichrist will rise.

In chapters 6-18, we watch as God sets in motion a series of events which work to bring about the redemption of His people, Israel. Just as the Lord delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage through a series of plagues (Exo. 1-15), so the Lord will deliver them in the future. While Satan is actively persecuting, and even attempting to destroy Israel (Rev. 12:13-17), God will bring a series of judgments upon the earth which will result in Israel's redemption from bondage. These judgments begin with the opening of the seven seals (Rev. 6-7), which usher in the blowing of seven trumpets (Rev. 8-11), which end in the pouring out of seven bowls which are full of the wrath of God (Rev. 15-16).

PREPARING FOR ARMAGEDDON

The sixth bowl of God's wrath is poured out in Revelation 16:12-16. Unlike the previous five bowls, which have resulted in death and destruction on the earth, the purpose of this bowl is to prepare for a battle between the dragon (Satan), and the Lamb (the Lord Jesus Christ). The kings of the east, along with their

armies, will be gathered together to the “battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14). They will gather in a place that is called in Hebrew, “Armageddon” (Rev. 16:16). They will gather to “make war with the Lamb” (Rev. 17:14). What a futile thing they attempt to do, just as the Psalmist wrote,

*“Why do the nations rage, and the people plot **a vain thing**? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, ‘Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.’ **He who sits in the heavens shall laugh**; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then **He shall speak to them in His wrath**, and distress them in His deep displeasure.” (Psalm 2:1-5)*

The Second Coming of Christ

The great tribulation period will be brought to a close by the second coming of Christ. While seated on the Mount of Olives, Jesus told His disciples that,

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt. 24:27-31)

The second coming of Christ back to the earth is not to be confused with the rapture, which is the coming of the Lord “in the air” for His church (I Thess. 4:13-18). These two comings are distinct and will occur at different times. The rapture is the unprophesied end (I Cor. 15:51-57) of the unprophesied dispen-

sation of grace (Eph. 3:1-9). The second coming was prophesied in both the Old Testament Scriptures as well as by the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry. It is the “consummation” of the end time events prophesied in the book of Daniel (Dan. 9:27).

The second coming of Christ will be preceded by great signs and wonders in the heavens. The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The stars of heaven will fall and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. “Then” the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. These signs were prophesied in Joel 2:30-31.

The second coming of Christ will be visible and known to all. Revelation 1:7 says that “every eye shall see Him.” But, in particular, He will be revealed to His people, Israel.

When Jesus came to earth the first time, His own people, Israel, rejected Him (John 1:11). Just days before His crucifixion, Jesus stood overlooking Jerusalem and mourned because of Israel’s unbelief and rejection of Him.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! ... You shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matt. 23:39)

As Israel rejected Him and crucified Him on Calvary, we see that Jesus’ appearance the first time was “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26).

In spite of their rejection and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God’s promise is that one day “all Israel will be saved,” for the day will come when Israel’s “Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:26).

When Christ appears the second time, it will be “apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb. 9:28), the salvation of the nation of Israel.

Matthew 24:30 states that when Christ appears, “all the tribes of the earth will mourn for Him.” The tribes of the earth

refers to the tribes of Israel. Zechariah prophesied that this would happen.

*“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then **they will look on Me whom they pierced**. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a first-born.” (Zech. 12:10)*

We read further in the book of Zechariah,

“And it shall come to pass in all the land, says the Lord, that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My people’; and each one will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’” (Zech. 13:8-9)

When Israel looks upon Him, whom they pierced, they will know Him and mourn over what they did to Him. When this occurs, the new covenant that the Lord promised to establish with Israel will be fully realized.

*“I will put My law in their mind, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for **they all shall know Me**, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord.” (Jer. 31:33-34)*

The second coming of Christ will also be the time ...

*“... when the Lord Jesus is **revealed** from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire **taking vengeance** on those who do not know God, and on those who do not*

obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” (II Thess. 1:7-9)

When the Lord returns to earth He will judge and make war. This is why Jesus, in Matthew 24, referred to it as “the coming of the **Son of Man.**” The title “Son of Man” is used of the Lord Jesus in reference to His authority to judge (John 5:27). The apostle John described His coming in this way,

“I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.” (Rev. 19:11)

When the Lord Jesus returns, He will be followed by an army of angels (cf. II Thess. 1:7). Out of His mouth will go a sharp sword with which He will smite the nations.

The Antichrist and His armies will be gathered together at Armageddon (Rev. 16:16) to make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb “will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings” (Rev. 17:14).

The beast (Antichrist), and the false prophet will be “cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Rev. 19:20). The kings and armies who were in league with them will be “killed with the sword of Him who sat on the horse.” And all the birds will be filled with their flesh (Rev. 19:21).

The prophecy of Psalm 2, verses 5-9 will be fulfilled.

“Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. ... You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

At the second coming of Christ, the kingdoms of this world will become “the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and

He will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

The kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be an everlasting kingdom, just as promised to David (II Sam. 7:16), but the initial part of His reign is said to be for one millennium, or a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

During this initial thousand year period, the devil, or Satan, will be bound with a chain and shut up and sealed in the bottomless pit, so that he cannot deceive the nations during this time period.

Chapter 30

The Millennial Kingdom

There are many divergent views on the kingdom. Some believe it is a spiritual kingdom, not a literal, physical kingdom to be established on earth. Others believe that the kingdom will be ushered in when the church successfully converts the world to Christianity. What do the Scriptures teach? To understand this subject we must view it dispensationally, being careful to “rightly divide the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15).

DISPENSATIONALLY CONSIDERED

In order to help us understand the subject of the kingdom from a dispensational viewpoint, a chart is provided on the following page.

Promised to Israel

The first promises of the kingdom were made to Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. He was promised that his seed or descendants would one day become a great nation (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:15-19). He was also promised a land for a possession

The Millennial Kingdom

(Dispensationally Considered)

| LAW | | TRANS. | GRACE | TRIB. | KINGDOM |
|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Kings | Prophets | Gospels | Acts | Hebrew Epistles & the Revelation | |
| PROMISED | PROPHESIED | PROCLAIMED | PRESENTED | PRELUDE | PROVIDED |
| II Sam. 7:10-17 | O.T. Prophets | Matt. 3:1-3, 4:17 | Acts 3:19-21 | Matt. 24:15-31 | Rev. 20:1-6 |
| Seed - Gen. 17 Land - Gen. 15 Nation - Jer. 31 House - II Sam. 7 Throne I I Sam. 7 Forever - II Sam. 7 | Psaln 2, 24, 72 Isaiah 11, 35, 65 Jeremiah 23, 30, 33 Ezekiel 37 Daniel 2, 7 Amos 9, Micah 4 Zechariah 14 | Pronounced (rejoice) Luke 1:30-35 Proclaimed (repent) Matt. 3:1-3, 4:17 Prayer (request) Matt. 6:8-15 Parables (rejection) Matt. 13,20,21,22 | Peter - spokesman Keys of kingdom Repent and be converted Times -refreshing Shall send Jesus Times of restitution Rejected by Israel | Times of Gentiles Great tribulation God's wrath 2nd Coming Armageddon Beast and False prophet judged Satan bound | Kingdom setup Saints resurrected Nations judged War prevented Peace enjoyed Rest entered Righteousness reigns |
| | | | Israel set aside Israel blinded until fulness of Gentiles Mystery revealed New apostle - Paul New age - Grace New body - Church New hope - Glory | | |

(Gen. 13:14-17). The boundaries of that land are described in Genesis 15:18-21, but neither Abraham nor the nation which sprang from his loins, Israel, has ever completely possessed that land. The fulfillment of this promise awaits the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Years later, more specific promises concerning the kingdom were made to King David. He was promised a house and a throne that would be established forever (II Sam. 7:13,16). These verses, in one sense, speak of David's son, Solomon, whose kingdom was probably the greatest ever seen on earth (I Kings 4:20-34), but ultimately the seed of David, whose throne would be established forever, refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, "the son of David" (Matt. 1:1).

Propheesied In the Old Testament

There are numerous prophecies throughout the Old Testament Scriptures which confirm the coming King and Kingdom which Israel had been promised. There are prophetic Psalms which speak of the kingdom (Psalm 2, 24, 72), and throughout the prophetic books, the kingdom is described in great detail (cf. Isa. 11, 35, 65; Jer. 23, 30, 33; Ezek. 37; Dan. 2 and 7; Amos 9; Micah 4; Zech. 14; and many others). Consider, for example, Jeremiah 23:5-6,

"... I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; ..."

Proclaimed as "At Hand"

The angel Gabriel's pronouncement to the virgin Mary of the birth of the Lord Jesus was cause for rejoicing (Luke 1:28), as she was told concerning Him, ...

"... the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father

David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:32-33)

As Jesus began His public ministry, He began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (draws near)” (Matt. 4:17). The King was in their midst. The question is how would they respond?

As Jesus taught, His message was directed to Israel and specifically concerned their coming kingdom. He taught them, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**” (Matt. 5:3) and, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit **the earth**” (Matt. 5:5). He taught His disciples to pray, “Your **kingdom** come. Your will be done **on earth** as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). Keep in mind that these teachings were not directed to the church of today, but to the people of Israel.

Later, Jesus began to teach in parables, saying that Israel would reject the kingdom by crucifying their King, and the kingdom would be postponed (Matt. 13:18-23; Matt. 20:18-19; 21:33-46).

Presented to Israel

The book of Acts records God’s presentation of the kingdom to Israel through the ministry of the twelve apostles. The chief spokesman was Peter, to whom Christ gave “the keys to the kingdom” (Matt. 16:19). Peter told the people of Israel that if they would repent of the sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus Christ, God would fulfill the words of His prophets and “send Jesus Christ” back to earth to establish His kingdom (Acts 3:12-21).

Israel, as directed by their religious leaders, demonstrated their rejection of this kingdom offer by stoning Stephen to death (Acts 7:51-60).

The apostle Paul, through the remainder of the book of Acts, preached to the Jews of the dispersion, proving to them, from the Old Testament Scriptures, that Jesus was their Messiah

and Lord, but they rejected Him (Acts 13:46; 28:23-24).

Postponed Today

Because of Israel's rejection of Christ, God has postponed His prophesied kingdom program for them, and has revealed His unprophesied program for the church, the body of Christ. Today God is not building His kingdom, but He is building up His body (Eph. 4:11-16). The kingdom program will remain suspended until the church is complete and caught up into glory (I Thess. 4:13-18; Col. 3:4).

Prelude to Kingdom

Following the rapture of the church, God will set in motion the events which must occur as a prelude to the coming kingdom. These events include the revelation of the "man of sin" (Antichrist), the making of the covenant which begins the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 9:27), the great tribulation period (Matt. 24:15-22), the pouring out of God's wrath on the earth, and the second coming of Christ to the earth. These will be terrible times of sorrow and suffering, especially for the people of Israel. The Hebrew epistles of the New Testament (i.e. Hebrews through the Revelation), will have special meaning to the Jewish people who will experience these events.

Provided on Earth

When the Lord Jesus Christ comes back to earth, He will judge and make war. He will judge the Antichrist and the false prophet. He will bind Satan. Then He will rule and reign on the earth for a thousand years, and Israel will reign with Him (Rev. 20:1-6). The Lord will rule in righteousness, and Israel will experience the peace, safety, and rest promised to them throughout the Scriptures.

DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Period of the Kingdom

The kingdom, in its initial phase, will last for a thousand years, which is where we get the term, “millennial kingdom.” This fact, though not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, is mentioned six times in Revelation 20:1-7.

“... and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:4)

When God promised the kingdom to David through Nathan the prophet, He promised him it would last forever.

“And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.” (II Sam. 7:16)

Prince of the Kingdom

Though it was described as the house, throne, and kingdom of David, yet the One who will be the Prince and Ruler of this kingdom is none other than David’s greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel of Matthew, which presents Jesus as the King, begins this way,

*“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, **the Son of David**, the Son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1:1)*

When the angel Gabriel announced the birth of the Lord Jesus to Mary he said,

*“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him **the throne of His father David**. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of **His kingdom there will be no***

end.” (Luke 1:32-33)

The Lord Jesus Christ is the future King that was prophesied throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. He is “Messiah the Prince” mentioned in Daniel 9:25. He is the “Prince of Peace” prophesied in Isaiah 9:6. He is “the Son” who was “begotten” of God and set as God’s King on His “holy hill of Zion” as described in Psalm 2:6-8. Jesus of Nazareth, whom the Jews took “by lawless hands, crucified, and put to death” (Acts 2:23), was raised from the dead by God to one day sit on the throne of David (Acts 2:30). He is “both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Province of the Kingdom

The millennial kingdom, though called “the kingdom of heaven,” is to be established upon the earth. The expression “the kingdom of heaven” is literally “the kingdom of (or from) the heavens.” It is the time when God’s will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

This kingdom, over which the Lord Jesus Christ will rule and reign, will be worldwide. It is pictured in Daniel 2:35 as “a great mountain” that will “fill the whole earth.” In Daniel 7:27 it is described as “the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven.” Zechariah states that “His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:9-10). The center of Christ’s kingdom will not be in Washington D.C., nor will it be in London or Moscow, but it will be in Jerusalem (Isa. 24:23), the one city where the Lord chose to put His name (I Kings 11:36).

People of the Kingdom

The millennial kingdom is the hope of God’s chosen people, the nation of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel was given this message for Israel concerning their kingdom.

*“Then say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Surely I will take **the children of Israel** from among the nations, wherever they have gone, ... and I will make them **one nation in the land**, on the mountains of Israel; and one King shall be king over them all. ... David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall have one Shepherd ...” (Ezek. 37:21-24)*

Just as God promised them when He brought them up out of the land of Egypt, Israel will be “a kingdom of priests” (Exo. 19:6). They will be raised up and restored as a nation (Ezek. 37:1-14), and they will rule and reign on the earth with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 5:10; 20:4-6).

The Gentiles (nations) shall also have a part with Israel in this kingdom. This fact was prophesied in Amos 9:11-12 and was referred to by James at the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15:13-17.

We must be careful to distinguish this prophesied earthly hope of Israel and the nations from God’s heavenly purpose for His church, the body of Christ (Col. 3:1-4; Eph. 1:3). These are two distinct programs. To join them together only results in confusion.

Power of the Kingdom

The millennial kingdom will be established in great power. The Lamb that was slain and currently sits on the right hand of God, will one day take power (Rev. 5:5-7,12; 11:17) and will establish His reign on earth. It is the Lamb that will set in motion the judgments described in the Revelation (Rev. 6:1). These judgments will culminate in the second coming of Christ back to earth.

*“... and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven **with power and great glory.**” (Matt. 24:30)*

When He returns, the battle of Armageddon will be fought and the armies of Satan will be defeated (Rev. 19:17-21). The beast and false prophet will be judged (Rev. 19:20) and Satan will be bound in the pit of the abyss for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3).

Even after the kingdom is established, Jesus Christ will reign in power and will “rule them with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2:9; Rev. 19:15). The reason for this is that throughout the thousand years, not everyone will willingly worship the Lord (Zech. 14:16-19). Further evidence of this is seen in the fact that at the end of the thousand years, Satan will be loosed from his prison and will gather together an army from among the nations to battle against God and His people once more (Rev. 20:7-9). Though Satan is bound for this thousand years, man’s sin nature is still evident.

Peace of the Kingdom

*“For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace**. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isa. 9:6-7)*

Though Christ must rule with a rod of iron during the kingdom, it will still be a time of peace. He Himself is called the Prince of Peace and it is said that “of His government and peace there will be no end.” The Lord will make a covenant of peace with His people Israel (Ezek. 37:26) and it will not be removed (Isa. 54:10).

The prophet Micah saw a vision of this future kingdom of peace.

“He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation

*shall not lift up sword against nation, **neither shall they learn war anymore.***” (Micah 4:1-3)

The prophet Jeremiah also speaks of the peace and rest Israel, as well as the whole earth, will enjoy.

*“... Jacob will return, have **rest and be quiet**, and **no one shall make him afraid.**”* (Jer. 30:10)

Provisions of the Kingdom

During the millennial kingdom, the earth will experience perfect government. The Righteous Judge, described in Isaiah 11, will rule with absolute authority.

*“**With righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.**”* (Isa. 11:4-5).

The earth itself will be changed during this time. Animal nature will change.

*“**The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, ... and a little child shall lead them. ... The lion shall eat straw like the ox. ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain.**”* (Isa. 11:6-9)

Even physical nature will change.

“... and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. ... The waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and the streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water.” (Isa. 35:1,6-7)

The kingdom will be a time of spiritual healing for Israel (Zech. 13:1, Isa. 12:1-3), but it will be a time of physical healing

for them as well.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing.” (Isa. 35:5-6)

Purpose of the Kingdom

Ultimately, the purpose of the kingdom goes beyond just the fulfillment of promises made to Israel. The purpose of the kingdom is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory.

*“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and **the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.**” (Isa. 2:11)*

*“**For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.**” (Hab. 2:14)*

Satan's Final Rebellion

The Scriptures declare that one day the Lord Jesus Christ will return to this earth to judge and to make war (Rev. 19:11-21). He will defeat the forces of the Beast and the False Prophet and will establish His kingdom upon this earth for a thousand years. During this time, the Devil, who is also called Satan, will be chained and bound in the bottomless pit, “so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:1-3).

When the thousand years are finished, then Revelation 20:3 goes on to say that “he **must** be released for a little while.” The word “must” carries the idea of that which is “necessary, needful, right or proper,” especially in order to fulfill or complete a purpose or to reach a proper end. For instance, it is used in Matthew 16:21, where “Jesus began to show to His disciples that He **must** go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day” (see also Matt. 26:54 and Luke 24:46). It was God’s “determined purpose” that Christ die on the cross for the sins of the world and be raised again the third day (Acts 2:23).

In a similar manner, Satan “must” be released for a little

while, in order to fulfill the purpose of God. The question is why? What was God's reason for releasing him, especially after the glorious reign of Christ on earth? While we do not claim to know the mind and heart of God, we will look at three possible explanations.

SIN NATURE UNCHANGED

One possible reason for Satan's release might be to prove that the sinful nature of both Satan and man remains unchanged.

The following passage describes what will happen following Satan's release.

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.” (Rev. 20:7-9)

Though bound for a thousand years, when Satan is released, he will go right back to what he has been doing since the garden of Eden: deceiving man and opposing God and His saints. Satan's sinful nature will not change at all. While we might not be surprised at this, neither should we be surprised at the response of man to Satan's deception.

For a thousand years the inhabitants of the earth will experience what was never seen before: a perfect government; a time when God's will is done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10); a time of peace, rest, and goodness for all the earth. Yet, at the end of this period, Satan will be able to deceive the nations and gather together an innumerable army to surround and attack God's people and God's city. How? How is he able, so easily, to sway men's hearts and minds? The answer lies in the nature of man's heart. As Jeremiah described it,

*“The heart is **deceitful** above all things, and **desperately wicked**; who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9)*

From the time that sin first entered the world in the garden of Eden (Rom. 5:12), to this present day, and on through the Millennial Kingdom period, man's sinful nature remains unchanged. Because of this, Satan can still deceive and influence unsaved men to do his bidding, even after they have experienced the perfect justice and rule of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Earlier in the book of Revelation, we see that the outpouring of God's powerful, righteous judgments will have no effect upon man's sinful heart. We read in Revelation 9 of the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments. When the fifth trumpet sounds, a terrible torment will be inflicted upon men for five months. When the sixth trumpet sounds, a third of mankind will be killed. Yet, we read,

*“But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, **did not repent** of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they **did not repent** of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.” (Rev. 9:20-21)*

Following the trumpet judgments, the seven bowls of the wrath of God will be poured out upon the earth, which are far worse than the trumpet judgments. Yet those who survive these judgments, “**blasphemed the God of heaven** because of their pains and their sores, and **did not repent** of their deeds” (Rev. 16:11).

While God's judgments will have no effect upon man's sinful heart, neither will God's righteous rule during the Millennial Kingdom.

There is only one thing that can change the heart of a sinner: faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We are, by nature,

sinner (Eph. 2:1-3), and thus we fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We cannot attain to God's required standard of perfect righteousness, therefore God cannot accept us. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), but God, who is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4), "demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). By His glorious grace, God has provided us the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23). All who hear the Word of God and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior are saved, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9); they become "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26) and are, by the Holy Spirit, "baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:27). We are made the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21). What a tremendous change that occurs in our hearts because of Christ.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (II Cor. 5:17)

VANITY OF OPPOSING GOD

As we think back to God's reasons for loosing Satan, we see another purpose; a purpose that was prophesied in the 2nd Psalm, verses 1-2.

"Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed."

This prophecy was partially fulfilled when Satan led the rulers of Israel and the Roman leaders to crucify the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:25-28). Their purposes in seeking to destroy Him were in vain, for they were actually used of God to accomplish His purpose.

This prophecy will also be seen when the ten kings of the earth align with the Beast at the close of the tribulation period to

make war with the Lamb. It will all be in vain, for the Lamb will overcome them (Rev. 17:12-14).

This prophecy will be seen one last time when Satan is released for a little while. In vain they will surround God's city and God's saints, for fire will come down from God out of heaven and devour them.

RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS

Finally, in demonstrating that both Satan's and man's sinful natures remain unchanged, God also shows the perfect justice and righteousness of His final judgments upon them both. These judgments are described in Revelation, chapter 20.

Chapter 32

God's Final Judgments

Following the Millennial Kingdom, Satan, who will be bound during the thousand year reign of Christ, will be loosed and will lead a final rebellion against God and His people. As soon as Satan's army surrounds Jerusalem, God will rain down fire from heaven and devour them (Rev. 20:7-9).

SATAN'S FINAL JUDGMENT

Satan will then experience the final judgment that God has prepared for him.

“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Rev. 20:10)

The lake of fire does not cause annihilation. The beast and the false prophet, who were cast into the lake of fire a thousand years prior to this (Rev. 19:20), are still there. The lake of fire is a place of torment; a torment that is experienced “day and night

forever and ever.”

Jesus taught that “everlasting fire” (i.e. the lake of fire) was specifically prepared for “the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41), but, because of their rejection of God, unbelievers from every dispensation will be cast into the lake of fire as well.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God,” (Rev. 20:11-12)

Those who appear before this “great white throne” judgment will be resurrected to do so. Notice that John saw “the dead ... standing before God.” Verse 13 goes on to say “the sea gave up the dead who were in it,” and “Death and Hell delivered up the dead who were in them.”

Though many teach that there will be one great “general resurrection” at the last day, the Scriptures teach that there are two different types of resurrection. Jesus spoke of these two resurrections.

“... the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28-29).

The “resurrection of life” is described in Revelation 20:4-6. The believing dead, from Israel and the nations, whose hope is the earthly kingdom of Christ, will be raised to reign with Him for a thousand years. This is the “first” (former) resurrection.

The “resurrection of condemnation” is described here in Revelation 20:11. It is referred to in Revelation 20:5 as “the rest of the dead” who will not live again until the thousand years are finished.

There is another resurrection that was not the subject of prophecy, but was part of the mystery revealed to the apostle Paul. This resurrection, commonly called the rapture, is the “blessed hope” of the church, the body of Christ. At the close of this current age of grace, before the beginning of the tribulation period, the Lord Jesus will come “in the air” to catch his church up into glory (cf. I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:51-57; Titus 2:13; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:4).

Those who stand before the great white throne judgment, are the **unbelieving dead** of all ages. As the apostle Peter describes it, in II Peter chapter 2, this is the “day of judgment” that God has reserved to punish the “unjust” (vs. 9). They will receive “the wages of unrighteousness” (vs. 13), for God has reserved for them “the blackness of darkness forever” (vs. 17).

The Judge who will sit upon this great white throne is the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Father “has committed all judgment to the Son ... and has given Him authority to execute judgment also” (John 5:22,27; Acts 17:31).

As we look back again at Revelation 20, we see in verses 12-15, that the basis for this judgment is twofold: (1) “books” (plural) were opened and (2) “another book (singular) was opened which is the Book of Life.” The first thing that will be examined is “the books.” These unbelievers will be “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” Evidently, these books contain a record of each person’s works done here on earth.

If we stopped at this verse, we might be led to believe that people can be saved by their works. This is the mistaken notion that many people have today, that if they have done enough “good works,” or if their “good works” outweigh their “bad works,” they will be allowed into heaven. There will be many in that day of judgment who will claim to have done good works, some even in the name of the Lord, and claim to be worthy of heaven, but the Lord will answer, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:21-23).

The great white throne judgment will demonstrate that **no one** is worthy before God, based on their own works. For God’s

standard is perfect righteousness, and “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3:10), “for all have sinned and **fall short** of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). God gave the law, His measure of righteousness, not that men might be saved by doing the “deeds” of the law, but “that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world** may become guilty before God, therefore by the deeds of the law **no flesh** will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:19-20).

Only those who are “in Christ” can be counted righteous in God’s sight. God revealed His righteousness in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. This righteousness is made available to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. It is not by works that a person is justified, or made righteousness, for we are “justified freely (lit. ‘without a cause’ cf. John 15:25) by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:21-24). Jesus Christ, “who knew no sin,” was made sin for us, “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (II Cor. 5:21). There is no other way (John 14:6).

The end for all those who stand before the Great White Throne judgment will be the same; they will all be cast into the lake of fire. “Anyone not found written in the Book of Life” will be cast into the lake of fire. In Revelation 13:8, the Book of Life, is called, “the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Those whose names are written in the Book of Life are those who have looked, in faith, to the Lamb of God, who alone is able to save them.

Being cast into the lake of fire is called “the second death” (Rev. 20:14), or the second type of death. The first type of death is physical death, which is separation from the body. This second type of death is spiritual death, which is separation from God—a separation which will last for all eternity.

The twentieth chapter of the Revelation contains some very sobering passages of Scripture, but they remind us of the importance of our own relationship with the Lord. Have you trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, or are you trusting in your own works? It’s not too late to come to God in faith and be saved (Eph. 2:8-9). God does not desire “that any should perish

but that all should come to repentance” (II Pet. 3:9). God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2:4).

To those who know Jesus Christ as Savior, this passage should encourage us to take seriously our calling, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others.

“Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” (II Cor. 5:20)

The Eternal State

NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

We read in Genesis 6 how God destroyed “the world that then existed” (II Pet. 3:6) with a global flood. The reason for this cataclysmic judgment was because “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). But God, in His grace, chose to save Noah and his family so that He might continue to work out His plan for man’s redemption.

Following the flood of Noah’s day, God promised that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood of water (Gen. 9:11). However, the heavens and earth that existed after the flood, which are the same heavens and earth that exist today, “are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (II Pet. 3:7). The wickedness of man continued after the flood, and continues to grow worse day by day (II Tim. 3). There will come a time in the future when the current heavens and earth will be judged and destroyed by fire.

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the

earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.” (II Pet. 3:10)

We need to distinguish what is meant here by the expression “the heavens.” The Scriptures speak of at least three different heavens: (1) the atmospheric heaven which surrounds the earth and contains the air we breath (2) the stellar heaven which contains the sun, moon, stars, and planets and (3) the heaven which is the dwelling place of God. The “heavens” that will pass away refers to the atmospheric and stellar heavens, which are associated with the earth. The heavens and the earth will pass away because of their contamination by sin. The heaven which is the dwelling place of God, needs no purging or cleansing from sin.

Following this fiery judgment upon the existing heavens and earth, God will create “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (II Pet. 3:13). These new heavens and new earth are described in Revelation 21.

“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.” (Rev. 21:1)

John’s vision of these new heavens and earth is of a wonderful new world. A world that is not just “new” as to time, but “new” as to kind and quality. It will be a better world for two reasons: (1) the presence of God and (2) the absence of sin. God Himself will dwell with His people in this new world (Rev. 21:3). There will be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying, or pain, for all the former things will have passed away (Rev. 21:4). God declares, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:5). There will be no cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, or liars, for all of these will have already received their portion in the lake of fire, which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Isaiah 65:17 declares that the former heavens and earth “shall not be remembered or come to mind.” Isaiah 66:22 as-

sure us that the new heavens and earth “shall remain” before the Lord. The new heavens and earth will be the eternal state for God’s people.

At this point, we need to ask the question, “Who will live in these new heavens and earth?” Oftentimes, people try to assign the church of this age to these new heavens and new earth, but remember, that these new heavens do not refer to the dwelling place of God, but to the atmospheric and stellar heavens that are associated with the earth.

The church, the body of Christ, which consists of all people saved during this current dispensation of grace, finds its position and sphere of blessing in “the heavenly places” or, more literally, “the heavenlies.” The Lord Jesus Christ is currently seated in the heavenlies, as Head over all things to His church (Eph. 1:20-23). Our position as believers is “in Christ,” thus Paul declares that we have been seated together with Him in the heavenlies “in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Furthermore, we are told that our blessings, which are spiritual, are also in the sphere of “the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).

If we look at the context of the book of the Revelation, this book describes the fulfillment of God’s promises and prophecies concerning His earthly people, Israel (1:1,6 with Exo. 19:6). God’s plans and purposes for Israel have always been tied to this earth. Abraham, the father of this nation, was promised a specific land for an everlasting possession. The patriarch David was promised a house, a throne, and a kingdom to be established forever upon the earth.

When we come to the description of the new heavens and earth, once again the emphasis seems to be upon God’s relationship to His earthly people, Israel. Notice the words in Revelation 21 that are used to describe this new world. Verse 3 says that “the tabernacle of God” will be with men, and that God shall “dwell with” “His people.” Numerous times throughout this book, as well as throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, God refers to Israel as “His people.” He goes on in this verse to say, “they shall be His people” and “God Himself will be with them and be their God.” Compare this expression to the New

Covenant promises made to Israel in Jeremiah 31:33 and you will find they are very similar.

We see also that these new heavens and earth were the subject of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22), whereas God's plan and purpose for the church, the body of Christ, was a mystery kept secret from past ages (Col. 1:24-26).

NEW JERUSALEM

Another interesting thing about these new heavens and new earth is that there is a city associated with them,

“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Rev. 21:2)

A detailed description of this city is given in Revelation 21:9 through 22:5.

Not the Millennial Kingdom

Some believe that the New Jerusalem is a picture of the millennial kingdom, but there are numerous problems with this viewpoint. To begin with, Revelation 21:2 and 10 state that the New Jerusalem is a city, not a kingdom. It is a real city that descends from God out of heaven. It has gates, walls, and foundations that are specifically described as to size and number. There is no indication that these are merely symbolic of things in the kingdom. The language is literal.

The events of Revelation 19-22 are given in chronological order. The Lord Jesus Christ will return and set His feet upon the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4). Is this a mount upon the new earth or the existing earth? Surely it is the same Mount of Olives that exists today. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels who were there spoke to the apostles and said, “This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). He will

return to the same Mount of Olives. He will judge and make war and establish His kingdom upon the same earth that exists today. There is no indication that the first earth will pass away before the kingdom is established. This judgment upon the existing heavens and earth will not occur until after the millennial kingdom is complete and Satan's final rebellion has occurred and been overthrown (Rev. 20:7-9).

If we look at the description of the New Jerusalem, there are several key differences between it and the millennial kingdom. For instance, Revelation 21:22, states that there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will be its temple. But when we look at the prophecies of Zechariah 14 and Ezekiel 37-40, there will be a temple during the millennial kingdom. The Jews will come to Jerusalem, just as they did in the past, to keep the feasts and to worship the Lord.

In addition, Revelation 21:23-25 states that there will be no sun or moon in the New Jerusalem and that there will be no night there, for the Lamb will be its light. But as we look at the descriptions of the millennial kingdom throughout the Scriptures, there is every indication that days and nights proceed just as they have done in the past for the full thousand years.

Finally, Revelation 21:27 indicates that nothing that defiles or causes an abomination or a lie will enter into the New Jerusalem, for only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will be there. Yet, in Psalm 2:6-12, we read that the Lord Jesus will rule during the kingdom with a "rod of iron" (Rev. 19:15). Why, if there is nothing that defiles, causes abomination, or lies? By the time the New Jerusalem is inhabited, there will be no more sin (Rev. 21:8), for Satan, his angels, and all unbelievers from all ages will already have been judged and cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10-15).

Not the Church

Others believe that the New Jerusalem is the church, the body of Christ. The primary reason for this is because it is called

“the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9). Based on passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33, many believe that the church is the bride of Christ. If this passage is carefully examined, the church is described as the **body of Christ, not the bride**. The love of Christ for the church, His body, is the pattern for a man’s love for his wife, not because the church is the bride, but in keeping with the statement in verse 28, “so husbands out to love their own wives **as their own bodies**; he who loves his wife loves himself.”

Please notice that Revelation 21 never makes reference to the bride of Christ, but to “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” In fact, the expression, “bride of Christ,” is not found in the Scriptures at all. When we look at the word “bride” in the New Testament, the first time it is found is in John 3:29, where John the Baptist mentions it in reference to the bridegroom, which is the Lamb of God. It is interesting that the next mention of the word “bride” in the New Testament is found in the book of the Revelation (18:23). The apostle Paul does not use the word at all, nor does he use the word “Lamb.”

The wife of the Lord is the subject of Old Testament prophecy (cf. Isa. 54:1- 5, Hosea 2:14-23) and refers to the nation of Israel. In contrast, the church, the body of Christ, was not the subject of prophecy, but was a mystery, hidden in God until it was revealed to the apostle Paul (Eph. 3:1-5).

If you look at the language used to describe this city, it is associated, not with the church, but with the nation of Israel. It is called New Jerusalem, the name of the Jew’s capital city. It is stamped all over with the number twelve, which is the number associated, again, with Israel. It has twelve gates, on which are written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel (Rev. 21:12). It has twelve foundations, on which are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev. 21:14). When all of this is taken into consideration, where does the church, the body of Christ come in? Where is the name of the apostle Paul? It certainly isn’t written on, or connected with this city at all.

Not Heaven

When you mention the word “heaven,” many people think of a beautiful city with streets and mansions of gold. Where do they get this idea? Actually, this is a description of the New Jerusalem, not of heaven. How could the New Jerusalem be heaven? Notice the description in Revelation 21:10, “... the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.” First, it is called a “city.” Second, it could not be heaven, for it is seen “descending out of heaven.” How could heaven descend out of heaven?

Where does the city descend to? The Scriptures do not actually say, but most likely it descends to the earth. Some have a problem with this because of the huge size of this city, about 1500 miles in length, breadth, and height (Some believe it will be shaped like a cube, others believe it will be a pyramid). They question that a city of this size would logically fit on an earth that is only 8000 miles in diameter. But keep in mind that the earth this city will descend to is not the existing earth, but the new earth. Who says that the new earth will have the same dimensions as the old earth?

Abraham’s Promised City

We have looked at what the New Jerusalem is not, but what is it? The answer to this question may be found in Hebrews, chapter 11, where we read that Abraham,

“... waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10)

We read further in verses 13-16, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, never actually possessed that city, but they were assured of the promise of it. What type of city was it? Verse 16 says,

*“But now they desire a better, that is, a **heavenly** country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their*

God, for He has prepared a city for them.” (Heb. 11:16)

When we compare these passages with the city described in Revelation 21, it seems that the New Jerusalem is the city that Abraham looked for; a city with foundations; a city (and a country or homeland) that was of “heavenly” origin.

No More Curse

When God created the heavens and the earth, as recorded in Genesis 1-2, they were perfect. There was no sin, and there was no curse upon the earth. When sin entered the world, there in the garden of Eden, the earth was cursed and God barred man’s access to the tree of life. In the new heavens, new earth, and new Jerusalem, the beauty and perfection of God’s original creation will be seen once again (Rev. 22:1-5). The water of life will proceed from God’s throne (vs. 1). The tree of life will be there for the healing of the nations (vs. 2). There will be no more curse for the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in its midst (vs. 3). His servants will serve Him and they will see His face (vs. 4). What a wonderful place this will be, a place where God’s people, both Israel and the nations, will dwell and reign with Him forever and ever (vs. 5).

“These words are faithful and true.” (Rev. 22:6)

CONCLUSION

We have come to the end of our studies, though by no means to the end of our study of God's Word. We have seen the manifold wisdom of God unfolded through the pages of Scripture; His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11). We have only scratched the surface in these brief studies. As the apostle Paul was moved to exclaim,

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33)

It is our prayer that you have been helped through these studies to better understand God's Word, and that you have been encouraged to diligently study the Word on your own, always being careful to “rightly divide the Word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15).

As you study, keep in mind that Bible study is not an end in itself. Certainly it is important to know what the Bible says and to understand what it means, but this is not enough. We need to take it a step further. II Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

God's Word is profitable for us as believers, but not just for doctrine or teaching. There are three other areas that it benefits us in: reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (or righteous living). For these last three to be of help to us, we must **respond to the Word** in faith and obedience. When God reproves us and shows us things we should not do, we need to obey the reproof and stop doing them. When God corrects us

Conclusion

and shows us things we need to change in our lives, we need to obey the correction and make the necessary changes. When God instructs us in how to live righteously, we need to obey the instruction and do what God tells us to do. James puts it all together by saying,

*“But **be doers of the Word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)*

We deceive ourselves if we believe that simply hearing and understanding the Word of God is sufficient to please Him. The apostle Paul expressed this need to be “doers of the word” as he prayed for the Colossian believers.

“... that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Col. 1:9-10)

The purpose of being filled with the knowledge of God’s Word is so that we can know His will. Once we know His will, then we can **walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him**. As we walk in His will, we become fruitful in every good work He has called us to do (Eph. 2:10). Please notice that the final statement in Colossians 1:10 indicates that as we walk and work for the Lord, we continue **increasing in the knowledge of God**.

Ultimately, we study the Bible so that we may come to know the One who wrote it—the Lord. The prophet Jeremiah was led of the Lord to write these words,

*“Thus says the LORD: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he **understands and knows Me**, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I de-*

light, says the LORD.” (Jer. 9:23-24)

What a tremendous privilege we have of knowing and understanding the Lord. Not just knowing **about Him**, but actually **knowing Him**; having a close, personal, loving relationship with the God of glory. It is our prayer that you may come to know Him in this way.

*“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation **in the knowledge of Him.**” (Eph. 1:17).*

