



# TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*

C. Wayne Pratt





# **TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS**

## **ALSO BY C. WAYNE PRATT**

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*God Helps Those Who Cannot Help Themselves*

*Foundations of the Christian Life*

*My Confession of Faith*

*The Book of Revelation*

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**C. Wayne Pratt**

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# INTRODUCTION

Be diligent [study] to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

—2 Timothy 2:15 (NKJV)

THE APOSTLE PAUL GAVE YOUNG TIMOTHY some very important pastoral advice in this verse of Scripture: Study God's Word so that you can rightly divide the word of truth. The Greek word used for "divide" here is *orthotomeo* which means "to make a straight cut or dissect (expound) correctly." A closer examination of the Scriptures reveals distinct divisions known as "dispensations," and a proper understanding of these divisions will enable us to apply the truths found in them correctly. Once these divisions in God's Word are recognized and understood, much of the Bible's complexity disappears and many of its alleged contradictions vanish—the different manners, methods, and doctrines in the Bible which often trouble people are then reconciled, and the believer begins to see the big picture of God's eternal plan.

Since properly understanding the Bible's divisions is the key to being sound in doctrine and making sense of its differences, failure to do so can lead to dangerous heresies and spiritual chaos. When a person takes a precept or doctrine peculiar to one dispensation and forces it to apply doctrinally to another, he ends up with a heresy every time. He may quote several Bible verses to *prove* his doctrine, but it is still a lie once it is divorced from its corresponding dispensation.

## **Definitions**

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A dispensation is defined as "a stage in a progressive revelation, expressly adapted to the needs of a particular nation or period of time." It refers to a manner, method, system or particular arrangement of dealing with people God has chosen to dispense during a specific period of time.

The word "dispensation" appears four times in the New Testament. It is translated from the Greek word, *oikonomia*, from which we get the word "economy." It means "a stewardship [see Luke 16:1-4], the management or disposition of affairs entrusted to one; administration or economy." Let us examine each instance where the word is used:

For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a *dispensation* of the gospel is committed unto me.

—1 Corinthians 9:17 (KJV)

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<sup>9</sup>Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, <sup>10</sup>that in the *dispensation* of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

—Ephesians 1:9-10 (NKJV)

<sup>2</sup>If indeed you have heard of the *dispensation* of the grace of God which was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, <sup>4</sup>by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), <sup>5</sup>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: <sup>6</sup>that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.

—Ephesians 3:2-6 (NKJV)

Whereof I am made a minister, according to the *dispensation* of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God.

—Colossians 1:25 KJV

In each one of these passages, it is very apparent that it is always God who is dispensing something. Throughout history, God has *dispensed* His righteousness, truth, grace, etc. to man in different ways. The writer of Hebrews explains how God has spoken to man in many different ways throughout history, but in our present dispensation, which the Scriptures refer to as the “last days,” there is now a unique revelation:

<sup>1</sup>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.

—Hebrews 1:1-2

The Bible often refers to “ages” [the Greek word used is *aion* or *eon*] which are distinguishable periods of time in God’s dealing with His creation. Note the following:

1. Matthew 12:32 - “this age and the age to come”
2. Matthew 13:39, 40-49 - “the end of the age”
3. Romans 16:25; Colossians 1:26; Titus 1:2 - “ages past”
4. Galatians 1:4 - “present evil age”
5. 1 Timothy 1:17 - “King of the ages”

## Introduction

### **Characteristics Common to Each Dispensation**

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There are a number of characteristics that are found in each dispensation, as listed below:

1. There is a **new revelation from God**, a fresh introduction of new principles not before valid [and not previously known or understood]. God, not man, is always the initiator. It is important to note that, although God changes certain ways in which He deals with man in each new dispensation, *He never changes!* His character and attributes are eternal and unchangeable, so they may be manifested in any given dispensation:

I the LORD do not change. So, you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

— *Malachi 3:6*

2. In most instances, **God invites those concerned to enter into a covenant with Him**. The covenant establishes a relationship between God and man, usually consisting of promises, commandments, responsibilities, and warnings of the consequences for man's failure to keep his part of the agreement. The word "covenant" in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word *beriyth* which literally means "to cut, as a compact or agreement between two parties." It is first found in Genesis 6:18, where God established His covenant with Noah. The true nature of "cutting a covenant" is graphically demonstrated in God's covenant with Abraham, which shows how both "halves" are necessary for a valid covenant:

<sup>8</sup>But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?" <sup>9</sup>So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." <sup>10</sup>Abram brought all these to Him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half... <sup>17</sup>When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. <sup>18</sup>On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram.

— *Genesis 15:8-10, 17-18*

3. There is a **continuance of certain ordinances** already valid before that time.
4. There is an **annulment of other regulations** valid up until that time.
5. There follows a **period of testing** which usually ends in man's failure to obey.
6. There is typically a **judgment** after man's failure, marking the end of the dispensation.

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### *Examples in Scripture*

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Perhaps the best way to understand the principles mentioned above is to look at several examples. For instance, in the first part of Noah's life, he was forbidden to eat meat. But after the Flood, God brought a major change, allowing Noah and his descendants to eat meat. They were now living in a new dispensation:

Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I *now* give you everything.

— Genesis 9:3

Another example is seen in the life of Abraham. Prior to Abraham's time, God had always dealt with individual people (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, etc.). But through Abraham, God initiated something altogether different: He promised to create a separate, covenant nation (Israel) whom He would call "My people." They would have their own land, privileges, and requirements.

But the clearest example of all that demonstrates two distinctly different dispensations is the change that occurred between the Old Covenant (Israel under Law) and the New Covenant of grace. Notice in the following verses that it was God who changed the laws, the priesthood, the covenant, and even the tribe from which He brought forth His Great High Priest Jesus Christ:

<sup>11</sup>If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood [Dispensation of Law] (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? <sup>12</sup>For when there is a *change of the priesthood*, there must also be a *change of the law*. <sup>13</sup>He of whom these things are said belonged to a *different tribe*, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. <sup>14</sup>For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests... <sup>18</sup>The *former regulation is set aside* because it was weak and useless.

— Hebrews 7:11-18

<sup>7</sup>For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. <sup>8</sup>But God found fault with the people and said: 'The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>9</sup>It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers... <sup>11</sup>No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord'... <sup>13</sup>By calling this covenant "new," He has *made the first one obsolete*; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

— Hebrews 8:7-13

Furthermore, in the Dispensation of Grace (the Church Age), there was a fresh revelation of mysteries that had been hidden in previous dispensations:

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<sup>9</sup>And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup>His intent was that *now, through the church*, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup>according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

— Ephesians 3:9-11

<sup>25</sup>Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, <sup>26</sup>but *now* revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey Him.

— Romans 16:25-26

NOTE: These were things that people in previous dispensations did not need to understand—it would only have confused Jews living under the Dispensation of Law to understand that God would one day make Jew and Gentile one in Christ.

An understanding of the dispensations will explain why certain Scriptures seem to contradict one another when they in fact belong to two different dispensations:

1. In Matthew 5:17-18, we read: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” But in Galatians 2:16, we read: “Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.” On the surface, it seems that Paul is contradicting Jesus. Jesus stresses the importance of fulfilling the Law, while Paul says that no one can be justified by observing the Law. Who is right? Or, more importantly, are we asking the right question?

There is a simple explanation for the apparent contradiction here: Jesus was still living under the Law as a Jew, and it was paramount that He fulfill every detail of the Law in order to be a sinless sacrifice at Calvary; Paul was writing as a Christian on the other side of the Cross and Pentecost—he was living in a new dispensation, the Dispensation of Grace!

2. In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus told His disciples: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” But He later told them in Matthew 28:19: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” Once again, there is an apparent contradiction—were they to go to Jews only, or were they to go to Gentiles also?

In Matthew 10, Jesus was speaking as a Jew to His Jewish disciples, all of whom were still living under the Dispensation of Law. In Matthew 28, speaking after His resurrection and just prior to His ascension, Jesus knew they were on the brink of a new dispensation, the Church Age, where God would bring salvation to the nations, not only Israel; Jew and

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Gentile alike would both be saved and joined into one Body. Without an understanding of the two different dispensations, the two passages cannot possibly be reconciled.

### *Outline of the Ten Dispensations*

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In this study, we will examine ten distinct dispensations, as listed below:

1. Dispensation of Angels (p. 7)
2. Dispensation of Innocence (p. 19)
3. Dispensation of Conscience (p. 27)
4. Dispensation of Civil Government (p. 35)
5. Dispensation of Israel under Promise (p. 43)
6. Dispensation of Israel under Law (p. 53)
7. Dispensation of Grace: The Church Age (p. 67)
8. Dispensation of the Great Tribulation (p. 87)
9. Dispensation of the Millennium (p. 109)
10. Dispensation of the Eternal Kingdom (p. 121)

# DISPENSATION OF ANGELS

<sup>4</sup>Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.

<sup>5</sup>Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? <sup>6</sup>On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone – <sup>7</sup>while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

– Job 38:4-7

**B**EFORE ANYTHING ELSE EXISTED, the eternal God inhabited eternity. He had no beginning; He has no end. He knows the end from the beginning. At some point, God began creating. As far as we can tell from the scriptural record, the first beings God created were the angels. There is no direct account of their creation in the Old Testament like that given in Genesis for the physical creation and man. But according to the Scripture cited above, the angels were already present when God was creating the earth.

The angels are marvelous beings and are extremely important in God's kingdom and plan. They are mentioned in 34 of the 66 books of the Bible (17 in the Old Testament, 17 in the New Testament!). Hagar, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Israel, Balaam, Gideon, Manoah and his wife, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah (both the OT prophet and John the Baptist's father), Mary and Joseph, the shepherds in Bethlehem, Peter, Philip, Cornelius, Paul, and John all had encounters with angels, to mention a few! The Scriptures reveal that angels are extremely numerous:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly.

– Hebrews 12:22

I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand.

– Revelation 5:11

## *Angels Are Created Beings*

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The Bible makes it very clear that the angels are created beings. This is important to remember for the reason that, although they possess amazing qualities, angels are *not* divine. For instance, they are not eternal, all-knowing (omniscient), nor can they be in more than one place at the same time (omnipresent) as God can. In Colossians, Paul states that there is an "invisible" world that God created, including the angels:

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For by Him all things were *created*: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities [different types of angelic beings]; all things were created by Him and for Him.

– *Colossians 1:16*

Ezekiel 28:13 refers to the “anointed cherub” [Lucifer] and it says, “on the day you were *created*,” and Hebrews 1:7 says that God “*makes* His angels spirits.”

The Scriptures also show that angels are moral beings with a free will, and some of them chose to sin against God [see 2 Peter 2:4, Jude 6]. In that sense, they are similar to man, but the similarity stops there. Only man was created in the very image of God, thus setting him above the angels in God’s eternal order. Note the following:

<sup>5</sup>It is not to angels that He has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. <sup>6</sup>But there is a place where someone has testified: “What is man that You are mindful of him, the son of man that You care for him? <sup>7</sup>You made him a little [NIV margin: “for a little while”] lower than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honor <sup>8</sup>and put everything under his feet.” In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.

– *Hebrews 2:5-8*

<sup>14</sup>Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—<sup>15</sup>and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. <sup>16</sup>For surely it is not angels He helps, but Abraham’s descendants.

– *Hebrews 2:14-16*

Paul even states in 1 Corinthians 6:3 that the Church will one day judge the angels!

### ***Characteristics of Angels***

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Angels possess a number of characteristics that make them distinctly different from human beings. Here is a list of a few:

1. **Angels are spirit beings.** Jesus said that spirits do not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39), thus angels are very different from humans:

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

– *Hebrews 1:14*

2. **Angels are immortal.** They are not subject to death as man is. For instance, Gabriel and Michael are mentioned by name in various books of the Bible which span hundreds and even thousands of years. Gabriel interpreted Daniel’s vision (Daniel 8:16; 9:21) and also spoke to

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Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist and Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:19, 26). Michael is mentioned in Daniel (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1) and centuries later in Revelation 12:7!

<sup>34</sup>Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. <sup>35</sup>But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, <sup>36</sup>and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels.”

— Luke 20:34-36

3. **Angels are normally invisible but can appear in human form.** When the two angels visited Lot in Sodom, he bowed down and called them “my lords,” prepared a meal for them, and they ate (Genesis 19:1-8)! Lot and the men of Sodom all referred to them as “the men.” When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, it was only after some time that he finally realized that it was the angel of the Lord (Judges 6:20-22). Daniel called Gabriel “the man I had seen” (Daniel 9:21) and described Michael as “one who looked like a man” (Daniel 10:13-18). When Mary and the others saw the angel, who had rolled the stone away from Christ’s tomb, he appeared as a “young man” (Mark 16:5). The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to be hospitable to strangers, for they can disguise themselves:

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

— Hebrews 13:2

4. **Angels are bright and glorious.** In the Bible, angels are often described as shining creatures of light:

<sup>1</sup>After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. <sup>2</sup>With a mighty voice he shouted: “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!”

— Revelation 18:1-2

<sup>2</sup>There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup>His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup>The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

— Matthew 28:2-4

5. **Angels have wings and fly.** There are numerous references in the Scriptures to the wings and flight of angels:

<sup>5</sup>The sound of the wings of the cherubim [a type of angelic being: see *Different Levels of Angelic Government or Hierarchy* on p. 11] could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks... <sup>22</sup>Then the cherubim, with

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the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

—Ezekiel 10:5; 11:22

While I was still in prayer, *Gabriel*, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in *swift flight* about the time of the evening sacrifice.

—Daniel 9:21

<sup>2</sup>Above Him were seraphs [another type of angelic being; see *Different Levels of Angelic Government or Hierarchy* on p. 11], each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying... <sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.

—Isaiah 6:2, 6

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.

—Revelation 14:6

6. **Angels are mighty in power.** The Scriptures refer to angels as God's "mighty ones" (Psalm 103:20). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that the Lord Jesus would return from heaven "in blazing fire with His powerful angels" (2 Thessalonians 1:7). There are numerous accounts in the Bible of angels performing amazing, superhuman feats. When Jerusalem was under siege by the Assyrians during the reign of King Hezekiah, an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians in one single night! (2 Kings 19:35). At the start of the Millennial Kingdom, one angel is able to bind Satan and lock him up in prison for a thousand years (Revelation 20:1-3).
7. **Angels are wise and intelligent.** On one occasion, the woman of Tekoa was so amazed at the insight and discernment of King David that she said he was like an angel of God:

<sup>17</sup>"And now your servant says, 'May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil...' <sup>20</sup>Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land."

—2 Samuel 14:17, 20

8. **Angels are holy.** As we will study a bit further, some of the angels rebelled against God and became evil. But the good angels, or as Paul calls them, the "elect angels" (1 Timothy 5:21) are holy (Acts 10:22; Revelation 14:10). Jesus said that when He comes again in glory the holy angels will be with Him:

If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the *holy angels*.

—Luke 9:26

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9. **Angels sing, rejoice and worship in God's presence.** Jesus said the angels always see the face of His Father in heaven (Matthew 18:10). Hebrews 12:22 mentions how thousands upon thousands of angels are gathered in "joyful assembly." There are numerous accounts in the Bible describing the angels' worship and singing:

<sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, *praising God* and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." <sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

— Luke 2:10-15

<sup>11</sup>Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. <sup>12</sup>In a *loud voice they sang*: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

— Revelation 5:11-12

In the same way, I tell you, there is *rejoicing* in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

— Luke 15:10

### Different Levels of Angelic Government or Hierarchy

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In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul refers to different groups or classes of angelic beings in the heavenly realms [see Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; 6:12]. The Bible clearly identifies several distinct types or groups of angels:

1. **Archangels** – One of the groups mentioned in these passages just listed from Ephesians are "principalities" (KJV) or "rulers" (NIV). The Greek word used is *arche* which means "chief in rank." A related Greek word found twice in the New Testament is *archaggelos* or "archangel":

For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the *archangel* and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

— 1 Thessalonians 4:16

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But even the archangel *Michael*, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!”

– Jude 9

Michael and Gabriel are the only two angels identified by name in the Scriptures. Daniel refers to Michael as “one of the chief princes” (Daniel 10:13) and “the great prince” (Daniel 12:1). John described an angelic war in heaven with Michael leading the holy angels into battle against Satan and his fallen angels (Revelation 12:7). Gabriel appeared to Daniel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21); Daniel had the privilege of meeting both Michael and Gabriel! Gabriel also visited Zechariah (Luke 1:19) and Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26).

**2. Cherubim** – First seen guarding the way to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24), these beings are the guardian protectors of God’s glory. God told Lucifer that He had been “anointed as a guardian cherub” (Ezekiel 28:14). Likenesses of cherubim hammered out of gold overshadowed the Mercy Seat of the ark in the Tabernacle, guarding God’s sacred Law inside. Ezekiel gives a detailed description of the wings, wheels, eyes and other aspects of these unusual creatures which dwell in the fire and glory of God:

<sup>1</sup>I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the *heads* of the cherubim. <sup>2</sup>The LORD said to the man clothed in linen, “Go in among the *wheels* beneath the cherubim. Fill your hands with burning coals from among the cherubim and scatter them over the city.” And as I watched, he went in. <sup>3</sup>Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. <sup>4</sup>Then the *glory of the LORD* rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD. <sup>5</sup>*The sound of the wings* of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks. <sup>6</sup>When the LORD commanded the man in linen, “Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim,” the man went in and stood beside a wheel. <sup>7</sup>Then one of the cherubim reached out his hand to the *fire* that was among them. He took up some of it and put it into the hands of the man in linen, who took it and went out. <sup>8</sup>(Under the wings of the cherubim could be seen what looked like the *hands* of a man.) <sup>9</sup>I looked, and I saw beside the cherubim four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim; the wheels sparkled like chrysolite. <sup>10</sup>As for their appearance, the four of them looked alike; each was like a wheel intersecting a wheel. <sup>11</sup>As they moved, they would go in any one of the four directions the cherubim faced; the wheels did not turn about as the cherubim went. The cherubim went in whatever direction the head faced, without turning as they went. <sup>12</sup>Their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely *full of eyes*, as were their four wheels. <sup>13</sup>I heard the wheels being called “the whirling wheels.” <sup>14</sup>Each of the cherubim had *four faces*: One face was that of a

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cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle... <sup>16</sup>When the cherubim moved, the wheels beside them moved; and when the cherubim spread their wings to rise from the ground, the wheels did not leave their side. <sup>17</sup>When the cherubim stood still, they also stood still; and when the cherubim rose, they rose with them, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them. <sup>18</sup>Then the glory of the LORD departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. <sup>19</sup>While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground, and as they went, the wheels went with them. They stopped at the entrance to the east gate of the LORD'S house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. <sup>20</sup>These were the living creatures I had seen beneath the God of Israel... and I realized that they were cherubim.

– Ezekiel 10:1-20

3. **Seraphs** – It is not clear whether or not these beings represent a distinct and separate group; they may actually be identical with the previous group, the cherubim (cherubim and seraphs share a number of significant similarities – wings, fire, etc.). In a vision, the prophet Isaiah saw winged angelic beings which he called “seraphs.” The Hebrew word *saraph* literally means “burning one,” perhaps because of their close association with coals, fire and smoke [remember Ezekiel’s cherubim had fire and burning coals]:

<sup>1</sup>In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Above Him were seraphs, each with *six wings*: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. <sup>3</sup>And they were calling to one another: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” <sup>4</sup>At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke... <sup>5</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>6</sup>With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

– Isaiah 6:1-7

## Ministries of Angels

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It is interesting to see how the Hebrew and Greek words translated “angel” in the Bible actually reveal the true function of angels – they are God’s *messengers*. Throughout the Old Testament, it is the Hebrew word *malak* which means “to dispatch as a deputy or messenger”; in the New Testament, the Greek word used is *aggelos* meaning “to bring tidings; a messenger.” Regardless of the mission God dispatches His angels on, they are always faithful and obedient servants doing His will:

<sup>20</sup>Praise the LORD, you His angels, you mighty ones who *do His bidding*, who *obey His word*. <sup>21</sup>Praise the LORD, all His heavenly hosts, you His servants who *do His will*.

– Psalm 103:20-21

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Angels faithfully deliver the message God gives them [see Daniel 8:15-16; Luke 1:19-27]. They announce good news and bring answers to prayer [see Daniel 9:21-23; 10:2, 11-14; Luke 1:11-13].

God often sends angels to protect, guard or deliver His people from harm and danger. An angel protected Daniel in the lion's den (Daniel 6:22) and on two different occasions, angels released the apostles from prison in the Early Church [see Acts 5:19; 12:7-10]. An angel traveled with Israel's army, fighting against their enemies and guarding them along the way:

<sup>19</sup>Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, <sup>20</sup>coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

— Exodus 14:19-20

<sup>20</sup>See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared... <sup>23</sup>My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out.

— Exodus 23:20, 23

Guardian angels are constantly around God's people protecting them from harm:

<sup>11</sup>For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; <sup>12</sup>they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

— Psalm 91:11-12

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.

— Daniel 12:1

Another important ministry performed by the angels is the execution of God's judgment. Note how God used (or will use) angels in each of the following judgments:

1. Plagues of Egypt (Psalm 78:43, 49; Exodus 12:13, 23)
2. Sodom (Genesis 19)
3. David's numbering of Israel (1 Chronicles 21:11-12)
4. Herod killed (Acts 12:21-23)

## **Dispensation of Angels**

5. Great Tribulation (Revelation 8-11)
6. Satan bound for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-3)
7. White Throne Judgment (Matthew 13:41-42, 49-50)

Finally (and most importantly for us!), God has charged the angels with the responsibility of serving the heirs of salvation, i.e., Christian believers!

Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

— Hebrews 1:14

From beginning to end, the angels are keenly interested in our salvation. They rejoice whenever a sinner repents and long to look into those things concerning the Gospel:

In the same way, I tell you, there is *rejoicing in the presence of the angels* of God over one sinner who repents.

— Luke 15:10

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

— 1 Peter 1:12

## ***Rebellion, Fall and Judgment of the Evil Angels***

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One of the great dilemmas in the Bible is a question that goes something like this: “If God is good and everything He made was good (Genesis 1:31), why is there evil in the world? If God is not the creator of sin or wickedness, where did the devil come from?” The answer to these questions revolves around something discussed earlier—angels (like man) were given a free will, which granted them the capability of sinning. In other words, God’s creation was perfect, but there was one inherent “flaw”—men and angels were free moral agents who could choose whether or not to obey and honor their Creator.

In John’s Gospel and first epistle, we are told that the devil has been sinning since the beginning of time:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

— John 8:44

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He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the *devil has been sinning from the beginning*. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

— 1 John 3:8

Two passages from the Old Testament shed more light on the origin or "beginning" of Satan. They speak about a beautiful angel named Lucifer who was anointed as a guardian cherub. He was created blameless, but was corrupted through his own pride and self-will. Because of his sin and rebellion against God, he was cast down from the high place he once occupied in God's kingdom:

<sup>12</sup>How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star ["Lucifer" – KJV], son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!  
<sup>13</sup>You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. <sup>14</sup>I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." <sup>15</sup>But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

— Isaiah 14:12-15

<sup>12</sup>Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. <sup>13</sup>You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. <sup>14</sup>You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. <sup>15</sup>You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. <sup>16</sup>Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. <sup>17</sup>Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.' "

— Ezekiel 28:11-17

In the New Testament, Paul seems to confirm the fact that Satan is an angelic being, saying that he masquerades as "an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). The Bible also reveals that a number of other angels joined Lucifer in his revolt against God. Peter and Jude both write about them:

God did not spare angels when they *sinned*, but sent them to hell [Greek *Tartaros*], putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.

— 2 Peter 2:4

## Dispensation of Angels

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these He has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day.

—*Jude 6*

In Matthew 25:41, Jesus said that hell was “prepared for the *devil and his angels*.” In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John describes a war in heaven that is yet to take place between Michael and his angels and the dragon, Satan, with his fallen angels:

<sup>7</sup>And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the *dragon and his angels* fought back. <sup>8</sup>But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup>The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

—*Revelation 12:7-9*

In Ephesians 6:11-12, Paul confirms that these evil angels are *still* present in the heavenly realms; he explains how we are wrestling with them in hand-to-hand combat:

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

—*Ephesians 6:11-12*

The following question sometimes arises: “If, according to 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, all the angels that sinned are locked up in prison, who are these evil rulers and powers that Paul says are still in heavenly places?” There are several possible answers:

1. Perhaps the “chains” and “dungeons” mentioned only signify that the fallen angels have been removed from the presence of God and are being kept under some kind of restraining influence until their final judgment (which, according to the two passages, has not yet taken place). The only problem with this explanation is the fact that Peter uses the Greek word *Tartaros*, defined as the “deepest abyss of Hades, the place of eternal torment.”
2. Paul says we only “know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9)—that is certainly true about the invisible realms of heaven occupied by unseen rulers, principalities, etc. The evil powers and forces mentioned in Ephesians may be a totally different group of rebellious beings—we just don’t know for sure! In Romans 8:38, Paul lists angels, principalities, and powers separately, indicating that they may possibly be three distinct entities.

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

Finally, any discussion about Satan and fallen angels invariably leads to the subject of demons. What are demons? Where did they come from? Some believe that demons are fallen angels. Demons are called “evil spirits” in the New Testament, but there is no indication that they are angelic beings. Others believe they are the spirits of departed human beings, or perhaps spirits from a pre-Adamic race. All of this makes for interesting speculation and conversation, but the Bible simply doesn’t say. The emphasis in the New Testament is not on the origin or exact nature of demons—the emphasis is on casting them out!

### ***Concluding Thoughts on Angels***

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The Angelic Dispensation is the only one that does not deal directly with man. However, it is vitally important for us to understand the role of angels in God’s order and plan. As with most of the dispensations that follow, God tested those involved and some of them failed the test, i.e. the fallen angels.

As we have seen, angels are an amazing, marvelous part of God’s creation. However, the Bible gives us several warnings concerning angels:

1. We are not to worship or pray to angels [Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 1 Timothy 2:5].
2. We should never (as did Joseph Smith of the Mormons with the angel “Moroni”) receive a doctrine or revelation from an angel that is contrary to the Word of God [see Galatians 1:8; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Kings 13:18].

# DISPENSATION OF INNOCENCE

## (GENESIS 1-2)

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” <sup>27</sup>So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

—Genesis 1:26-28

**G**OD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE AND LIKENESS in the beginning. Adam was without sin and without any knowledge of good or evil—he was created in a state of innocence.

In Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we are given the full account of man’s creation. God blessed Adam and Eve, and gave them specific commands to obey, and responsibilities to carry out. It was a sort of unwritten contract between God and our first parents.

### ***God’s Covenant with Adam and Eve in Eden***

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Though not specifically called a “covenant,” this contract is often referred to as the *Edenic Covenant*. In this covenant, God supplied Adam with many blessings: life; a perfect body; a perfect environment; a world without pain, hunger, sickness or death; and also, a wife. All Adam (and Eve) had to do was meet *six conditions* which God had laid down for them in order to keep the covenant (and all of its blessings) in effect:

1. Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28)
2. Subdue the earth for their use (Genesis 1:28)
3. Rule over the animal creation (Genesis 1:28)
4. Have only a vegetable diet (Genesis 1:29)
5. Work and take care of the garden they were put in (Genesis 2:15)
6. Abstain from eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17)

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

In Genesis 2:15-17, God warned Adam and Eve of the consequences if they broke the covenant [NOTE: This is the first time the word “command” is used in Scripture]; if they disobeyed God’s command, they would surely die:

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup>but you must not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

The covenant remained in force until Adam broke it by eating the forbidden fruit. God kept His part but man did not keep his. This is a trend that will sadly continue through every dispensation.

### ***Man's State of Innocence***

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Up until the time of Adam’s disobedience, he was created as an innocent creature—he had no natural inclination towards evil or righteousness. Adam and Eve obviously had no knowledge whatsoever of good and evil; it was the *knowledge of evil* that condemned them to death. Once a person knows the difference between good and evil or right and wrong, he or she is accountable for his or her actions. Knowledge brings responsibility.

Paul wrote in several places in the New Testament about the importance of innocence concerning evil:

I want you to be wise about what is good, and *innocent* about what is evil.

—Romans 16:19

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking, be adults.

—1 Corinthians 14:20

According to Genesis 2:25, Adam and Eve “were both naked, and they felt no shame.” God used their nakedness as the test to see whether or not they were obedient to His command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were unaware of their nakedness until they ate of the forbidden tree and their eyes were opened; it was at that point that they “felt shame” (Genesis 3:6-7).

### ***Man's Failure and the Consequences***

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Like the angels, man was created with a free will to choose. But God doesn’t want robots to serve Him—He wants people to love, serve and obey Him of their own volition. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and do their own will: this is the very essence of what God calls *sin*. The prophet Isaiah sums it up this way:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.

—Isaiah 53:6a

## Dispensation of Innocence

God tested Adam and Eve to see if they would keep the Edenic Covenant, but they failed the test. Satan planted seeds of doubt in their hearts, causing Adam and Eve to question whether or not God really had their best intentions in mind. The root of the temptation, as seen in the following passage, was that by eating the fruit, they could become like God, knowing good and evil:

<sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup>but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” <sup>4</sup>“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup>“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” <sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

— Genesis 3:1-6

There were *three things* about the fruit that Eve found attractive:

1. It was good for food;
2. It was pleasing to the eye;
3. It was desirable for gaining wisdom and intelligence.

As soon as a transgression is actually over, the realization of the wrongfulness of the act rushes on the mind. This is what happened to Adam and Eve. After they ate the fruit, they knew at least *three things* they had not known before:

1. They knew they had eaten of the forbidden tree and would die
2. They knew they had broken God’s covenant
3. They knew they were naked, and this new knowledge caused them to feel fear, guilt, and shame; they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves and hide from God’s presence, because they had a guilty conscience and were afraid:

<sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they *realized they were naked*; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. <sup>8</sup>Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and *they hid from the LORD God* among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup>He answered, “I heard You in the garden, and I was *afraid* because I was naked; so I hid.”

— Genesis 3:7-10

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

As a result of his disobedience, Adam and all of his descendants became sinners. According to Genesis 5:1-3, Adam had been created “in the likeness of God,” but he had sons “in his own likeness, in his own image.” In other words, Adam’s children were all born sinners like him. And Adam’s sin brought condemnation, judgment and death. Paul explains the awesome consequences of Adam’s fall in Romans 5:

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, just as *sin entered the world through one man*, and death through sin, and in this way *death came to all men*, because all sinned —<sup>13</sup>for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. <sup>15</sup>But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! <sup>16</sup>Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The *judgment followed* one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. <sup>17</sup>For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one Man, Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. <sup>19</sup>For just as *through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners*, so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous.

— Romans 5:12-19

Adam’s sin brought death—he died *spiritually* immediately, meaning he was cut off or alienated from the life and presence of God [see Ephesians 2:1-5; 4:17-18; Isaiah 59:1-2]; and he would eventually die *physically* as well, returning to the dust of the ground from where he had been taken [see Genesis 3:19].

Each time we read the story of Adam and Eve’s fall, it should be a powerful reminder to us of the destructive potency of sin: *One single act of disobedience ruined the whole human race!* Adam and Eve didn’t commit murder or adultery; they didn’t steal or worship an idol—they just disobeyed one simple command of God about a certain fruit they couldn’t eat! Suddenly they found themselves cut off from God, guilty and afraid, and trying by their own efforts to cover their nakedness and undo their wrong. But it was too late—the damage was done. Death had come to all men. All of their descendants would now be just like them: disobedient sinners, separated from God. The *Age of Innocence* was over!

## Dispensation of Innocence

### ***God's Covenant after the Fall***

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Though the Edenic Covenant was now broken, God did not cast aside His new creation. By His foreknowledge and grace, He made another covenant with Adam, and unlike the first one, this covenant was unconditional and is still in effect today. It is often called the *Adamic Covenant*. This covenant testifies to all mankind of the far-reaching consequences of their father Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden long ago. It is composed of several curses and a promise. There were actually three parties involved in the Fall (the serpent, the woman, and Adam), and this covenant pronounced specific curses for each party in the order in which they had transgressed:

<sup>14</sup>So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel." <sup>16</sup>To the woman He said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." <sup>17</sup>To Adam He said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup>It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

— Genesis 3:14-19

1. **The serpent** – He was cursed above all livestock; he would crawl upon the ground and eat dust. These curses remain in effect through the Millennium [see Isaiah 65:25]. Satan's ultimate doom is pronounced: Christ, the Seed of the woman, would one day crush his head!
2. **The woman** – Childbearing would now be painful toil and sorrow [in the Hebrew it is literally "worryomeness"] for women, perhaps because each time they give birth they are bringing another sinner into the world. The woman's desire would now be for her husband, and he would rule over her. Paul seems to refer indirectly to this when he writes to Timothy of the woman's role in the Fall:

<sup>11</sup>A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup>But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

— 1 Timothy 2:11-15

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NOTE: Paul was not declaring Adam innocent, for Romans 5:14 refers to "Adam's transgression."

3. **Adam** - God points to the beginning of Adam's downfall: "Because you listened to your wife." Adam was head of his wife; God made him first, and He expected him to lead his household. Adam already knew the will of God; he was without excuse following his wife in her folly. Paul refers to God's order of creation when he explains the different roles of man and woman in the home:

*³Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁵For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; ⁶neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.*

— 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7-9

The ground would now be cursed and man's labor would be painful and frustrating; he would eat by the sweat of his brow, battling with weeds and thorns choking his crops [see Romans 8:19-22]. Ultimately, after a life of pain and toil, he must pay for his sin and suffer physical death, returning to the very ground he had worked.

NOTE: Man has spent the last 6,000 years trying to undo all of these curses (with drugs, chemicals, technology, etc.) with only limited success; but the curse he is most desperately trying to stop is death. Ever since Adam's fall, man has sought ways to overcome death or at least delay it for even a short period. The devil knows this well, as seen in his conversation with God in Job 2:4: "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life." But eventually death wins out. The death rate is still 100%! God cannot be beaten—what He has cursed is cursed. These curses will not be completely lifted until the renovation of the earth by fire after the Millennium.

### ***God's Grace Revealed under the Adamic Covenant***

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In spite of the curses of pain and death pronounced by God after Adam's fall, there are some astounding evidences of God's mercy and grace as well:

1. God sought for Adam [Genesis 3:9; see Luke 19:10]
2. God promised a future deliverance from the serpent's power through the Christ, "the seed of the woman" [Genesis 3:15]. God told the serpent that even though he would strike the heel of the woman's seed, He (Christ) would crush the serpent's head. This was the first prophecy of Messianic hope given to man!
3. God provided a covering of animal hide for Adam's sin and nakedness:

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

— Genesis 3:21

## **Dispensation of Innocence**

It is generally presumed that this required the death of animals, for the word translated “skin” in the Hebrew is “*or*” which means “hide or leather.” This was the first instance of physical death in God’s creation. Perhaps Adam witnessed an innocent lamb or goat shedding its blood for his sin! What a powerful object lesson foreshadowing the use of animal sacrifices to provide a covering (atonement) for sin under the Dispensation of Law and the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb of God that would usher in the Dispensation of Grace. Adam may very well have taught this to his sons, for Abel knew he needed to offer animal sacrifices to God [see Genesis 4:3-4].

### ***God’s Final Judgment for Adam and Eve’s Disobedience***

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Adam and Eve had lost their innocence – they were now conscious of their own sinfulness. Genesis 3:22-24 gives the heartbreak account of how God banished the guilty pair from His presence, driving them out of the Garden of Eden:

<sup>22</sup>And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever.” <sup>23</sup>So the LORD God *banished him* from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. <sup>24</sup>After He *drove the man out*, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

God *drove* them out: this is taken from the Hebrew word *garash* which is often translated “divorce” or “expatriate” in the Old Testament. Because of his sin, man now found himself “divorced” from the presence of his Creator, and exiled from his homeland!

### ***Conclusion***

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After looking at God’s dealing with Adam and Eve, we can already see how dispensations differ from each other. There is very little the Dispensation of Innocence has in common with any other dispensation. Nowhere in any of the other dispensations of Law, Grace, etc., does God command anyone to subdue the earth, keep a garden, eat a vegetarian diet, or abstain from eating a particular kind of tree. These doctrines were valid *only* as long as the covenant and its dispensation were in force. When Adam broke the covenant, the Dispensation of Innocence ended and was superseded by another.



# DISPENSATION OF CONSCIENCE

## (GENESIS 3-8)

<sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup>but you must not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” <sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

<sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. <sup>8</sup>Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup>He answered, “I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so, I hid.”

—Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6-10

**I**MMEDIATELY AFTER ADAM AND EVE ATE from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they became conscious of their nakedness and sin. No one had to tell them they were naked; somehow, they already knew. In fact, God asked Adam, “Who told you that you were naked?” (Genesis 3:11)

Adam and Eve had lost their innocence; they now had a conscience to tell them what was right and what was wrong. And they knew they had done wrong. They felt ashamed, guilty and afraid. Instinctively, they tried to hide and cover up their nakedness.

### ***Definitions***

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This dispensation derives its name from the fact that during this period, man had nothing to guide him except his conscience. *Webster's Dictionary* (1828) defines “conscience” as:

Internal or self-knowledge, or judgment of right and wrong; or the faculty, power or principle within us, which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our own actions and affections, and instantly approves or condemns them.

After Adam’s fall, man had a knowledge of right and wrong. He now had to learn to walk by the inner voice which instructed him in what was and was not pleasing to God. Needless to say, with a few exceptions, man utterly failed in following his conscience. For the most part, he hardened it and became extremely wicked. This wickedness brought God’s judgment in a

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worldwide flood. There is no record in the Scripture of God giving any specific commands to man during this dispensation. There were no “thou shalts” or “thou shalt nots”; God simply left man to be guided by his own heart.

### ***Man's Accountability during the Conscience Period***

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Some may ask, “How could God bring judgment (through the Flood) for the wickedness of the people living in this period, when He had not given them specific laws or commandments?” The answer is twofold:

1. **God revealed many things to mankind through His creation.** To this very day, the vast universe the Lord made is continually declaring and displaying the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth. However, even though the people had a knowledge of God, they often chose to suppress that knowledge and live in wickedness. Note the following passages:

<sup>1</sup>The heavens *declare* the glory of God; the skies *proclaim* the work of his hands. <sup>2</sup>Day after day they pour forth *speech*; night after night they *display* knowledge. <sup>3</sup>There is no speech or language where their *voice* is not heard. <sup>4</sup>Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

— *Psalm 19:1-4*

[Note: In Romans 10:18, Paul refers to this passage and asks, “Did they not hear? Of course they did: ‘Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.’”]

<sup>18</sup>The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who *suppress the truth* by their wickedness, <sup>19</sup>since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup>For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are *without excuse*. <sup>21</sup>For although *they knew God*, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

— *Romans 1:18-21*

On the basis of creation alone, God states that they were “without excuse!” Because man was made in the image of God, Ecclesiastes 3:11 states that God “set eternity in the hearts of men.” Everyone knows there is an eternal Creator! According to Paul, there is no such thing as an atheist—all men know there is a God, but many choose to *suppress* or hold down that knowledge. You cannot suppress something that doesn’t exist!

## Dispensation of Conscience

2. **Man has God's law written on his heart – this is called the conscience.** When Adam lost his innocence in the Garden, he gained knowledge of good and evil — he was conscious of right and wrong. In other words, he had a conscience. Paul says we all have one:

<sup>14</sup>(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, <sup>15</sup>since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their *consciences* also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) <sup>16</sup>This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

— Romans 2:14-16

Though the law of the conscience is vague compared to a written or verbal law, it can still convict a person of guilt when he contemplates evil. For instance, when Cain slew his brother Abel, no written law against murder had yet been given. But he did break the law God had written in his heart and was therefore guilty. Like his father Adam, Cain had a knowledge of good and evil, and he willingly chose evil. In Genesis Chapter 20, we read the story of King Abimelech, who had taken Sarah to be his wife (because Abraham had told a lie saying that Sarah was his sister!) Abimelech was a man of integrity, living according to his conscience. It is obvious from the story that if he had known he was taking another man's wife, Abimelech would not have had a clear conscience. Even though this was long before the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" had been given, he knew in his heart it was wrong to take another man's wife:

<sup>3</sup>But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." <sup>4</sup>Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will You destroy an innocent nation? <sup>5</sup>Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a *clear conscience* and clean hands." <sup>6</sup>Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against Me. That is why I did not let you touch her."

— Genesis 20:3-6

When King David cut off the corner of Saul's robe, and later when he numbered the Israelites, the Scriptures say that he was "conscience-stricken" (1 Samuel 24:5; 2 Samuel 24:10). In John Chapter 8, when the religious leaders were ready to stone the woman caught in adultery, Jesus challenged them, saying that the one without sin should hurl the first stone. The ensuing scene is most startling:

And they which heard it, being *convicted by their own conscience*, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

— John 8:9 (KJV)

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Until today, every accountable person in the world, no matter where he is, knows that murder, adultery, stealing, and the like are wrong (whether he has heard of the Word of God or not); these laws are embedded into every man's conscience. But the conscience imparts no power to keep man from sinning against it. [For much more in the New Testament on conscience, look at the following passages: Acts 24:16; Romans 9:1; 13:5; 14:13-16; 1 Corinthians 4:4; 8:9-13; 10:23-30; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Timothy 1:5, 19; 3:9; 4:2; Hebrews 9:9, 14; 10:22].

### ***People Who Lived during the Conscience Period***

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Although Adam and Eve began their lives in the Dispensation of Innocence in the Garden of Eden, they lived many centuries after that outside of Eden, with their conscience as their only guide. Let us now examine some other important people who lived during the Dispensation of Conscience:

1. **Cain and Abel.** Both understood the need to bring offerings to God (perhaps Adam and Eve had instructed them after they saw God sacrifice animals to cover their nakedness in Eden). It is clear from the Scripture that Cain knew in his heart what was right, and that if he did not do what was right, it would be "sin" [NOTE: This is the first appearance of the word "sin" in the Bible]:

<sup>3</sup>In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup>But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup>but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. <sup>6</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup>If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, *sin* is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

– Genesis 4:3-7

We know from Hebrews 11:4 that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith to God and that God commended him for doing right. According to Romans 14:23, the root of *all* sin is unbelief [see also Hebrews 3:12]; so in some way, Cain was not trusting his heart (conscience). Cain committed the first murder, but many others would follow in his footsteps [see Genesis 4:14, 23-24]. By the time of Noah's Flood, the whole earth would be "full of violence" (Genesis 6:11-13).

2. **Enoch.** Sometime after Cain's horrible sin, we read in Genesis 4:26 of a remarkable turn of events: "Men began to call on the name of the Lord." And four generations later, a fascinating man named Enoch appeared. He walked with God by faith, and he understood how to please God. According to Amos 3:3, walking with God signifies being in agreement with Him. How did Enoch know what God wanted? How was he able to please His Maker,

## Dispensation of Conscience

not having any rules or commandments? There are only three short passages in the entire Bible that shed any light on these questions and others:

<sup>22</sup>And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup>Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. <sup>24</sup>Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.

– *Genesis 5:22-24*

God took him away! Without experiencing natural death, Enoch was apparently translated or “raptured” up to heaven! The author of Hebrews tells us how Enoch pleased God: the secret was his faith—a faith that believes in God and seeks Him:

<sup>5</sup>By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. <sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

– *Hebrews 11:5-6*

Without a Bible or any written rules or laws, Enoch simply followed his heart. The creation all around him, along with his conscience, told Enoch that there was a living God, so he trusted Him and sought Him with his whole heart! According to Jude 14-16, Enoch was a prophet—the first prophet mentioned in the Scriptures! Enoch was given profound prophetic insight concerning Christ’s coming and final judgment:

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of His holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.” These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

According to Genesis 5:22-24, Enoch only began walking with God at the age of 65, when his son Methuselah was born. Obviously, something dramatic occurred in Enoch’s life at that time. Some believe that God gave a revelation to Enoch of the coming judgment (Flood) and that it would commence with the death of Methuselah, Noah’s grandfather. It is interesting to note that the Flood indeed came the very same year that Methuselah died! Note the following:

- a. Methuselah was 187 years old when his son Lamech was born (*Genesis 5:25*)
- b. Lamech was 182 years old when his son Noah was born (*Genesis 5:28*)
- c. Noah was 600 years old when the Flood came (*Genesis 7:6*)

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Therefore, Methuselah was 969 years when the Flood came ( $187 + 182 + 600 = 969$  years), exactly as stated in Genesis 5:27! He lived longer than any other human being, a testament to the patience and long-suffering of God [see 1 Peter 3:19-20]!

**3. Noah.** Noah lived at a time where most of mankind was going directly against the law of their conscience. Although, as stated earlier, the people of this dispensation had no written code of law, they were declared guilty by God on the basis of their actions. Noah's neighbors obviously knew right from wrong in their hearts, and God considered their behavior evil and wicked. Even though the majority of those around him were corrupt and depraved, Noah found favor with God and walked with Him:

<sup>5</sup>The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup>The LORD was grieved that He had made man on the earth, and His heart was filled with pain. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them." <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. <sup>9</sup>This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. <sup>10</sup>Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. <sup>11</sup>Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.

— *Genesis 6:5-11*

Noah is the first person mentioned in the Bible who found "favor," i.e., grace from God. Grace is often defined as "unmerited favor"—the kindness and love of God that is *not* based on works or performance. But we must be very careful to note the word "found"—Noah *found* grace, implying that he was looking for it. We are also exhorted to come to God's throne of grace, looking for grace to help us in our time of need. [NOTE: Our "time of need" is every minute of every hour!]:

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

— *Hebrews 4:16*

Noah, like his predecessor Enoch, must have been seeking God! This was indeed "saving grace," for Noah and his family were the only ones to escape the coming destruction of God's wrath. It is important to also note that Noah was righteous [the Hebrew word is *tsaddiyq*, meaning "just, lawful or righteous"] and blameless [Hebrew *tamiym*, translated "entire or perfect; integrity, truth, sincerity"]. In other words, he was true to his own heart and conscience; he walked in integrity. The apostle Peter even says that Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5), condemning the sin and depravity around him. [NOTE: By today's standards, Noah would not be considered a very successful or effective preacher—only seven people (all of

## **Dispensation of Conscience**

whom were family members!) got saved!] As with Enoch, we again discover that faith was the key to Noah's success:

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

— Hebrews 11:7

### ***Evidences of God's Grace in the Conscience Period***

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As seen in the previous dispensation, here we see how God's judgment once again followed hard on the heels of man's failure. He brought a worldwide flood on the earth that destroyed everyone except Noah and his family (Genesis 7). But right in the midst of man's apostasy and complete moral collapse, God manifested His amazing grace once again, just as He had done with Adam and Eve when He clothed them after their fall. Note the following evidences of God's gracious disposition toward man in this period:

1. Certain ones like Abel, Enosh [see Genesis 4:26], and Enoch worshiped God with integrity of heart and a pure conscience.
2. God's Spirit had been pleading and striving with men's hearts for a long time, no doubt trying to bring conviction to their consciences (Genesis 6:3).
3. Noah found grace in the midst of worldwide apostasy and wickedness (Genesis 6:8).
4. God warned the people through the preaching of Enoch and Noah, giving them an opportunity to repent.
5. God waited patiently before He finally judged the disobedient (1 Peter 3:20 tells how God suffered with the people for a long time while He was waiting for Noah to complete the ark).
6. God provided a means of salvation (escape from His judgment) through Noah's ark.

### ***A Final Note about Conscience***

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Man's responsibility in the Dispensation of Conscience was to simply follow his heart and conscience. Interestingly, in every dispensation thereafter, even when man has no knowledge of God's law or Word, God expects him to follow his conscience. If one listens carefully to his own conscience, it will convict him of sin and lead him to God for salvation. For example, the story of Cornelius is told in Acts Chapter 10. He was a God-fearing Gentile, apparently with little knowledge of Jewish law, but he had a heart for God. This led him to the apostle Peter, who

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preached the gospel to him, resulting in Cornelius becoming the first Gentile believer in the Early Church!

But when a person refuses to listen to his conscience, hardening his heart repeatedly, all he has to look forward to is judgment. He has what the Bible calls a “conscience seared as with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2). Most of the people from Adam to Noah ignored their conscience and followed wickedness; so God was forced to bring the judgment of the Great Flood. Once again man had failed.

But God wasn’t finished yet. As the floodwaters receded, and Noah and his family climbed out of the ark, it was the dawning of a new day—a new dispensation was about to begin!

# DISPENSATION OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT

## (GENESIS 8-11)

<sup>1</sup>Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup>Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. <sup>4</sup>But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. <sup>6</sup>Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.

—Genesis 9:1-6

**A**S NOAH AND HIS FAMILY LEFT THE ARK AFTER THE FLOOD, God announced several significant changes in the way He would be dealing with mankind. As discussed in the *Introduction*, this is one of the hallmarks of a new dispensation [see *Characteristics Common to Each Dispensation* on p. 3]:

1. God promised that He would never destroy the earth with a flood again.
2. Man would now be allowed to eat the meat of animals for food.
3. God instituted capital punishment; He would demand an accounting for the taking of a human life, charging man with the responsibility of putting to death anyone guilty of murder.

### ***The Noahic Covenant***

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When Noah left the ark after the Flood, the first thing he did was make an altar and offer animal sacrifices to the Lord. (Just imagine—these animals had spent a year cooped up in the ark, they had survived the Flood, and now their hoofs were finally standing on solid ground; just as they were taking their first breath of fresh air, Noah chose them for God’s burnt offering! Sometimes life ain’t fair!) God was pleased with Noah’s offering and decided that He would never destroy the earth with a flood again:

<sup>18</sup>So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. <sup>19</sup>All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds –

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everything that moves on the earth—came out of the ark, one kind after another.  
<sup>20</sup>Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. <sup>21</sup>The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in His heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. <sup>22</sup>As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

— Genesis 8:18, 22

God then made His third covenant with man, often referred to as the *Noahic Covenant*. Like the previous covenant, this one was also unconditional and will last until the renovation of the earth by fire [see 2 Peter 3:10]. Having destroyed everyone except Noah and his family because of the extreme wickedness in the earth, God sought to replenish the earth through Noah because he had found grace in His eyes (Genesis 6:8). This was to be a new beginning.

<sup>1</sup>Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup>Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. <sup>4</sup>But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. <sup>6</sup>“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. <sup>7</sup>As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.” <sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup>“I now establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup>I establish My covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.” <sup>12</sup>And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between Me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup>I have set My rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. <sup>14</sup>Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>I will remember My covenant between Me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup>Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of

## **Dispensation of Civil Government**

every kind on the earth.”<sup>17</sup> So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between Me and all life on the earth.”

— *Genesis 9:1-17*

The Noahic Covenant marks the beginning of the Dispensation of Civil Government, so named because man was now given the ultimate authority for human government—capital punishment: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.” This endowed human government with the authority necessary for governing in the world. Civil government became the divine means of maintaining order in society. Like previous covenants, the Noahic Covenant contained promises to man and responsibilities required of man.

### ***Promises under the Noahic Covenant***

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God made a number of promises to man in the Noahic Covenant, all of which were unconditional; in other words, they would be valid regardless of man’s conduct. He also announced several significant changes that were now going to take effect:

1. God would “never again” curse the ground or destroy all living creatures (*Genesis 8:21*).
2. He would “never again” flood the earth to destroy it (*Genesis 9:11*).
3. The seasons and day and night would not cease (*Genesis 8:22*).
4. He would set the sign of the rainbow in the clouds as a token of His “everlasting covenant” (*Genesis 9:12, 16*).
5. Man was now permitted to eat fish, fowl and meat; thus the animals would fear and dread man (*Genesis 9:2-3*); this was a significant new development, as man had been a vegetarian up until this time [see *Genesis 1:29*: “Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.’”]

### ***Requirements for Man under the Noahic Covenant***

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Under the Noahic Covenant, there was a reinforcement of commandments given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as well as the institution of several new requirements:

1. Man was once again [see *Genesis 1:28*] commanded to be fruitful, increase in number, and fill the earth (*Genesis 9:1, 7*).

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2. Man was forbidden to eat blood (Genesis 9:4); later in Leviticus 17:10-11, God explained the reason for this prohibition, saying that the life of the creature is in the blood, and that atonement is made through the shedding of blood.
3. Man was to exercise capital punishment upon man and beast (Genesis 9:5-6). The highest function of government is the protection of human life, out of which arises the responsibility for capital punishment. Man is not to personally avenge murder, but as a corporate group, he is to safeguard the sanctity of human life as a gift of God which cannot be disposed of except as God determines. The powers that be are ordained of God, and to resist the power is to resist God. Whereas in the preceding dispensation, restraint upon men was internal, with God's Spirit working through man's conscience and his inner sense of moral responsibility (Genesis 6:3), now a new and external restraint was added, i.e., the power of civil government. God did not want to see a repeat of the tragedy that took place during the Dispensation of Conscience, where the whole earth was filled with violence. There would now be severe consequences for acts of violence, especially for the act of murder.

The Dispensation of Civil Government, which lasted from Noah to Abraham, made man responsible for governing himself when he did wrong. God gave him very basic principles (listed above) to guide him in this, and man was required to keep them. Since man would not listen to his conscience (though he does still have a conscience to guide him in the right way) and let it lead him to God, God made mankind as a whole responsible for punishing the sins of individuals and keeping iniquity in check. Paul would later explain to Timothy that laws and civil authority are absolutely necessary for lawbreakers:

<sup>8</sup>We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup>We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup>for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurors—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

— 1 Timothy 1:8-10

NOTE: Most of these obligations of this dispensation are still in force today. The command against eating blood is found in the New Testament [see Acts 15:28-29] and capital punishment is still a responsibility given by God to governing authorities today. Despite all of the debate in our post-modern politically correct culture of today, the Bible *clearly* teaches capital punishment. Paul explained in his epistle to the Romans that we should submit to civil authorities "because of conscience," and that wrongdoers should fear the civil rulers because they are agents of wrath to bring punishment on all evil. He specifically mentions that the

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authorities don't bear the *sword* for nothing—swords are not used to slap a criminal on the wrist—they are used to put them to death:

<sup>1</sup>Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. <sup>2</sup>Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. <sup>3</sup>For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. <sup>4</sup>For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.

—Romans 13:1-5

There is no record of capital punishment before God gave the command to Noah – it was His idea and shows the sanctity of human life and the consequences of taking it with malice.

### ***Man's Failure: Rebellion at Babel***

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Man's primary responsibility under the Noahic Covenant was to "be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth," but even in this he miserably failed! The earth's population rapidly increased after the flood, but all the people banded together near an area later called "Babel." God wanted man to scatter and repopulate the whole earth, not remain in one area. The failure of man to do this brought upon him another judgment.

The descendants of Noah directly rebelled against the command to scatter and sought to stay united around a great city and tower in the plain of Shinar. Shinar was the center of the first kingdom mentioned in Scripture [see Genesis 10:8-12]. Here the world's first dictator, Nimrod (a descendant of Ham!) arose, leading the people in their rebellion against God (and beginning what many believe was the first system of false religion based on astrology and worship of the stars):

<sup>1</sup>Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup>As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup>They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. <sup>4</sup>Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth." <sup>5</sup>But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. <sup>6</sup>The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." <sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them from there

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over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup>That is why it was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

— Genesis 11:1-9

Their motive was clear: they wanted to make a name for themselves. To this day, many of man's great works and projects (and sadly, this includes some ministries as well) are the results of the same motivation: let us make a name for ourselves.

Instead of forming a government that was consistent with God and His commands, man developed one that was directly against Him. Just like the one-world, global, United Nations-common market “Babel” of today, the descendants of Noah 4,300 years ago were more concerned about unity and political progress than about their sins and God. But God judged them for their pride and rebellion. He stopped their building, confused their languages, and scattered them.

A similar thing happened in the Early Church. Although Christ had specifically told His disciples to take the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth [see Acts 1:8], after what is estimated to be eight to ten years, there was just one central Jewish church (the first megachurch!) in Jerusalem. It was only after fierce persecution arose that the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered to Judea and Samaria [see Acts 8:1-4]. In the same way, God will bring down every megaministry in these last days that seeks to make a name for itself rather than to glorify and exalt the name of Jesus and His name alone!

### ***Man's Failure: Disorder in Noah's Family***

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As previously seen, God's desire after the Flood was to establish a civil society, where man would govern himself. But in Genesis Chapter 9, we read about another failure during this period. Noah was unable to govern his own house—he became drunk and brought a curse upon his own family. This is the first mention of wine in the Scriptures, and in Noah's defense, he may not have been aware of its effects. God was silent with Noah on the issue, but He was very displeased with Ham's (Noah's son) response to his father's nakedness:

<sup>20</sup>Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. <sup>21</sup>When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. <sup>22</sup>Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. <sup>23</sup>But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. <sup>24</sup>When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup>he said, “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.” <sup>26</sup>He also said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. <sup>27</sup>May God extend

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the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave."

— Genesis 9:20-27

Rather than cover his father's nakedness, Ham publicized it to his brothers, exposing Noah's shame. In a sense, Ham became the first gossip in the Bible! Shem and Japheth did the nobler thing, taking a garment and covering their father's nakedness. Ham's failure to cover over his father's disgrace was taken very seriously by God, and it resulted in a curse upon his descendants. Consider the following:

Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

— Proverbs 10:12

He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

— Proverbs 17:9

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

— 1 Peter 4:8

When Noah awoke, he cursed Ham's seed in the person of his son Canaan (he didn't curse Ham himself because God had already blessed him in Genesis 9:1). Noah then made a series of prophetic statements that may have been somewhat vague to his three sons (the fathers of the three races), but events that have occurred down through history make them clearer to us:

1. **Canaan** (Ham's seed) was cursed to be "the lowest of slaves" to his brothers (Shem and Japheth).

NOTE: This curse would come back to haunt Shem and his descendants (Israel), for most of the future enemy nations of Israel would come directly through the lineage of Ham [see Genesis 10:6-19], including the Babylonians and Assyrians (Nimrod), Egyptians, Philistines, and the seven nations that occupied the Promised Land [see Deuteronomy 7:1] all of whom were Canaan's descendants. It is significant to note that *drunkenness* was the direct cause of most of Israel's enemies; it would later give rise to the enemy nations of the Ammonites and Moabites through Lot's drunkenness which led to incest with his two daughters [see Genesis 19:31-38]. It is no wonder that *no drunkard will inherit the kingdom of God* (1 Corinthian 6:10).

2. **Shem** on the other hand was blessed: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem" (Genesis 9:26). We learn later that Shem was the ancestor of Abraham and the Semitic people; God would ultimately bless the world with a Savior through Shem!

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3. **Japheth** was also blessed, and his territory was to be extended; he would dwell in the former dwelling places (tents) of Shem. Some believe this refers to the Europeans.

### *Conclusion*

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As Noah's sons multiplied and spread out over the earth, God's eyes were especially upon Shem and his descendants. Nine generations after Shem, a very special man named "Abram" would be born [see Genesis 11:10-26]. God would establish a new covenant with Abram which would mark the beginning of the next dispensation.

# DISPENSATION OF ISRAEL UNDER PROMISE

## (GENESIS 11:10 – EXODUS 18:27)

<sup>1</sup>The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

—Genesis 12:1-3

**U**P UNTIL THIS TIME, GOD HAD ONLY DEALT WITH INDIVIDUALS who chose to walk with Him in the integrity of their heart or conscience. But this new dispensation marks a significant shift in God’s program: He would now choose one *nation*—the nation of Israel, to be His chosen people.

As we saw at the close of the previous dispensation, God had placed a special blessing upon one of Noah’s sons, Shem. He would become the father of the Semites or Hebrews; through one of his descendants, Abram, God would bring forth the Jewish nation of Israel. Israel would be at the center of God’s program for centuries to come.

This dispensation extends from the call of Abram (Genesis 12) to the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19). It is based on God’s covenant with Abram, first cited in Genesis 12:1-3, and confirmed and enlarged in Genesis 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8; 22:16-18; God further expanded the covenant with Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5, 24) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15; 31:13; 35:9-12). God gave unconditional promises to a specific people, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the children of Israel.

### ***Promises of the Abrahamic Covenant***

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God’s initial call to Abram was to leave everything, and it included a number of promises that guaranteed he would gain much more than he was losing! This was the beginning of what is called the *Abrahamic Covenant*:

<sup>1</sup>The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

—Genesis 12:1-3

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Let us list the promises God gave Abram in the Abrahamic Covenant:

1. **To make him into a great nation.** This promise has been fulfilled both physically (the Jewish nation of Israel) and spiritually (Christians). For the first time, God selected a specific nation to be His people; in this and the following dispensation, it is important to note that the blessings promised pertained *only* to the Israelites. Anyone else had to be circumcised and become an Israelite in order to partake of the promises [see Ruth 1:16]. Acts 2:11 speaks of "Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs."

Throughout their history, the Jewish people have made incredible contributions to society; a disproportionate percentage of famous scientists, composers, musicians, etc. are Jewish [see *Appendix A. Outstanding Jewish Contributions in Arts & Sciences* on p. 145 for a listing of famous Jewish Nobel Prize winners, musicians, etc.]. The Jews' accomplishments are an irrefutable testimony to the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promise to Abraham.

2. **To bless him.** God promised to make Abraham's offspring like the dust of the earth and the stars in the heavens:

I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

— *Genesis 13:16*

He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

— *Genesis 15:5*

<sup>15</sup>The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup>and said, "I swear by Myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup>I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies.

— *Genesis 22:15-18*

This was actually a twofold blessing: the "dust" or "sand" referred to Abraham's earthly, physical descendants (the Jews) and the "stars" represent his heavenly, spiritual seed (believers in Christ). By the time Abraham's physical descendants were in Egypt, God had literally made them like dust—their numbers had increased dramatically:

But the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

— *Exodus 1:7*

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Paul makes it clear that all believers (Gentiles included) are the spiritual children of Abraham:

<sup>6</sup>Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>7</sup>Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham... <sup>29</sup>If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

— *Galatians 3:6-7, 29*

3. **To make his name great.** The rebels who wanted to make a name for themselves at Babel were judged and scattered by God. Now God had found a faithful man whom He could trust. *He* would make Abraham’s name great! Even today the name of Abraham is known and respected by millions. Throughout Scripture, God identifies Himself as the “God of Abraham,” and Abraham was the only one whom God ever called “friend” in the Old Testament [see Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23]! Paul told the Christians in Rome that Abraham is the “father of all who believe” and that we are all to “walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had” (Romans 4:11-12).
4. **To make him a blessing to others.** Abraham blessed people in his own time and blessed humanity by his Seed, Jesus Christ.
5. **To bless those who bless him.** God has not only blessed those who blessed Abraham, but He also blessed those who blessed the nation that sprang from his loins, Israel.
6. **To curse those who curse him.** On the other hand, those who cursed Israel (Babylon, Assyria, Rome, Germany, etc.) must suffer. Some have suffered already, but these promises will not be completely fulfilled until the future.
7. **To bless all of the peoples of the earth through him.** As already mentioned, God brought untold blessings upon humanity through His people, the Jews – this includes scientific and medical discoveries, literary and musical compositions, and a host of other contributions. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise is Christ Himself [see Matthew 1:1], who blesses all those who believe on Him with salvation:

<sup>8</sup>The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” <sup>9</sup>So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

— *Galatians 3:8-9*

8. **To give Abraham and his descendants a specific land as their everlasting inheritance.** When God called Abraham out from his country, He told him that He was to go to a land that He would later show him. In a series of declarations, the Lord explained the details of

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that land (about the size of New Jersey!) that He was giving to Abraham and his descendants by an “everlasting covenant”:

The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

— *Genesis 12:7*

<sup>14</sup>The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Lift up your eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. <sup>15</sup>All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever... <sup>17</sup>Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

— *Genesis 13:14-17*

<sup>7</sup>He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it...” <sup>12</sup>As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. <sup>14</sup>But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions... <sup>18</sup>On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—<sup>19</sup>the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, <sup>21</sup>Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

— *Genesis 15:7, 12-14, 18-21*

[NOTE: God promised this to Abraham while he was asleep, proving the covenant was unconditional!]

<sup>7</sup>I will establish My covenant as an *everlasting covenant* between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. <sup>8</sup>The whole *land of Canaan*, where you are now an alien, I will give as an *everlasting possession* to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

— *Genesis 17:7-8*

<sup>7</sup>The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out... I am concerned about their suffering. <sup>8</sup>So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.”

— *Exodus 3:7-8*

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<sup>8</sup>He remembers His covenant forever, the word He commanded, for a thousand generations, <sup>9</sup>the covenant He made with Abraham, the oath He swore to Isaac. <sup>10</sup>He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: <sup>11</sup>“To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.”

— Psalm 105:8-11

[See also Genesis 26:2-5; 28:13-15].

### ***Requirements of the Abrahamic Covenant***

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Although all the promises that God made to Abraham and his descendants were unconditional, there were several things implicitly required of Abraham:

1. God told Abram to forsake his home and family (Genesis 12:1); they had formerly been idol-worshipers [see Joshua 24:2-4].
2. Abraham needed faith; he received the promises when he believed God: “Abram believed the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:1-6). In Romans Chapter 4, Paul cites this same Scripture to prove the doctrine of justification by faith:

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? <sup>2</sup>If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. <sup>3</sup>What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup>Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup>However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness... <sup>9</sup>Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. <sup>10</sup>Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! <sup>11</sup>And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. <sup>12</sup>And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. <sup>13</sup>It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup>because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup>Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. <sup>17</sup>As it is

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written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

– *Romans 4:1-5, 9-17*

Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham.

– *Galatians 3:6*

3. Obedience to God was needed to secure the blessings promised; if Abraham had not obeyed the call of God, none of the things God promised could have come to pass:

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, *obeyed* and went, even though he did not know where he was going.

– *Hebrews 11:8*

Later on, when God spoke to Abraham's son Isaac, He told him that all nations were going to be blessed because of Abraham's obedience:

<sup>4</sup>I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed,  
<sup>5</sup>because Abraham obeyed Me [Hebrew *shama gol-gol* = "heard My voice"] and kept My requirements, My commands, My decrees and My laws.

– *Genesis 26:4-5*

[NOTE: Prior to Sinai, they were *not* without law – Abraham had God's spoken decrees, commands and laws].

4. Abraham was to walk with God and be blameless:

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless."

– *Genesis 17:1*

5. Parental instruction of children and family order were required. God chose Abraham because He knew he would guide his children in the right way:

<sup>17</sup>Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? <sup>18</sup>Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. <sup>19</sup>For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him ["For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him" – KJV] to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him."

– *Genesis 18:17-19*

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6. Circumcision was the only binding requirement of the covenant, as explained in the next section.

### ***Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant: Circumcision***

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Just as the Noahic Covenant had a sign (the rainbow), the Abrahamic Covenant also had a sign—circumcision:

<sup>9</sup>Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup>This is My covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>You are to undergo *circumcision*, and it will be the *sign of the covenant* between Me and you. <sup>12</sup>For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. <sup>13</sup>Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

— Genesis 17:9-14

Circumcision was the only obligation Abraham and his people had under this covenant. If they performed it by faith, they had full access to all the promises. The only way a non-Israelite could partake of any of the blessings of this dispensation was to be circumcised [see Exodus 12:43-48].

### ***Abraham's Encounter with Melchizedek***

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In Genesis 14, we read about a highly unusual meeting that Abraham had with Melchizedek, who is identified as “King of Salem” and “Priest of God Most High”:

<sup>18</sup>Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup>and He blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. <sup>20</sup>And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave Him a tenth of everything.

— Genesis 14:18-20

Melchizedek is the first priest mentioned in Scripture. Several other priests are mentioned during this dispensation—the priest of On [see Genesis 41:45, 50] and the priest of Midian [see Exodus 2:16]; but there was no organized priesthood like that to be established in the following Dispensation of Law. And there is no other priest in the entire Old Testament who was also a king! Kings could not be priests, and vice versa. Who, then, is this Melchizedek? He is only

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mentioned one other time in the Old Testament in Psalm 110, which is clearly a Messianic psalm:

<sup>1</sup>The LORD says to My Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.” <sup>2</sup>The LORD will extend Your mighty scepter from Zion; You will rule in the midst of Your enemies... <sup>4</sup>The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

— *Psalm 110:1-4*

The writer of Hebrews leaves no room for doubt about the meaning of this prophetic passage: it was fulfilled in Jesus Christ; Jesus became a priest in the order of Melchizedek:

<sup>5</sup>So Christ also did not take upon Himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to Him, “You are My Son; today I have become Your Father.” <sup>6</sup>And He says in another place, “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.” <sup>7</sup>During the days of Jesus’ life on earth... <sup>8</sup>Although He was a son, He learned obedience from what He suffered <sup>9</sup>and, once made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him <sup>10</sup>and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

— *Hebrews 5:5-10*

<sup>19</sup>We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup>where **Jesus**, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.

— *Hebrews 6:19-20*

But that still does not answer our question, “Who is Melchizedek?” However, in the seventh chapter of Hebrews, we seem to get a clear answer:

<sup>1</sup>This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He met Abraham returning from the defeat of the kings and blessed him, <sup>2</sup>and Abraham gave Him a tenth of everything. First, His name means “king of righteousness”; then also, “king of Salem” means “king of peace.” <sup>3</sup>Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, *like the Son of God* He remains a priest forever. <sup>4</sup>Just think how great He was: Even the patriarch Abraham gave Him a tenth of the plunder! <sup>5</sup>Now the law requires the descendants of Levi who become priests to collect a tenth from the people—that is, their brothers—even though their brothers are descended from Abraham. <sup>6</sup>This man, however, did not trace His descent from Levi, yet He collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. <sup>7</sup>And without doubt the lesser person is blessed by the greater. <sup>8</sup>In the one case, the tenth is collected by men who die; but in the other case, by him who is declared to be living. <sup>9</sup>One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, <sup>10</sup>because when Melchizedek met Abraham,

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Levi was still in the body of his ancestor.<sup>11</sup>If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for *another priest* to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron?<sup>12</sup>For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law.<sup>13</sup>He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar.<sup>14</sup>For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests.<sup>15</sup>And what we have said is even more clear if *another priest like Melchizedek* appears,<sup>16</sup>one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.<sup>17</sup>For it is declared: “You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

—Hebrews 7:1-17

Note the following facts about Melchizedek given in this passage:

1. He had no parents, no family tree, no beginning or end of life (v.3); that narrows it down considerably: he is neither a human nor an angel—He is Divine! Melchizedek is God!
2. He is priest of God Most High (v.1), so He cannot *be* the Most High God, i.e., God the Father.
3. Many assume, therefore, that Melchizedek is Christ—but not so fast! In verse 3, we are told that Melchizedek is “like the Son of God” (just because I look *like* John Smith does not *make me* John Smith!). And Jesus is a priest “in the order [Gk. *taxis* = “fixed succession, rank or order”] of Melchizedek” and Christ was “another [Gk. *heteros* = “other, different”] priest like Melchizedek” (v.15). Hebrews clearly mentions two priests: Melchizedek, and *another priest* like Him, Jesus! So Melchizedek cannot be Jesus.
4. If Melchizedek is God, but He is neither the Father nor the Son, then who is He? By process of elimination, He must be the Holy Spirit. And this conclusion is supported by numerous Scriptures. Consider the following:
  - a. Jesus did absolutely no ministry until He was anointed by the Holy Spirit [see Luke 4:18]; likewise, He commanded His disciples to wait until they were empowered for ministry by the Holy Spirit [see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8].
  - b. Just as Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek, so Paul states in Galatians 3:13-14 that the blessing given to Abraham (“the promise of the Spirit,”) is for every child of God:

<sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”<sup>14</sup>He redeemed us in order that the *blessing given to Abraham* might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the *promise of the Spirit*.

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

- c. The Levitical order of ministry, established under the Law, was replaced with a better ministry under the New Covenant, called the “ministry of the Spirit” [see 2 Corinthians 3:3-9].
- d. Jesus offered Himself through the eternal Spirit, the Priest of God Most High (Hebrews 9:14).
- e. Paul performed his “priestly duty” by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:15-19).
- f. Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek (v.4). He is the first person mentioned in Scripture who paid tithes, long before tithing was commanded under the Law of Moses. Jacob is another example of someone who lived before the Law and yet paid tithes [see Genesis 28:20-22].

### ***Promise vs. Law***

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As Abraham’s descendants multiplied and grew into a great nation, God had promised that they would have to “be strangers in a country not their own [Egypt], and be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years” before this dispensation would come to a close (Genesis 15:13). In Galatians 3, Paul makes a clear distinction between Israel under Promise and Israel under Law. He states plainly that the Law given under Moses in no way set aside the promises given to Abraham in the Abrahamic Covenant. In other words, all of the blessings promised to Abraham in this dispensation remain in force in the next dispensation, the Dispensation of Law:

<sup>15</sup>Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. <sup>16</sup>The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. <sup>17</sup>What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. <sup>18</sup>For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. <sup>19</sup>What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

— *Galatians 3:15-19*

As the time of Israel’s slavery in Egypt drew to a close, God was about to break in with yet another brand-new program. He would deliver them from bondage with His mighty arm of power; but more importantly, after Israel’s exodus from Egypt and arrival at Mt. Sinai, God would give His people laws and commandments. Israel under promise was about to become Israel under law.

# DISPENSATION OF ISRAEL UNDER LAW

## (EXODUS 19 – ACTS 1)

<sup>1</sup>In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. <sup>2</sup>...and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup>You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. <sup>5</sup>Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup>you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

—Exodus 19:1-6

**B**Y THE TIME MOSES WAS BORN, the 75 people that had gone with Jacob down into Egypt had grown into a powerful nation of millions. When a new king “who did not know about Joseph came to power in Egypt” (Exodus 1:8), he put them into heavy bondage and eventually the Israelites began to cry unto the Lord for deliverance. God heard their cry and sent them a deliverer from among their own—Moses.

For the first time, God referred to the Israelites as “My people” (Exodus 3:5-10; 5:1, etc.). Since the self-governing of man in the dispensations of Conscience and Promise had failed, God established a highly comprehensive government called a “theocracy” through a new covenant known as the *Mosaic Covenant*. Now God Himself would rule man from a central place of worship.

### ***Israel at Mt. Sinai***

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After revealing Himself to Moses in the wilderness at the burning bush, God sent Moses back into Egypt to free his brethren from their slavery. With great signs and wonders which He performed through Moses, God forced Israel’s release, and brought the people across the Red Sea to make a nation out of them as He had promised to Abraham.

On their way to the Promised Land (Canaan), God established His covenant with them at Mt. Sinai with dramatic and frightening manifestations [see Acts 7:1-38 for a concise summary of these events]. At Sinai, God reviewed how He had graciously delivered them under the conditions of promise: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” (Exodus 19:4)

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Up until this time, all that God had wanted was for His people to listen to His voice and walk in obedience. At Marah, God had stated this clearly:

If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commands and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.

— Exodus 15:26

But this was the very point on which Israel failed—they hardened their hearts and refused to hear His voice (Hebrews 3:7-8).

At Sinai, God once again emphasized the importance of simple obedience for His people:

Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

— Exodus 19:5-6

### ***The Law Is Added***

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The people immediately responded with arrogant self-confidence, saying: “We will do everything the LORD has said” (Exodus 19:8). This shows the very reason why God then added the Law: the Law was given to make man see how utterly incapable he is of living up to the righteous standards of God by human effort; the Law was given to make sin increase, not decrease, because man is inherently blind to his own sinful nature; the Law provokes the sinful nature, manifesting and exposing man’s inner rebellion and pride. This was absolutely critical before the Dispensation of Grace could ever come.

So when the Law was given by God at Mt. Sinai, it was never intended to make man righteous. This is critical for us to understand. The Law was not a set of rules that God hoped everyone would be able to keep—He knew they would be broken. Although the Ten Commandments reveal God’s righteousness to us, they are powerless to make us righteous. Quite the contrary—the purpose of the Law was to show man his utter sinfulness, ultimately pointing him to the promised Seed of Abraham, Jesus Christ:

<sup>18</sup>For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. <sup>19</sup>What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.

— Galatians 3:18-19

## Dispensation of Israel under Law

In his epistles, Paul often speaks about the reasons why God gave the Law and how we are to apply it today. Below is a list of some *four reasons for the Law*:

1. **To help man recognize sin in his life.** The average person thinks he is pretty decent and good—he is certainly not a *sinner*. But one of the primary reasons God gave the Law was to help us know what sin is and identify it in our lives:

<sup>7</sup>What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed, I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “Do not covet.” <sup>8</sup>But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead... <sup>13</sup>But in order that sin might be *recognized as sin*, it [the law] produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

— Romans 7:7-13

2. **To stir up sin and cause it to increase.** Observing the Law does not produce sinless righteousness and perfection. It was designed to do just the opposite! The Law stirs up sin and causes it to increase and abound and become “utterly sinful”:

The law was added so that the trespass might *increase*.

— Romans 5:20

3. **To be our “schoolmaster” to lead us to Christ.** Paul taught that the Law is absolutely essential in bringing us to Christ:

<sup>21</sup>Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid; for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. <sup>22</sup>But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. <sup>23</sup>But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. <sup>24</sup>Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [Greek word *paidagogos* which means “a boy leader, that is, a servant whose office it was to take the children to school; a tutor or pedagogue”] to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup>But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

— Galatians 3:21-25 (KJV)

[NOTE: v.25 makes it very clear that the Law would eventually be replaced by a better dispensation].

4. **To bring condemnation and death to the sinner.** Rather than alleviate man’s guilt and shame, the Law increases it! The ministry of the Law is called the “ministry of

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

condemnation." Apart from the Law, Paul was alive. But when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and he died:

<sup>8</sup>But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire... <sup>9</sup>Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. <sup>10</sup>I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually *brought death*. <sup>11</sup>For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death.

— Romans 7:8-11

<sup>6</sup>He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the *letter kills*, but the Spirit gives life. <sup>7</sup>Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, <sup>8</sup>will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? <sup>9</sup>If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!

— 2 Corinthians 3:6-9

### ***Do Not Speak to Us or We Will Die***

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After God spoke the Ten Commandments to Moses, the Israelites trembled with fear and told Moses that they didn't want God to speak to them anymore: "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die" (Exodus 20:19). Years later, when Moses reminded the people of what happened at Sinai, we gain some important insights. God made a covenant with His people at Sinai (the Mosaic Covenant) that He had never made with Abraham and the fathers. And initially, after giving the Ten Commandments, God "added nothing more" (Deuteronomy 5:1-22).

The Israelites were amazed that God would speak to them and they didn't die; but they feared that if He kept speaking, they would surely die. Because they refused to listen to His voice any more, God added more than 600 other statutes and decrees:

<sup>23</sup>When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. <sup>24</sup>And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us His glory and His majesty, and we have heard His voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. <sup>25</sup>But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. <sup>26</sup>For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived? <sup>27</sup>Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell

## Dispensation of Israel under Law

us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey.” <sup>28</sup>The LORD heard you when you spoke to me and the LORD said to me, “I have heard what this people said to you. Everything they said was good. <sup>29</sup>Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear Me and keep all My commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever! <sup>30</sup>Go, tell them to return to their tents. <sup>31</sup>But you stay here with Me so that I may give you all the commands, decrees and laws you are to teach them to follow in the land I am giving them to possess.”

— Deuteronomy 5:23-31

What a sad day for God’s people! The Lord was speaking to them face to face, and what He had always desired was to have a people who would listen to His voice and obey. But they hardened their hearts like stone, and thus the Law had to be added, engraved on stone! They preferred to have Moses tell them everything that the Lord was telling him rather than stand in the presence of God and hear for themselves.

### ***Summary of the Mosaic Covenant***

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The Mosaic Covenant is undoubtedly the most complex of all the covenants mentioned in Scripture—many chapters of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy are devoted to the explanation and clarification of the Law. It can actually be subdivided in *four parts*:

1. **The Moral Law.** This consisted of the Ten Commandments, etc. (Exodus 20:1-26).
2. **The Civil or Judicial Law.** This consisted of the precepts of the judicial system for the punishment of crimes and settlement of disputes (Exodus 21:1 - 24:18).
3. **The Ceremonial Law.** This was Israel’s religious system, which included all the details of sacrifice and worship: The Tabernacle, Levitical priesthood, sacrifices and offerings, etc. (Exodus 25-40, Leviticus, etc.).
4. **The Sign of the Covenant: The Sabbath Day.** This covenant, like the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants, also had a sign – a day of rest to be observed on the seventh day (Saturday) of the week (Exodus 31:13-17).

NOTE: The Mosaic Covenant was completely conditional. That is, for God to continue to do His part, the Israelites had to continue to do theirs. The bulk of this covenant is referred to as “The Law,” a detailed list of rules and regulations that dealt with practically every aspect of life. No longer were the Israelites to be guided only by their conscience or by the opinions of other men. God had given them very specific *written* commands which were easily understood and could be consulted at any time.

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### ***Israel's Failure under the Mosaic Covenant***

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Very soon after the Israelites promised “we will do everything the LORD has said,” they rebelled against God, committed idolatry, grumbled and complained, treated God and His servants with contempt, and stubbornly refused to believe in Him. When Moses came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the Law and saw the Israelites sinning and worshiping the golden calf, he broke the tablets (Exodus 32:19), signifying that the Israelites had already broken their part of the covenant with God.

God was patient and long-suffering, bearing with Israel’s disobedience and unbelief for nearly 1,000 years, until His patience finally ran out. Around 600 B.C., God allowed Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to invade and destroy Jerusalem because of the sins of His people. God clearly anticipated Israel’s failure under the Law when He predicted a New Covenant through Jeremiah in the 7th Century B.C.:

<sup>31</sup>“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup>It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke My covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup>“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. <sup>34</sup>No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

— *Jeremiah 31:31-34*

Israel’s utter failure to live under the Law is meant to be an historical lesson for all humanity. The Law was never meant to be a means of salvation, but rather to show us how good we would have to be in order to save ourselves. It points to a better day under the New Covenant of grace, where God enables the believer to fulfill the requirements of the Law through the power of the indwelling Spirit:

<sup>3</sup>For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so, He condemned sin in sinful man, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

— *Romans 8:3-4*

## Dispensation of Israel under Law

### *God Interrupts the Dispensation*

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Israel's rejection of the promised and long-awaited Messiah Jesus caused God to set Israel aside and to temporarily suspend this dispensation. For a time, the Lord would turn to the Gentiles *until* Israel acknowledged their Messiah:

<sup>37</sup>"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. <sup>38</sup>Look, your house is left to you desolate. <sup>39</sup>For I tell you, you will not see Me again *until you say*, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

— Matthew 23:37-39

It must be emphasized that God's rejection of the Jews is temporary, *not* permanent. Contrary to the false teaching known as "Replacement Theology," God did not replace Israel with the Church. God's program with Israel is far from being completed yet. We will see in the Dispensations of the Great Tribulation and the Millennium that Israel will once again take center stage in God's program.

Below we have listed *ten proofs that God is not finished with Israel yet* (one for each of the Ten Commandments!):

1. **New Covenant salvation first for the Jews.** As noted above in Jeremiah 31:31-34, God was very specific about the New Covenant—it would be with the "house of Israel and with the house of Judah." Salvation through Jesus Christ would be "first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). Christ's first apostles were all Jewish, the first Church was a Jewish church in Jerusalem, and all of the New Testament was written by Jews! Throughout the Book of Acts, we see that it was always the apostles' custom to go *first* to the Jews and their synagogues with the gospel [see Acts 13:14, 44-46; 14:1: 17:1-2].
2. **144,000 Jews sealed during the Tribulation.** In Revelation 7, after the Rapture of the Church, God will seal 144,000 literal Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel during the Tribulation. This is contrary to the myth concerning the "lost tribes of Israel" [Paul confirms this in his testimony in Acts 26:7 where he states that all "twelve tribes" of Israel are hoping for the promise of resurrection; see also Luke 22:29-30; Revelation 21:11].
3. **Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week for the Jews not yet completed.** Israel still has allotted to her seven years to complete Daniel's 70th week and the six divinely given responsibilities mentioned there [see *Daniel's 70th Week* (*Daniel 9:24-27*) on p. 104]. These must be fulfilled under the same conditions that prevailed in the dispensation in which the other 69 weeks (483 years) were acted out. This seven-year period, called the Tribulation, is actually the completion of the Dispensation of Israel under Law.

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4. **A Jewish temple in Jerusalem is yet to be built.** Jesus and Paul both referred to a future time (during the Tribulation) when Daniel's "abomination that causes desolation" (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15) will occur, i.e., when the antichrist "sets himself up in God's temple [obviously a Jewish temple], proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This temple must be completed in order for the Scriptures to be fulfilled.
5. **Jews will have another time after the times of the Gentiles are completed.** Jesus spoke of a time in the future when "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). This implies that the Jews will yet have another "time" after God finishes with the Gentiles.
6. **The twelve tribes of Israel to be judged in the future.** In Luke 22:29-30, Jesus promised His disciples that they would one day "eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
7. **Jerusalem will be the capital of the world during the Millennium.** Zechariah prophesied of a time coming (during the Millennial Kingdom) when Jerusalem will be the capital of the world and all nations will have to go to Jerusalem to worship the King and celebrate the feast of Tabernacles! (Zechariah 14:16-19) At that time, men from all languages and nations will take hold of one Jew and say, "Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you." (Zechariah 8:23)
8. **God's eternal Kingdom is called "New Jerusalem."** The Bride of Christ, God's Holy City is called "New Jerusalem" [not New York or New London!] The names of the 12 Jewish tribes are written on the gates and 12 Jewish apostles are written on the foundations! (Revelation 21:10-14)
9. **The testimony of the sun, moon and stars.** God says that as long as the sun, moon and stars are shining, the children of Israel are still His covenant people. Obviously, God isn't finished with Israel yet!

<sup>35</sup>This is what the LORD says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar – the LORD Almighty is His name: <sup>36</sup>"Only if these decrees vanish from My sight," declares the LORD, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me." <sup>37</sup>This is what the LORD says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the LORD.

– Jeremiah 31:35-37

10. **God's covenant with Israel is everlasting.** It is repeated over and over throughout the Scriptures that God's covenant with Israel is an "everlasting covenant," and that He

## Dispensation of Israel under Law

promised them “everlasting salvation” [see Genesis 17:7-8, 13, 19; 1 Chronicles 16:17; Psalm 105:10; Isaiah 55:13; Jeremiah 32:40; Ezekiel 16:60, etc.]. More specifically, this covenant would be with Isaac [see Isaiah 45:17; Romans 9:1-9].

In Romans Chapter 11, Paul deals at length with this whole question of whether or not God rejected Israel. He makes it clear that God has not rejected Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham. Rather, they have experienced a temporary blindness or callousness for a time to allow Gentiles to be saved. But Paul emphasizes that God still loves the Jews for Abraham’s sake—His covenant promises with Abraham are irrevocable, and ultimately, all Israel will be saved. He sternly warns Gentile believers not to arrogantly think that God has chosen them instead of Israel. Below, find a summary of Paul’s answer to the question, “Has God rejected Israel?”

1. Did God reject Israel? No, not at all! Because of their temporary fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles:

<sup>1</sup>I ask then: Did God reject His people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. <sup>2</sup>God did not reject His people, whom He foreknew... <sup>11</sup>Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

— *Romans 11:1-2, 11*

2. The Jews will be accepted again, and their fullness will bring great riches to the world:

<sup>12</sup>But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! <sup>13</sup>I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry <sup>14</sup>in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. <sup>15</sup>For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

— *Romans 11:12-15*

3. Gentiles warned not be arrogant and boast against Israel:

<sup>17</sup>If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, <sup>18</sup>do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. <sup>19</sup>You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” <sup>20</sup>Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. <sup>21</sup>For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. <sup>22</sup>Consider

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

— Romans 11:17-22

4. Israel will be saved; God's call is irrevocable:

<sup>23</sup>And if they [Israel] do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. <sup>24</sup>After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! <sup>25</sup>I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening *in part* until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup>And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. <sup>27</sup>And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins." <sup>28</sup>As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, <sup>29</sup>for God's gifts and His call are *irrevocable*.

— Romans 11:23-29

### ***Misuse and Erroneous Application of the Mosaic Covenant Today***

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It is important to be reminded that the Mosaic Covenant was *only* between God and the Israelites. No part of it applied to any Gentile then and neither does it now. The moral law of God found in the Ten Commandments is a reflection of God's nature and is profitable for anyone in any dispensation, but it was *never* intended to be a means for man's salvation. As already pointed out, the Law was given to convict man of his utter sinfulness in order to point him to the coming Messiah and Savior Jesus Christ. Paul exhorted Timothy to make sure he was using the Law "properly":

<sup>8</sup>We know that the law is good if one uses it *properly*. <sup>9</sup>We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup>for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurors—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

— 1 Timothy 1:8-10

Much of the confusion about how the Mosaic laws apply today is a result of people not properly dividing the truth of Scripture, trying to force doctrines from one dispensational system into another. This is dangerous, and may eventually lead to heresy. This was precisely

## Dispensation of Israel under Law

the issue that arose in the Early Church where Jewish believers were trying to force Gentiles to observe the Law of Moses. The apostles and elders met in what has come to be known as the "Jerusalem Council" to take up the question, "Are Gentiles required to obey the Law of Moses in order to be saved?" Peter gave a simple one-word answer: "No!"

<sup>5</sup>Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." <sup>6</sup>The apostles and elders met to consider this question. <sup>7</sup>After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup>God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. <sup>9</sup>He made no distinction between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup>Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

—Acts 15:5-11

It is amazing, in light of such a clear understanding in the Early Church, how many false Christian movements in the world today try to drag Jew and Gentile alike back into bondage to the Mosaic Law. Gentiles are led to believe that they must keep the Levitical feasts, observe the kosher food laws, etc. in order to be saved and achieve a higher spirituality. "No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved."

In their epistles, both Paul and James gave strong admonitions about New Covenant believers trying to live under the Law of Moses. They warned that such people bring themselves under a curse and cut themselves off from the grace of God (Galatians 2:21; 5:4). The apostles stressed that if someone chooses to live under the Law of Moses, he must do *everything* written there—he cannot pick and choose certain parts of it, and leave others. Note the following:

<sup>10</sup>All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do *everything* written in the Book of the Law."

<sup>11</sup>Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." <sup>12</sup>The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." <sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." <sup>14</sup>He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

—Galatians 3:10-14

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<sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. <sup>11</sup>For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

— James 2:10-11

The Sabbath, for instance, is one truth from the Law that is heavily abused today. In Exodus, God stated very clearly and specifically that the Sabbath was *only* for the children of Israel to observe, and was thus binding on no one else:

<sup>12</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>13</sup>“Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be a sign between Me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. <sup>14</sup>Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. <sup>15</sup>For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. <sup>16</sup>The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. <sup>17</sup>It will be a sign between Me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He abstained from work and rested.’”

— Exodus 31:12-17

Some think that since the Sabbath is found in the Ten Commandments, it is an “eternal law” for everyone, but as mentioned above, no one else (except Israel) was ever commanded to keep it. In fact, a born-again Christian is not commanded to set apart any particular day for worship, not even the Lord’s Day (Sunday). He is free to meet on any day he esteems best [see Romans 14:5]. Most believers usually meet on the Lord’s Day, however, following the pattern found in the New Testament [see Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Revelation 1:10]. Paul warned the Colossians about false teachers trying to force them to observe religious festivals and Sabbath days (requirements of the Mosaic Law):

<sup>16</sup>Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup>These are a *shadow* of the things that were to come; the *reality*, however, is found in Christ.

— Colossians 2:16-17

Note the words “shadow” and “reality” in the previous Scripture. The Sabbath, like many of the other festivals and special days celebrated under the Mosaic Covenant, was only a shadow of a greater reality that came through Christ. The purpose of shadows in Scripture is to lead us to the Light. Thank God, we have now come to the reality and true light in Jesus Christ. It is foolish to leave that light and go back in search of the shadow! The writer of Hebrews explains

## **Dispensation of Israel under Law**

that there is a true “Sabbath rest” for the believer—not one day a week, but rather a continual rest that comes when we cease from doing our own works and believe in God:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. <sup>2</sup>For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. <sup>3</sup>Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, “So I declared on oath in My anger, ‘They shall never enter My rest.’” And yet His work has been finished since the creation of the world. <sup>4</sup>For somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “And on the seventh day God rested from all His work.” <sup>5</sup>And again in the passage above He says, “They shall never enter My rest.” <sup>6</sup>It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience... <sup>8</sup>For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about *another day*. <sup>9</sup>There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup>for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. <sup>11</sup>Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

— Hebrews 4:1-11

### **Conclusion**

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When God established the Mosaic Covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai, He did not annul or replace any of His promises made to Abraham in the preceding dispensation (Galatians 3:17). The Abrahamic Covenant is an “everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:7-8), and thus it remains in force throughout the Dispensation of Law and all succeeding dispensations! On the contrary, the Mosaic Covenant, with its laws, priesthood, tabernacle, etc. would be replaced with a new and better covenant in the next dispensation, the Dispensation of Grace (Hebrews 8:13). God would eventually do away with the covenant, but *not* Israel.

As previously mentioned, the Law had to come before the Messiah of grace could be revealed. The Law was merely a schoolmaster to lead us to the One who is full of grace—Messiah Jesus. Now, with great anticipation and excitement, we are ready to move on to what is the greatest of all the ten dispensations—the Dispensation of Grace!



# DISPENSATION OF GRACE: THE CHURCH AGE (PENTECOST TO THE RAPTURE)

<sup>31</sup>“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup>not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup>“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart, I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup>They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

—*Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NAS)*

<sup>1</sup>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.

—*Hebrews 1:1-2*

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

—*John 1:17*

**T**HE DISPENSATION OF GRACE began on the Day of Pentecost and will conclude with the Rapture of the Church. Peter referred to Pentecost as the “beginning” in Acts 11:15, though some mark the beginning of this dispensation at the birth of Christ.

Undoubtedly, Jesus is the key to this entire dispensation—He is Messenger of the New Covenant, His blood is the “blood of the New Covenant,” etc. But technically, Christ’s birth, death and resurrection all took place “under law.” Paul emphasizes this point in Galatians:

But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law.

—*Galatians 4:4*

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Jesus lived a sinless life as a Jew under the Law (Matthew 5:17) so that He could be a perfect atoning sacrifice. Had He broken the Law even on one minor point, He would have been considered a transgressor. But John points out that He was without sin:

<sup>4</sup>Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup>But you know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin.

– 1 John 3:4-5

Because the Church is the central theme of this dispensation, it is often (and aptly) called the *Dispensation of the Church*. This entire period is referred to as “the last days” (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2). It was actually a mystery that God kept secret throughout the Old Testament and revealed after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ephesians 3:2-9). In some ways this is a parenthetical dispensation because it is in the form of a mystery and is sandwiched between the two Jewish dispensations of Law and the Millennium.

The terms “Kingdom of God” and “Kingdom of Heaven” are predominant in the Dispensation of Grace; through the many blessings and promises of the New Covenant, saints from this period can enter and inherit God’s Kingdom, the New Jerusalem [see *Revelation 21:2* notes on p. 126]. So great is the grace offered those living in this dispensation that Jesus said the least in the kingdom would be greater than the greatest saint (John the Baptist) from all of the preceding dispensations:

I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

– Matthew 11:11

As we will see, this “greater grace” available to saints in the Dispensation of Grace comes through the baptism in the Holy Spirit; this blessing had not yet been given during John the Baptist’s time [see John 7:37-39], so he was unable to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus clearly taught that one must be “born of water and the Spirit” to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

### **A New and Better Covenant**

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As already discussed in the section titled *Examples in Scripture* on p. 4, of all the various dispensations, the most distinguishable differences are seen between those of law and grace. This contrast is seen in numerous Scriptures in the New Testament, particularly in the books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. In every case, we see that the Dispensation of Grace (and its New Covenant) is far superior to the Dispensation of Law (Old Covenant):

For the *law* was given through Moses; *grace* and truth came through Jesus Christ.

– John 1:17

## Dispensation of Grace: The Church Age

<sup>14</sup>You are not under *law*, but under *grace*. <sup>15</sup>What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!

— Romans 6:14-15

<sup>1</sup>In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.

— Hebrews 1:1-2

God made major changes in the priesthood, the law, and the covenant as He transitioned from the Dispensation of Law to the Dispensation of Grace. The Old Covenant was now obsolete and being discarded, being replaced with a New Covenant that was superior in every way. Note in all of the Scriptures that follow that it was *God* introducing the changes:

<sup>11</sup>If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood [Dispensation of Law] (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? <sup>12</sup>For when there is a *change of the priesthood*, there must also be a *change of the law*. <sup>13</sup>He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. <sup>14</sup>For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests... <sup>18</sup>The former regulation is *set aside* because it was weak and useless <sup>19</sup>(for the law made nothing perfect), and a *better hope is introduced*, by which we draw near to God.

— Hebrews 7:11-19

<sup>6</sup>But the ministry Jesus has received is as *superior* to theirs as the covenant of which He is mediator is *superior* to the old one, and it is founded on *better promises*. <sup>7</sup>For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. <sup>8</sup>But God found fault with the people and said: “The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>9</sup>It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers... <sup>11</sup>No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord’ ”... <sup>13</sup>By calling this covenant ‘new,’ He has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.”

— Hebrews 8:6-13

<sup>1</sup>The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. <sup>2</sup>If it could, would they not have *stopped* being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. <sup>3</sup>But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, <sup>4</sup>because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said:

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"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You prepared for Me..." <sup>9</sup>Then He said, 'Here I am, I have come to do Your will.' He *sets aside the first* to establish the second... <sup>14</sup>because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

— Hebrews 10:1-14

### ***Blessings and Changes under the New Covenant***

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There are at least four major changes listed below that God instituted under the New Covenant, which made it far "superior" to the Mosaic Covenant of Law. We will examine each one briefly:

1. Regeneration
  2. Justification by faith
  3. Baptism and life in the Holy Spirit
  4. The Church
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#### **1. Regeneration**

The New Covenant gets to the "heart" of man's problem—his heart! The Law of Moses dealt with externals, but in the Dispensation of Grace, God changes man on the inside. At Sinai, the Law was inscribed on tablets of stone because God knew the people's hearts were hard like stone. In the New Covenant, God promises to change the very heart of man through an experience called "regeneration" or "new birth." These promises are central to the covenant:

<sup>26</sup>I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup>And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws.

— Ezekiel 36:26-27

<sup>33</sup>"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. <sup>34</sup>No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more"

— Jeremiah 31:33-34

## **Dispensation of Grace: The Church Age**

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about man's need for regeneration. Man doesn't simply need to reform or try a little harder—he "must be born again!" This is a radical, miraculous transformation that results in a new life:

<sup>3</sup>In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." <sup>4</sup>"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely, he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" <sup>5</sup>Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. <sup>7</sup>You should not be surprised at My saying, 'You must be born again.'"

—John 3:3-7

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul makes an even bolder statement, explaining that through the gospel of Christ, we become "new creations":

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; the old has gone, the new has come!

### **2. Justification by faith**

We saw in the section titled *The Law Is Added* on p. 54, that righteousness based on the letter of the Law was impossible. This was not only because the Law was a mere shadow of the true, but because man in his unregenerate state could not please God. The Law revealed God's righteousness (and what He expects and requires of man), but was never intended to make man righteous. On the contrary, it was given to condemn man and show him just how hopelessly lost in sin he was. The Law foreshadowed a better day when the sinner would be justified (made righteous) by faith in God's grace and empowered to live a life pleasing to God by the Holy Spirit.

Paul boldly preached to his fellow Jews that justification was impossible under the Law of Moses—it was only possible through faith in Jesus Christ:

<sup>38</sup>"Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. <sup>39</sup>Through Him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."

—Acts 13:38-39

In the section titled *Misuse and Erroneous Application of the Mosaic Covenant Today* on p. 62, we discussed the major controversy that arose in the Early Church over whether or not Gentiles were required to observe the Law. The apostles understood that those who were insisting that Gentiles had to observe the Law in order to be saved were undermining the very foundation of the Christian faith—justification by faith through grace and grace alone. Peter's answer to the question was quite clear:

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

<sup>10</sup>"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

— Acts 15:10-11

In 2 Corinthians 3:3-11, Paul summarizes the results of observing the Law: death and condemnation; the New Covenant, on the other hand, he calls the "ministry that brings righteousness." And throughout his epistle to the Romans [see Romans chapters 3-12], Paul speaks extensively about justification by faith, contrasting the "works of the law" (man's attempt to attain God's righteousness through his own works) with a righteousness which comes by faith. Paul is adamant that no one can be made righteous by observing the Law; God's righteousness comes only through the law of faith in Christ:

<sup>19</sup>Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup>Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup>But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup>This righteousness from God comes *through faith in Jesus Christ* to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are *justified freely by His grace* through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup>God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—<sup>26</sup>He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup>Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a *man is justified by faith apart from observing the law*. <sup>29</sup>Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, <sup>30</sup>since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

— Romans 3:19-31

In Romans Chapter 4, Paul continues his teaching on justification by faith, using the example of Abraham to show how he was justified before God simply by believing, long before he was ever circumcised. God's promises came to him, not through the Law, but by faith so that it would be by grace:

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. <sup>10</sup>Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but *before!* <sup>11</sup>And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the

## Dispensation of Grace: The Church Age

*righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.* So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. <sup>12</sup>And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. <sup>13</sup>It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup>because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. <sup>16</sup>Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.

— Romans 4:9-16

Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel lived by the Law, but could not attain the righteousness of God, because they sought it through their own works and self-righteousness:

<sup>30</sup>What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. <sup>32</sup>Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone...” <sup>33</sup>Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

— Romans 9:30-32; 10:3

Christ's death brought an end to man's futile effort at attaining God's righteousness through works, opening the way for the sinner to call on the Lord and be justified by faith. All he has to do in order to be saved is confess with his mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in his heart that God raised Him from the dead. Jesus is the “end of the Law,” establishing a righteousness and salvation through faith alone:

<sup>4</sup>Christ is the *end of the law* so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. <sup>5</sup>Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.” <sup>6</sup>But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup>“or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup>But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: <sup>9</sup>That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. <sup>11</sup>As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame.”

— Romans 10:4-11

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

There are numerous passages in the New Testament emphasizing the fact that salvation is on the basis of grace alone, and not the works of the Law. Grace is defined as “the unmerited favor of God.” Salvation is a gift of God which we cannot earn through any goodness or works of our own. Consider the following:

<sup>8</sup>For it is by *grace* you have been saved, through faith – and this *not from yourselves*, it is the *gift* of God – <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast.

– *Ephesians 2:8-9*

And if by *grace*, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

– *Romans 11:6*

Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

– *Galatians 2:16*

### 3. Baptism and life in the Holy Spirit

The Old Testament prophets (Joel 2:28-29; Isaiah 44:2-3), as well as John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 3:16; Acts 1:4-5) all spoke of a time when God would “pour out” and even “baptize” people with His Holy Spirit. “Baptism” means “to immerse or fully dip into something.” Thus, when he is “baptized” with the Holy Spirit, the believer is fully saturated or “soaked” in the Spirit. Through this experience, the Holy Spirit takes up personal residence in each believer, making them His very temple (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20). A variety of expressions are used in Scripture to refer to this glorious New Covenant experience, which was always confirmed with the initial evidence of tongues:

1. “Filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4)
2. “Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38; 8:17)
3. “The Holy Spirit came on them” (Acts 10:44-46; 19:6)
4. “Streams of living water will flow from within” (John 7:37-39)
5. “The Father will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – The Spirit of truth” (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7)

This new “outpouring” or “infilling” of the Spirit was first experienced on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and marks the beginning of the Dispensation of Grace. In John 7:37-39, Jesus said that such an experience had never been known before – in no previous dispensation had the Holy Spirit ever been given in this way – it would come “later” after Jesus had been glorified:

## Dispensation of Grace: The Church Age

<sup>37</sup>On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” <sup>39</sup>By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were *later* to receive. *Up to that time the Spirit had not been given*, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

With the Baptism in the Spirit came a diversity of gifts, manifestations and ministries within the Church (1 Corinthians 12). The book of Acts documents this new “ministration of the Spirit” that so dominates the Dispensation of Grace [see *Abraham’s Encounter with Melchizedek* on p. 49 for more on ministry by the anointing].

One of the central features of this dispensation is the personal ministry of the Holy Spirit in and to every believer in Jesus Christ. A key promise in Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning the New Covenant was the supernatural work of God in man’s heart by His Spirit, “moving” him to fulfill the requirements of the law, not through his own strength and effort, but by the power of the indwelling Spirit. Because of the emphasis upon the Holy Spirit, this age has also been called the “Dispensation of the Spirit.”

And I will put My Spirit in you and *move you* to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws.

—Ezekiel 36:27

In Romans Chapter 8, Paul speaks about two different laws: The Law of Moses and the Law of the Spirit. He explains how, by walking and living in the Spirit (the Law of the Spirit), the New Covenant believer fulfills the righteous requirements that were demanded under the Law of Moses:

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>because through Christ Jesus the *law of the Spirit* of life set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so, He condemned sin in sinful man, <sup>4</sup>in order that the *righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us*, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires... <sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, <sup>14</sup>because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

—Romans 8:1-5, 13-14

Jesus came as the mediator of a better covenant. He told those who followed Him that their righteousness had to exceed that of the Pharisees (those who kept the smallest details of the Law). He never advocated breaking the Ten Commandments; in fact, when the rich young ruler asked Him what he had to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him to keep the Commandments:

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<sup>16</sup>Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” <sup>17</sup>...”If you want to enter life, *obey the commandments.*” <sup>18</sup>“Which ones?” the man inquired. Jesus replied, “‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, <sup>19</sup>honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” <sup>20</sup>“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” <sup>21</sup>Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me.” <sup>22</sup>When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

— Matthew 19:16-22

Jesus wasn’t telling the young man that he could be saved by keeping the Law. Rather, He was using the Law to bring conviction to his heart and show him how woefully far away from salvation he truly was. Interestingly, Christ quoted five of the Commandments that deal primarily with man’s treatment of his fellow man, summarizing them with “love your neighbor as yourself.” He did not quote “do not covet” or “you shall have no other gods before Me.” Jesus masterfully exposed the young man’s covetousness and how he loved his money more than God or others (the poor). The important point to note is that eternal life *is* gained by obeying God commandments and fulfilling all that the Law required—but not by our own efforts or good works.

God didn’t abolish the requirements of the Law under this new dispensation—they remain in force; but now, through regeneration and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, He enables and empowers man to fulfill the “spirit” of the Law and not just the letter. The standard is actually much higher now. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus repeatedly contrasted the Law (“You have heard that it was said...”) with the New Covenant (“But I tell you...”):

<sup>20</sup>For I tell you that unless your righteousness *surpasses* that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>21</sup>You *have heard that it was said* to the people long ago, “Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” <sup>22</sup>But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment... <sup>27</sup>You *have heard that it was said*, “Do not commit adultery.” <sup>28</sup>But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart... <sup>38</sup>You *have heard that it was said*, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.” <sup>39</sup>But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup>And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup>If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. <sup>43</sup>You *have heard that it was said*, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” <sup>44</sup>But I tell you: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.” He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain

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on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup>Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

— Matthew 5:20-22, 27-28, 38-48

Jesus was referring to the true requirement of the Law, which was to love God and your neighbor:

<sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup>Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

— Matthew 22:36-40

Paul confirmed this in his writings, saying that *love* fulfills the entire Law:

The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

— Galatians 5:14

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, *love is the fulfillment of the law*.

— Romans 13:10

### **4. The Church**

The Church was first announced by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 16:18, was purchased by the shedding of His blood on Calvary (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:26-27), and began after His resurrection and ascension at Pentecost when, in accordance with His promise (Acts 1:5), individual believers were for the first time baptized with the Holy Spirit into a unified spiritual organism called the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Colossians 2:19).

In this dispensation, God is no longer dealing with a nation (Israel), but rather with men as individuals. Every individual can have a personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ and he does not have to go through any priest or religious system to receive atonement for his sins. Israel, as a nation, has been placed on a “back burner” because of their blindness, but individual Jews can be saved just the same as Gentiles until this dispensation ends. The “Church of God” is a distinct body made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and enjoys many blessings that neither of these groups ever enjoyed separately; the saved of this dispensation are afforded gifts and graces that God has not given to those living in any other dispensation! Even those saved in future dispensations will not have the precious treasures that the Body of Christ now possesses.

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Because there was such a drastic change from the Dispensation of Law to the Dispensation of Grace, we find a rather lengthy transition period from one to the other. While Jesus was here on earth, the Dispensation of Law was still in effect and the Jews were still God's covenant people. Even after the Day of Pentecost, it took some years for Jesus' Jewish followers to fully embrace the sweeping changes that had taken place [see Acts 15:1-22 and *God Interrupts the Dispensation* on p. 59]. For centuries, the Jews had been God's chosen people; Jesus was a Jewish Messiah; therefore, the Jewish believers assumed that the Church would be an exclusively Jewish Church. Note the following reasons why the early Jewish Christians assumed that Christianity was to be a strictly *Jewish* religion:

1. Jesus was a Jew born under the Law; He lived under the Law and fulfilled every requirement of the Law [see Galatians 4:4-5; Matthew 5:17].
2. Jesus was called the "King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2; 27:37).
3. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:21-24). Paul later wrote that salvation is always for the Jews first [see Romans 1:16; 2:9-10].
4. Prior to the Cross, Jesus' ministry was almost exclusively to the Jews: "These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.'" (Matthew 10:5-6)
5. In Matthew 15:24-26, Jesus emphatically told a Gentile woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." He then told her that "it is not right to take the children's [Jews] bread and toss it to their dogs [Gentiles]."
6. In Romans 15:8, Paul confirms the fact that Christ came first for the circumcision (Jews): "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers."
7. Jesus chose twelve Jewish disciples, on the Day of Pentecost 120 Jews were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and the First Church in Jerusalem was a Jewish church for the first eight years until the Gospel finally went out to Samaria;
8. Christ's final declaration about Himself in Revelation 22:16 tells us that He is and always will be a Jew: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David."

As God began revealing the mystery of the Church (that Gentiles were now fellow-heirs with the Jews) to the Jewish believers in the First Century, they struggled with such a new and foreign concept. We take these things for granted today, but for centuries, the Jews had been God's chosen people, and no one else! Gentiles had been "excluded" from any participation in

## Dispensation of Grace: The Church Age

God's promises and covenants. It must have sounded like heresy to the early Jewish believers when Paul wrote that God had broken down the barrier between the uncircumcised Gentiles and the Jews, making "the two one," joining them together as fellow citizens in "one body":

<sup>2</sup>Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup>In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup>This mystery is that through the gospel the *Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body*, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

— Ephesians 3:2-6

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, remember that *formerly* you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—<sup>12</sup>remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, *excluded* from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup>For He Himself is our peace, who has *made the two one* and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup>by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself *one new man out of the two*, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup>and in this *one body* to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility... <sup>19</sup>Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

— Ephesians 2:11-19

In spite of Christ's commission to go beyond Jerusalem to "Samaria and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8), it was only after eight years, when the Jewish believers were scattered from Jerusalem by a great persecution, that they finally (and reluctantly) went to Samaria (Acts 8; 11:19). And God had to appear to Peter in a vision to convince him to go to the Gentiles with the gospel (Acts 10). This explains why it created such a stir when the Gentiles in Cornelius' house were baptized in water and in the Holy Spirit!

<sup>44</sup>While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. <sup>45</sup>The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were *astonished* that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out *even on the Gentiles*. <sup>46</sup>For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup>"Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." <sup>48</sup>So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

— Acts 10:44-48

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In Acts 11:1-18, we read how Peter came under sharp criticism from the other apostles and brothers for going to the Gentiles with the gospel. It was only after Peter gave them a thorough explanation that their objections ceased:

<sup>1</sup>The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup>So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers *criticized him* <sup>3</sup>and said, “You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.” <sup>4</sup>Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened... <sup>15</sup>“As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ <sup>17</sup>So if God gave them the *same gift as He gave us*, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?” <sup>18</sup>When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, God has granted *even the Gentiles* repentance unto life.”

—Acts 11:1-4, 15-18

And Peter further explained in his testimony before the Jerusalem Council that God had accepted the Gentiles, giving them the same gift of the Holy Spirit He had given His Jewish followers on the Day of Pentecost. God was now making “no distinction” between Jew and Gentile:

<sup>8</sup>God, who knows the heart, showed that He accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as He did to us. <sup>9</sup>He made *no distinction* between us and them, for He purified their hearts by faith.

—Acts 15:8-9

By A.D. 70, the Jewish temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans. This literally brought an end to the Old Covenant, Levitical priesthood, sacrifices, etc.—that which was “obsolete and aging” had now disappeared (Hebrews 8:13). The transition period between Law and Grace was finally over! The Jews were then scattered throughout the earth, and for nearly 2,000 years, they have had no temple, priesthood or animal sacrifices. But that will soon change at the end of this dispensation, when the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem and sacrifices are resumed during the seven-year Tribulation. God will again turn His attention to Israel [see *God Interrupts the Dispensation* on p. 59].

### ***Responsibilities under the New Covenant of Grace***

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Because so much more has been offered in this dispensation than in any other, God will require much more also:

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, *much more will be asked.*

—Luke 12:48

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<sup>1</sup>We must pay *more careful attention*, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. <sup>2</sup>For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment [under the Law], <sup>3</sup>how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? [Dispensation of Grace] This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. <sup>4</sup>God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will."

— Hebrews 2:1-4

[See also Hebrews 10:26-31]

Here is a list of some of the *responsibilities for each believer* in the Dispensation of Grace:

1. Repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; live and walk by faith (Acts 2:38; John 3:3).
2. Follow Christ in Water Baptism (Acts 2:38; John 3:5).
3. Be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39; John 3:5), allowing Him to lead, guide and direct every thought and action.
4. Discipleship: Join a church in fellowship, prayer, Bible Study, etc. (Acts 2:41-47).
5. Take up the Cross, allowing the Holy Spirit to crucify the carnal/sinful desires and nature; present ourselves as living sacrifices for God's service and separate ourselves from the world (Romans 12:1-2).
6. Evangelize by preaching the gospel of the grace of God to every creature and making disciples (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15).
7. Watch, pray and prepare as the Bride of Christ for His imminent return.

## ***The End of the Dispensation: The Rapture***

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This dispensation began in a unique way and so it will end. It began with an unprecedented "outpouring" or "Baptism" in the Holy Spirit, where the Third Person of the Trinity took up personal residence on earth in believers, making them His temple [see 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20]. It will end with the Lord Himself evacuating the Church and closing the era of His Spirit being "poured out upon all flesh."

Understanding the distinction between God's program for Israel and His program for the Church helps us to clearly see why the Rapture *must* occur before the start of the Tribulation. As studied in the section titled *The Church* on p. 77, it was only in the Dispensation of the Church that God made Jew and Gentile one in the Body of Christ [see Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:27-28]. Prior to that, in the Dispensation of Israel under Law, as well as afterward in the Dispensation

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of the Tribulation, God deals with Israel as a separate and distinct people. It is obvious, then, that the Church must be removed before God can deal specifically with Israel as outlined in Daniel's prophetic seventieth week [see *Daniel's 70th Week* (*Daniel 9:24-27*) on p. 104].

From the call of Abraham until the birth of the Church, God divided the human race into two groups: Jews and Gentiles. However, from the birth of the Church until today, God has divided the world into *three* groups: 1) unbelieving Jews; 2) unbelieving Gentiles; and 3) the Church. Paul lists these three groups in 1 Corinthians 10:32 (NLT):

Don't give offense to *Jews* or *Gentiles* or the *church of God*.

Only in this present Dispensation of the Church do believing Jews and Gentiles become one in "the church of God."

In 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7, Paul refers to a "Restrainer" who continues to hold down or suppress the man of lawlessness (the antichrist) until He (the Restrainer) is taken away or removed:

<sup>6</sup>And now you know what is *holding* ["restraining" – NKJV] him [the antichrist] back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. <sup>7</sup>For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the One who now *holds it back* ["restrains" – NKJV] will continue to do so till He is taken out of the way.

Obviously, this Restrainer has supernatural power and exerts a worldwide influence. It seems clear that this is the Holy Spirit in the Church [see 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Revelation 22:17] who is taken out of the way at the time of the Rapture. Obviously, the Holy Spirit is omnipresent and cannot literally be "removed" from the earth—He will simply operate in the way He did prior to Pentecost.

### ***What Happens in the Rapture?***

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The Bible describes a number of details concerning the Rapture, as listed below:

- 1. The Rapture is called A mystery.** Paul referred to the Rapture as a "mystery" (1 Corinthians 15:51-54), meaning it was a new truth not known or understood previously.
- 2. The saints will be caught up alive to meet Christ in the air.** The event where Christ comes for the Church, instantly catching up living believers to meet Him in the air, and translates them into immortal bodies without experiencing physical death. Two partial examples of this mystery are seen in the Old Testament in the cases of Enoch and Elijah. They were both taken directly to heaven without experiencing death, but have not experienced the transformation in their bodies that will take place in the Rapture. The word "rapture" comes

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from a Latin translation of the Greek word *harpazo*, which is translated “caught up” in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. It literally means “to seize” or “to snatch away”:

<sup>15</sup>According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>After that we who are still alive and are left will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds *to meet the Lord in the air*. And so, we will be with the Lord forever.

– 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

**3. The Rapture will be sudden and secret.** Jesus and the apostles taught that the Rapture would occur suddenly and without warning, taking many by surprise:

<sup>51</sup>Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—<sup>52</sup>in a flash, *in the twinkling of an eye*, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

– 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

[Jesus]: <sup>36</sup>“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup>As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup>and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”

– Matthew 24:36-39

**4. The Rapture will be selective—some are taken, some are left behind.** Jesus also taught that when the Rapture occurs, one would be taken while another was left:

<sup>40</sup>Two men will be in the field; *one will be taken and the other left*. <sup>41</sup>Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; *one will be taken and the other left*. <sup>42</sup>Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

– Matthew 24:40-42

Only those watching and ready will be taken [see Luke 17:34-36; Matthew 24:44-51; Hebrews 9:28]; God removed Noah and Lot *before* judgment came. There is a very high standard for those who will be taken in the Rapture; here are some of the qualifications mentioned in Scripture:

- a. They are the Bride of Christ—holy, married to Him, not having any spot, blemish or wrinkle (Revelation 19:7-8; Ephesians 5:27).
- b. They belong totally to Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 15:23).

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- c. Christ *is* their life (Col. 3:1-4).
- d. They are one with the Spirit (Revelation 22:17).
- e. They are sanctified through and through, their whole spirit, soul and body kept blameless until the coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13; 5:23; Revelation 3:4).
- f. They will be presented perfect in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

NOTE: Why would Jesus and Paul warn believers to watch and prepare for Christ's return if everyone was automatically going in the Rapture? Parables like the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the Unprepared Servants (Luke 12:35-48) or the Unprepared Wedding Guest (Matthew 22:1-14) become totally meaningless.

Modern teachers and Christian films have popularized the view that *all* believers will be taken in the Rapture. They take issue with the idea that the Rapture will be selective. Indeed, we truly hope their view is right, but passages such as the following found in Matthew Chapter 7 do suggest the opposite:

<sup>13</sup>"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. <sup>14</sup>But *small* is the gate and *narrow* the road that leads to life, and *only a few find it...* <sup>21</sup>Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *only* he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name, drive out demons and perform many miracles?" <sup>23</sup>Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers!"

— Matthew 7:13-14, 21-23

**5. The physical bodies of those who are caught up will be changed.** Those saints who are taken in the Rapture will receive a resurrected body like that of Jesus. He had a body of "flesh and bones" that could be seen; He was able to eat food [see Luke 24:36-43; John 20:27]; and He could vanish and change His physical appearance [see John 20:19; Luke 24:31]. In 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, Paul enumerates the kinds of transformations that will be experienced instantaneously at the time of the Rapture:

- a. The perishable body will become imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:53).
- b. The mortal body will become immortal (1 Corinthians 15:53).
- c. The vile, dishonorable body will become glorious (1 Corinthians 15:43; Philippians 3:20-21).
- d. The weak body will become a powerful body (1 Corinthians 15:43).
- e. The natural body will become a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:44).

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### 6. The saints who are raptured will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive rewards:

<sup>9</sup>So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

– 2 Corinthians 5:9-10

It seems clear from this and other passages of Scripture, that only believers appear before the Judgment Seat [Greek *bema*: earthly *bemas* were raised platforms on which judges sat to make speeches or decide cases]. The purpose of this judgment is to examine each believer's works in order to determine rewards; their salvation is not in question. Paul refers to this same judgment in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, one that concerns only those (believers) who have built on the Foundation, Christ:

<sup>10</sup>By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>If any man *builds on this foundation* using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup>his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will *test the quality of each man's work*. <sup>14</sup>If what he has built survives, he will *receive his reward*. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; *he himself will be saved*, but only as one escaping through the flames.

Note in this passage, that all are saved—but some receive rewards, while others suffer loss [see 2 John 8]. This, therefore, makes a clear distinction between the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Great White Throne Judgment [see *The Great White Throne Judgment* on p. 116]. The Great White Throne Judgment occurs at the end of the Millennium, where both the saved and unsaved face judgment. The Judgment Seat seems to be only for those who participate in the first resurrection [see *Reigning with Christ for a Thousand Years* on p. 115], while the Great White Throne is for all those in the second resurrection.

The Judgment Seat has been likened to a High School or college graduation: some receive special awards for outstanding achievements and accomplishments, but all receive diplomas! There may be a measure of disappointment for some that they could have worked harder, but everyone leaves rejoicing because they graduated. If we judge ourselves and endure God's chastenings now, there will be no judgment later [see 1 Corinthians 11:28-32; Hebrews 12:5-11]; judgment must begin now in the house of God [1 Peter 4:17-18]. Various honors and rewards will be given by Christ at His coming [see notes on *Revelation 22:12* on p. 138]. Many expressions are used in God's Word to describe these rewards:

- a. Crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:7-8)
- b. Crown of glory (1 Peter 5:2-4)

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- c. Crown of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 2 Corinthians 1:14)
- d. Crown of life (Revelation 2:10)
- e. An incorruptible crown that will last forever (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)

**7. The Rapture will be an escape from the Great Tribulation.** Jesus taught very clearly that those taken in the Rapture would be “able to escape” the coming Tribulation:

<sup>34</sup>“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day [the Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation] will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. <sup>35</sup>For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

—Luke 21:34-36

### ***Conclusion***

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God initiated sweeping and unprecedented changes in the Dispensation of Grace. The Old Covenant was replaced by a New Covenant; sinners were made righteous by faith, not by works; Jesus became the Great High Priest in a whole new order of ministry called “priesthood after the order of Melchizedek”; and the promise of the Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost. All of this ushered in the Golden Age of the Church.

The dispensation will end just as dramatically as it began, with the “snatching up” of the Church in the Rapture. Immediately after the Rapture, a new dispensation begins—a time of tribulation, bloodshed and horror that the world has never witnessed. We will understand why Jesus urged His followers to watch, pray, be careful and do all that they can in order to escape this dreadful time of judgment, wrath, and suffering. Next, we will look at the Dispensation of the Great Tribulation.

# DISPENSATION OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION (REVELATION 6-19)

<sup>15</sup>Therefore when you see the “ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,” spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), <sup>16</sup>then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>17</sup>Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. <sup>18</sup>And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. <sup>19</sup>But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! <sup>20</sup>And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.

— Matthew 24:15-22 (NKJV)

**J**ESUS AND THE PROPHETS SPOKE ABOUT A TIME of unprecedented distress and tribulation that would one day come upon the whole earth. This “great tribulation” would be unlike anything witnessed in any of the previous dispensations.

There are numerous passages in Scripture that speak about end times events—future happenings that will take place one day. The study of these last things or events predicted in the Bible is called *eschatology*. There is a vast and confusing array of interpretations on this subject, particularly on the order and chronology of the Rapture, The Great Tribulation, and the Millennium. Before proceeding any further, it is important to understand certain guidelines that we need to follow when interpreting the Scriptures that will help us to avoid erroneous interpretations and doctrinal views.

## ***Various Ways of Interpreting Scripture***

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There are two distinctly different ways of interpreting the Bible, known as *exegesis* and *eisegesis*. Exegesis draws the meaning of the text from itself, simply allowing the normal meaning of the words, grammar and context to speak for itself. Simply stated, exegesis is a literal interpretation of the Scriptures. Wherever possible, we believe this is the correct and safest way to understand the Word of God. Because prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming were fulfilled literally, it makes good sense to expect prophecies of His second coming to be interpreted literally as well. Eisegesis reads into the text an allegorical or mythical meaning that is different from the natural,

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literal meaning of the passage [this method is often used by Amillennialists, Postmillennialists and Post-Tribulationists, as described below]. Such spiritualizing of Scripture can be very dangerous, leading to a loss of all objectivity.

Here are some guidelines that will enable us to achieve sound Biblical interpretation:

1. Begin with the clear statements of Scripture that apply to a particular truth or doctrine, using those to interpret parables, allegories and obscure passages: allow Scripture to interpret Scripture.
2. Interpret by the literal, grammatical and historical method.
3. Each word should be interpreted in the light of its normal, customary usage that was accepted at the time it was written.
4. Each sentence should be interpreted according to the rules of grammar normally accepted when the document was written.
5. Each passage should be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural environment.
6. Literal interpretation does not mean that there is no recognition of allegories, parables or figures of speech in the Scriptures—it simply means to take each word or passage in its plain, literal sense unless the context clearly demands otherwise:

“When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.” – Dr. David L. Cooper

7. NOTE: Most false doctrine and heresy can be traced to a failure to follow one or more of these principles.

It is helpful to look at several examples in the Gospels to see how Jesus interpreted Old Testament Scripture:

1. Matthew 22:41-46:

<sup>41</sup>While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, <sup>42</sup>“What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?” “The son of David,” they replied. <sup>43</sup>He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls Him ‘Lord’? For he says, <sup>44</sup>“The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies under Your feet.’” <sup>45</sup>If then David calls Him ‘Lord,’ how can He be his son?” <sup>46</sup>No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

## Dispensation of the Great Tribulation

Here, Jesus interprets Psalm 110 literally in order to prove that Messiah had to be both God and man. Although the literal interpretation didn't make sense to the Pharisees' natural minds at the time, Jesus was, nevertheless, both "Son" and "Lord!"

### 2. Matthew 22:31-32:

<sup>31</sup>But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you,  
<sup>32</sup>"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.

In this instance, Jesus interpreted the passage grammatically, placing emphasis on the fact that the verb was in the present tense: "I am [not "I was"] the God of Abraham..." to prove the truth of resurrection.

### 3. Luke 4:16-21:

<sup>16</sup>On the Sabbath day He [Jesus] went into the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. <sup>17</sup>The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup>"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup>Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, <sup>21</sup>and He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus recognized a dual fulfillment of the prophecy recorded in Isaiah 61:1-2. The first part of it refers to Messiah's ministry on earth, while the second part speaks about the future Day of the Lord. Here, He only quoted verse 1 and the first half of verse 2, for the second part of verse 2 speaks about the "day of vengeance of our God." Had He read that, He could not have concluded saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

## ***Various Views Concerning the Millennium***

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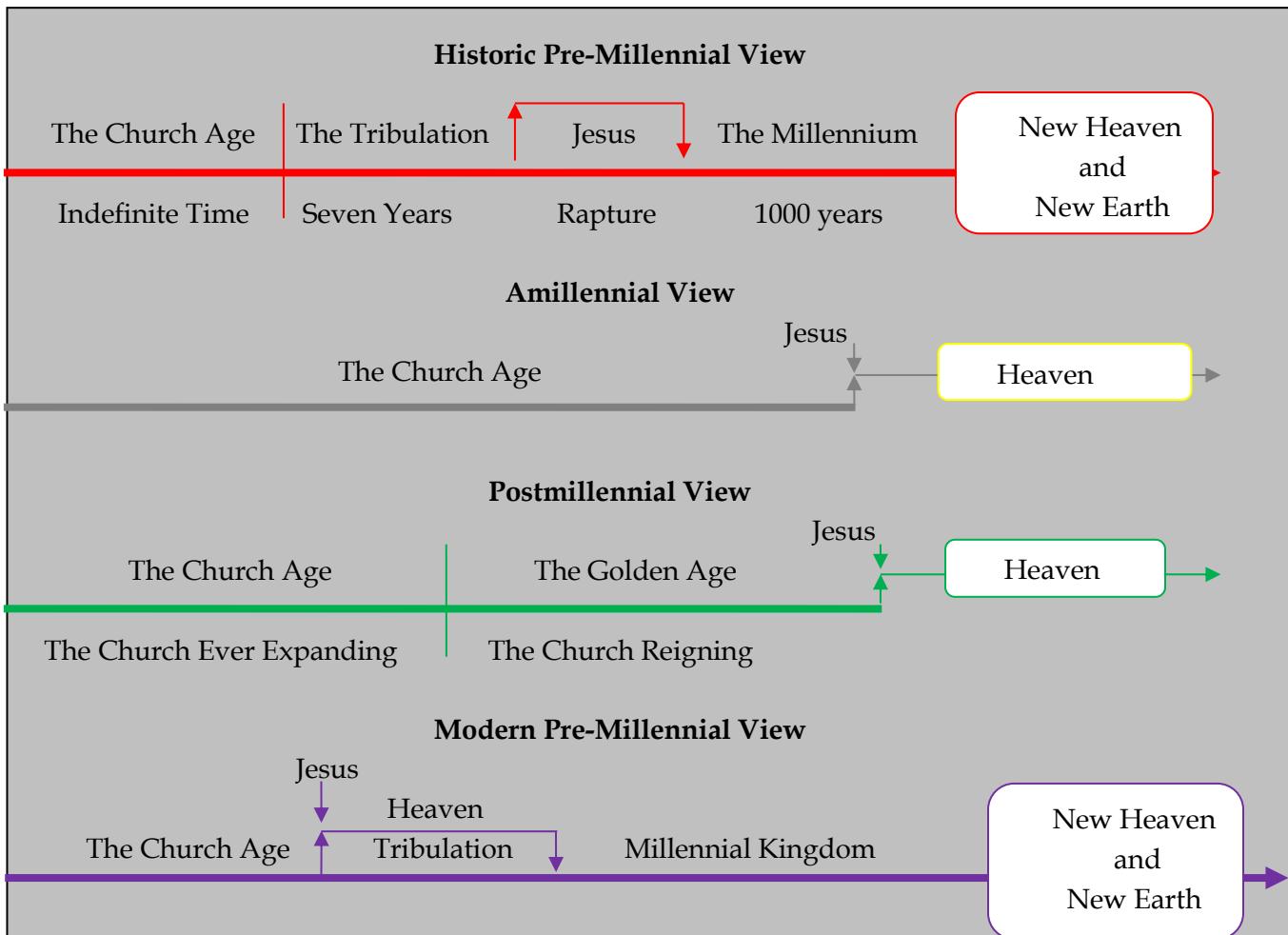
There are a number of views concerning the Millennium [see *Figure 1. Various Views Concerning the Millennium* on p. 90], as summarized below:

1. **\*Premillennial View** – Followers of this view believe in a period of seven literal years of worldwide Tribulation which terminates with the visible and personal return of Jesus Christ; He will then set up a literal 1,000-year earthly kingdom over which He will rule where mortals will repopulate a renewed earth; at the end of the 1,000 years, there will be a Great White Throne Judgment where all unbelievers of all ages past and those who did not participate in the "first resurrection" will be judged; the eternal Kingdom begins at

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that time. [NOTE: All pre-, mid-, and post-Tribulationists adhere to this view as does the author].

**Figure 1. Various Views Concerning the Millennium**



2. **Postmillennial View** – Followers of this view believe that the Kingdom of God is being extended in the world now through the preaching of the Gospel and the world will eventually be Christianized. The Church will overcome the world and bring the millennial period of peace and a perfect environment to earth on its own; the Messiah will come at the end of history and receive the kingdom from the Church. This is followed immediately by the general resurrection and final judgment, and then heaven and hell for all eternity. [NOTE: This view was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but was seriously shaken after World War I and especially after World War II; it requires

## **Dispensation of the Great Tribulation**

gross mishandling of prophetic Scriptures where allegorical interpretation is used extensively].

3. **Amillennial View** – This literally means “no millennium”; followers of this view believe that Satan was bound when Jesus went to the Cross and that we are now in the millennial period; since it has already been 2,000 years since Jesus’ death, the 1,000 years are not to be taken literally; there is no specific period of Tribulation, no fulfillment of Daniel’s 70th week, and no millennial kingdom; Jesus will simply come at the end of history, judge all people, believers and unbelievers, and start eternity. [Like the postmillennial view, this view also requires extensive allegorical interpretation of prophetic Scriptures]. The Reformation (Luther, Calvin, etc.) held to this view, first expounded by Augustine in A.D. 400, and didn’t question it or develop much doctrine on the subject. It continues to be the favored view of both the Roman Catholic Church and many reformed Protestant denominations. The amillennialist believes that the Church has replaced Israel in God’s plans (Replacement Theology). In other words, the Church now inherits all the spiritual promises and prophecies of Old Testament Israel. In this view, Isaiah’s beautiful prophecy of the bear and the cow lying together and the lion eating straw like the ox simply doesn’t mean what it says at all! However, if the eleventh chapter of Isaiah cannot be taken literally, what proof do we have that the magnificent fifty-third chapter should not likewise be allegorized away?

### ***Various Views Concerning the Rapture and the Tribulation***

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There are basically three different views in the Church today concerning the order in which the Rapture and Tribulation take place:

1. **\*Pre-Tribulation Rapture** – the Church will be raptured before the Tribulation begins, to be with Christ in heaven and to return with Him at the end of the Tribulation at His Second Coming (clearly the view of this book).
2. **Mid-Tribulation Rapture** – the Church will go through the first half (3½ years) of the Tribulation, and will be raptured and taken to heaven at the midpoint.
3. **Post-Tribulation Rapture** – the Church will go through the entire Tribulation and be raptured simultaneously with Jesus’ return to the earth in the Second Coming.

Why are there so many different views about end times events? We know that “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33), but we sure seem to be mixed up! There are several possible answers to this question. Firstly, God seems to have deliberately made this issue difficult so that only the most serious, diligent study and comprehensive knowledge of the whole spectrum of Biblical prophecy can begin to resolve it. Secondly, just as God kept many of the mysteries of the Church Dispensation hidden from those in previous ages [see Ephesians

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3:3-9], so He deliberately “sealed” many of the truths concerning the events of the Tribulation until the time of their fulfillment begins to draw near:

<sup>1</sup>“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. <sup>2</sup>Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup>Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. <sup>4</sup>But you, Daniel, *close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.* Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”

—Daniel 12:1-4

And finally, Jesus compared His return to three different “watches” in Luke 12:35-40. In reality, as we will see, He *does* appear three times – before, in the middle of, and at the end of the Tribulation, so all three views *are* in a sense correct! Does it even matter which view is correct? Absolutely! What we believe concerning these things *does* matter. As we will see, our view of the Rapture and end times has enormous consequences.

### ***What Will the Great Tribulation Be Like?***

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Throughout the ages, God has sent various judgments upon the earth to punish individuals, cities, nations, and, on one occasion, He judged the whole earth with the Flood in Noah’s time. But both the Old and New Testaments speak of a time of unprecedented trouble in the last days that is unlike any other. The prophet Daniel, as well as Christ Himself, stated that there has never been anything like the Great Tribulation in past history, nor will there ever be in time to come:

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.

—Daniel 12:1

<sup>15</sup>So when you see standing in the holy place “the abomination that causes desolation,” spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—<sup>16</sup>then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>17</sup>Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. <sup>18</sup>Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. <sup>19</sup>How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! <sup>20</sup>Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. <sup>21</sup>For then there will be *great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the*

## Dispensation of the Great Tribulation

*world until now – and never to be equaled again.* <sup>22</sup>If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

– Matthew 24:15-22

The Great Tribulation will be a time of horrible distress that encompasses “the ends of the earth!” As mentioned earlier, the only other judgment similar to the Tribulation in this regard was the Flood. Jeremiah prophesied about a time when God would bring charges against “all mankind” – obviously this prediction has not yet been fulfilled:

<sup>30</sup>“Now prophesy all these words against them and say to them: “The LORD will roar from on high; He will thunder from His holy dwelling and roar mightily against His land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against *all who live on the earth.* <sup>31</sup>The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the LORD will bring charges against the *nations;* He will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword,” declares the LORD. <sup>32</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the *ends of the earth.*” <sup>33</sup>At that time those slain by the LORD will be everywhere – from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be mourned or gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground.

– Jeremiah 25:30-33

Jesus also spoke about a terrible Day, the Great Tribulation, that would close in on all the inhabitants of the earth:

<sup>34</sup>“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. <sup>35</sup>for it will come upon *all those who live on the face of the whole earth.* <sup>36</sup>Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

– Luke 21:34-36

Since you have kept My command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial [Tribulation] that is going to *come upon the whole world* to test those who live on the earth.

– Revelation 3:10

We learn from Revelation Chapter 13 that during the Tribulation, a world dictator called the “beast” or antichrist will reign over the whole earth. He will have absolute control over the world economy and banking system. This beast will be a ruthless tyrant who demands all mankind to worship him, persecuting and killing all who refuse to do so. This man is the “little horn” spoken of in Daniel 7:8, 23-25:

<sup>8</sup>“While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another *horn*, a *little one*, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before

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it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully...  
<sup>23</sup>He gave me this explanation: ‘The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be *different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth*, trampling it down and crushing it.<sup>24</sup>The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.<sup>25</sup>He will *speak against the Most High and oppress His saints* and try to change the set times and the laws. *The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.*

The Great Tribulation, also known as the “Day of the Lord,” is designed by God to fulfill one great purpose: it is the great Day of God’s *wrath* [see Revelation 6:16-17; 11:18; 14:19; 15:1; 16:1, 19] and *judgment* [see Revelation 14:7; 16:5-7; 19:2], when He will punish the world for its wickedness. (It was never intended to be a time for purifying or perfecting the Church.) The prophet Isaiah clearly saw the events of the Great Tribulation when he prophesied the following:

<sup>6</sup>Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; it will come like *destruction* from the Almighty. <sup>7</sup>Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man’s heart will melt. <sup>8</sup>Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. <sup>9</sup>See, the *day of the LORD is coming*—a cruel day, with *wrath* and fierce anger—to make the land desolate and *destroy the sinners* within it. <sup>10</sup>The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. <sup>11</sup>I will *punish the world for its evil*, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless.

– *Isaiah 13:6-11*

Another purpose that God has for the Tribulation is to fulfill prophecy concerning Israel. A good example of this is Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week, prophesied in Daniel 9:24-27 [see *Daniel’s 70th Week* (*Daniel 9:24-27*) on p. 104].

### **When Will the Tribulation Take Place?**

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Just as God first removed the righteous before His judgment came in the days of Noah and Lot, so He will remove the Church before the Great Tribulation begins: “It will be *just like this* on the day the Son of Man is revealed.” Sadly, only a few were saved in the days of Noah (eight!) and in the days of Lot (three!); likewise, in the Rapture, some will be “taken” and some will be “left” to face the awful days of the Tribulation. Thus, the Tribulation commences immediately after the Rapture:

<sup>26</sup>“Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man.

<sup>27</sup>People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day

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Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. <sup>28</sup>"It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. <sup>29</sup>But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. <sup>30</sup>"it will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed. <sup>31</sup>On that day no one who is on the roof of his house, with his goods inside, should go down to get them. Likewise, no one in the field should go back for anything. <sup>32</sup>Remember Lot's wife! <sup>33</sup>Whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. <sup>34</sup>I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be *taken* and the other *left*. <sup>35</sup>Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be *taken* and the other *left*."

— Luke 17:26-35

These same events are graphically described in John's vision in Revelation 12:

<sup>1</sup>A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a *woman* clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. <sup>2</sup>She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. <sup>3</sup>Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. <sup>4</sup>His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. <sup>5</sup>She gave birth to a son, a *male child*, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was *snatched up* to God and to His throne. <sup>6</sup>The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

— Revelation 12:1-6

As soon as the Male Child is "snatched up" [Greek *harpazo*, the same word used in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 to refer to the Rapture: see *Section 2. The saints will be caught up alive to meet Christ in the air* on p. 82] to God's throne, the Woman flees to the desert for 1,260 days [see Revelation 12:1-17]. The Woman represents the universal Christian Church; out of her comes the overcoming Male Child "who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter" (v.5). This verse is the main reason so many mistakenly insist that the Male Child has to be Jesus Christ; but Revelation 2:26-27 makes it very clear that there is another group who will sit on His throne judging the nations with an iron scepter: "To him who overcomes and does My will to the end will rule them [the nations] with an iron scepter" [see also Revelation 3:21]. This is the overcoming Bride of Christ who was caught up to meet the Lord in the air in the Rapture.

It is critical to note that the Woman was *not* snatched up—she was *left behind* on the earth to be persecuted by the devil for 1,260 days (3½ years, or "a time, times and half a time"—the first half of the 7-year Tribulation!). Before the Male Child was caught up, the dragon had not paid any attention to the Woman—his sole interest was to devour the Male Child. But after the Male

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Child was snatched up, Satan then turned his attention to the Woman and the “rest of her offspring”:

<sup>13</sup>When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he *pursued the woman* who had given birth to the male child. <sup>14</sup>The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a *time, times and half a time*, out of the serpent’s reach. <sup>15</sup>Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. <sup>16</sup>But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. <sup>17</sup>Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to *make war against the rest of her offspring*—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

— *Revelation 12:13-17*

This vision gives us a clear picture of the order of events: Rapture first, followed by the first 3½ years of the Tribulation (which are further described in great detail in Revelation Chapter 13). It must be stressed here that John the Revelator was *not* giving a history lesson on the Virgin Mary and the birth of Christ or the rise of the Messiah out of the Woman Israel (two common interpretations of Revelation Chapter 12). First of all, from Revelation 4:1 onward, John was being shown “what must take place *after this*”—in other words, future events. Secondly, there is no sensible explanation for the 1,260 days that the Woman spends in the wilderness if we are to believe that the Male Child is Jesus. However, the 1,260 days make perfectly good sense in the context of the coming Tribulation.

### ***Will the Church Have to Go through the Great Tribulation?***

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The Rapture is always mentioned in the Scriptures as a source of hope and comfort for the believer; it is never something to be feared or dreaded. Note the following:

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. <sup>12</sup>It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup>while *we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.*

— *Titus 2:11-13*

<sup>13</sup>Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup>According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud

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command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>After that, we who are still alive and are left will be *caught up together* with them in the clouds to *meet the Lord in the air*. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup>Therefore *encourage each other with these words*.

— 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

It is clear from this passage that there will be Christians who are “still alive” who are caught up in the Rapture. In contrast, whenever saints are mentioned in Scripture who came out of the Tribulation, they had already died by famine, beast or sword [see Revelation 6:7-11; 7:9-17; 13:1-10, 15; 14:13; 20:4]. There are no living saints caught up during or after the Tribulation.

Our motivation for holy living now is to escape the horrible Tribulation that follows the Rapture [see Luke 21:34-36]. If all we have to look forward to is 3½ or 7 years of unprecedented death, destruction and wickedness, then we are of all men most miserable! If the Thessalonians’ “hope” was a fearful anticipation of coming Tribulation, Paul’s exhortation for them to “encourage each other” would make absolutely no sense. And if the Tribulation is necessary to purify and perfect the saints, how then did Paul, John and all of the other “dead in Christ” mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 prepare for Christ’s return? They never had the opportunity to go through the Tribulation, so they could not have been made ready for the Rapture. This would make God a respecter of persons, which the Scripture says is impossible [see Romans 2:11].

In Christ’s message to the church in Thyatira, He addressed a situation in the church involving a woman He called “Jezebel.” He warned that He would cast her and those committing adultery with her into “great tribulation” if they did not repent:

<sup>20</sup>Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup>And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. <sup>22</sup>Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into *great tribulation*, unless they repent of their deeds.

— Revelation 2:20-22 (NKJV)

The *only* way that we can make sense of this Scripture passage is in the context of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture! If they repent, they escape the Tribulation; if they refuse to repent, they are cast into the Great Tribulation!

One objection to the pre-Tribulation Rapture view is that it is an escapist philosophy. In other words, we are conveniently formulating a doctrine that allows us to escape all suffering. But this is not the case. The New Testament is full of passages telling us that we *will* have tribulations and sufferings “now” in this present world [see John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 1:6-7]; we must be prepared to face all kinds of persecutions and trials in this life — these we cannot escape! But the tribulations that every Christian experiences in his everyday life cannot compare

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to the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:21). And Jesus is the One who says we should strive to “escape” the Tribulation: “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to *escape* all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36). In this sense, we *should be* escapists: no one in their right mind would wish or hope to go through a day of God’s fierce wrath and punishment. If Jesus said He wants us to escape, then let’s escape! Later, in His message to the Church in Philadelphia, Jesus promised to keep His faithful ones from the worldwide “hour of trial” (i.e., the Tribulation) that would test everyone living on the earth (Revelation 3:10).

The Tribulation is called the “Great Day of God’s Wrath” [see Revelation 6:17], and it comes like a “thief in the night” bringing sudden destruction. In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul makes it very clear that children of light are not appointed to wrath—they have been rescued from it! He encouraged the believers that since they were sons of the day, the Day of the Lord would not surprise them like a thief:

<sup>9</sup>You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for His Son [not tribulation!] from heaven, whom He raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

— 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

<sup>1</sup>Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, <sup>2</sup>for you know very well that the *day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night*. <sup>3</sup>While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup>But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. <sup>5</sup>You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. <sup>6</sup>So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. <sup>7</sup>For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. <sup>8</sup>But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. <sup>9</sup>For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup>He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him.

— 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10

An important note about Paul’s epistles to the Thessalonians: In less than one month [see Acts 17:1-4], Paul had taught the Thessalonian believers extensively about the Rapture, the Tribulation, and related end times events [see 1 Thessalonians 5:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:5]. The Rapture and/or the Lord’s Second Coming are mentioned in every chapter of the two epistles except for the final chapter of 2 Thessalonians [see 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 2:19-20; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2:1-9]. So, we *can* and *should* teach these things in our churches today!

## Dispensation of the Great Tribulation

As mentioned earlier [see *When Will the Tribulation Take Place?* on p. 94], we see a pattern throughout Scripture: God always removes the righteous *first* before He sends judgment on the wicked. Jesus referred to two of these examples when He compared the events of the Rapture and the Tribulation to the “days of Noah” and the “days of Lot.” In both cases, the righteous escaped before the judgment of God came [see Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-32]. God removed Noah before the Flood, and He rescued Lot before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah [see Genesis 19:15-22]. Two passages from Isaiah seem to confirm this truth:

The righteous are taken away to be *spared from evil.*

—Isaiah 57:1

Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; *hide yourselves for a little while until His wrath has passed by.* See, the LORD is coming out of His dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins.

—Isaiah 26:20-21

An argument that is made by mid-Tribulationists is that, according to Revelation 6:17, the wrath of God is only poured out after the opening of the sixth seal, i.e., at the middle of the 7-year Tribulation. They see the Church going through the first 3½ years of the Tribulation, with God delivering them from His wrath which characterizes the second 3½ years. The problem with this argument is as follows:

1. At the opening of the first seal, the antichrist is revealed and he begins his mission of world conquest (Revelation 6:1-2); by the second seal (Revelation 6:3-4), there is already widespread death and destruction in the earth; and by the fourth seal (Revelation 6:7-8), one-fourth of the entire world population is already dead. Surely God’s wrath and judgment are already being revealed at this point (Romans 2:5)!
2. According to 2 Thessalonians 2, the Day of the Lord begins as soon as the antichrist is revealed, when he will oppose everything that is called God and deceive the world with false miracles; and God Himself will send a powerful delusion to condemn all those who refused to love and believe the truth. This sounds like God is more than a little bit angry!
3. If the last days Church is anticipating the first 3½ years of the Tribulation before meeting her Bridegroom, it can hardly be called a “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

One of the most convincing arguments for a pre-Tribulation Rapture is found in Paul’s second epistle to the Thessalonians. The believers there were terrified, thinking that they had missed the Rapture. Apparently, there was a false letter or report circulating in Thessalonica stating that the Day of the Lord (Great Tribulation) had already begun. Paul wrote his second letter to assure them that this was not the case. [NOTE: If Paul had taught them that the Rapture followed the Day of the Lord, they would not have been troubled but rather rejoicing because the Lord’s coming was very near!]:

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<sup>1</sup>Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him, we ask you, brothers, <sup>2</sup>not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that *the day of the Lord has already come*. <sup>3</sup>Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. <sup>4</sup>He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. <sup>5</sup>Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

– 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5

In his two epistles to Timothy, Paul makes reference to a false teacher named Hymenaeus (along with several others whom he names, Alexander and Philetus) who had “shipwrecked their faith” (1 Timothy 1:18-20). So insidious and dangerous was their heresy that Paul called it a “cancer” that was overthrowing the faith of other believers in the church and he had “delivered them over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.” What exactly were they teaching that elicited such a forceful reaction from the apostle? They were saying that “the resurrection is already past”:

<sup>16</sup>But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

<sup>17</sup>And their message will spread like cancer [“gangrene” – NIV]. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, <sup>18</sup>who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that *the resurrection is already past*; and they overthrow the faith of some. <sup>19</sup>Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

– 2 Timothy 2:16-19 (NKJV)

They were not, as most of the commentators wrongly suggest, saying that “there is no resurrection of the dead [see 1 Corinthians 15:12]; they were saying the resurrection had *already past*. What resurrection? Here, as always, we need to follow the simple guidelines on how to interpret Scripture listed earlier [see *Various Ways of Interpreting Scripture* on p. 87]: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense!” If they were saying the final resurrection of all the dead described in Revelation 20:11-15 at the Great White Throne Judgment had taken place, then neither they nor Paul nor anyone else would still be living! Obviously, they were not implying that the final judgment had come.

Paul often used the phrase “the resurrection” in his epistles to refer to the special resurrection of the Church that takes place at the time of the Rapture. This can be seen clearly in the following passage, where he describes how he had counted everything in his life as loss so as to win Christ and gain the prize of the high calling of God, “if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead”:

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<sup>7</sup>But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. <sup>8</sup>Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, <sup>9</sup>And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: <sup>10</sup>That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; <sup>11</sup>*If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.* <sup>12</sup>Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

— *Philippians 3:7-14 (KJV)*

Was Paul not sure of his salvation? Was he still trying by his own efforts to make it into heaven? Absolutely not! The resurrection he refers to here is the Rapture. There is no other sensible way of understanding this passage. But once again, when the Scripture itself makes plain sense, we need not seek any other. Paul didn't want to miss the Rapture and be left behind for the Great Tribulation. It was not something that he had automatically attained when he first "accepted Christ"—he was still pressing and reaching in order to "attain unto the resurrection" when Christ returns for His Bride. And what Hymenaeus and the other heretics were teaching was similar to the trouble Paul had addressed in 2 Thessalonians (and it is possible that Paul was referring to the same Hymenean heresy there) that the Rapture had already taken place. In saying that the "resurrection had already past," they were in essence telling the believers, "you missed the Rapture; you are now left behind to face the Great Tribulation." This makes no other sense except in the context of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

It is important to note that throughout the Scriptures, two different "days" are mentioned: the "Day of the Lord" (the Great Tribulation), and the "Day of Christ" (the Rapture). There is always a negative connotation when the Day of the Lord is mentioned—it is seen as a time of horrible judgment and trouble, culminating in the Second Coming of Christ when He establishes His Millennial Kingdom on earth. It comes as a "thief in the night" [see 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4], surprising and ensnaring everyone. Note the following:

<sup>18</sup>*Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD!* Why do you long for the day of the LORD? *That day will be darkness, not light.* <sup>19</sup>It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. <sup>20</sup>Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light—pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?

— *Amos 5:18-20*

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<sup>14</sup>"The great day of the LORD is near—near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the *day of the LORD will be bitter*, the shouting of the warrior there. <sup>15</sup>That day will be a day of *wrath*, a day of *distress* and *anguish*, a day of *trouble* and *ruin*, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, <sup>16</sup>a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. <sup>17</sup>I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. <sup>18</sup>Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD'S wrath. In the fire of His jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for *He will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.*"

— Zephaniah 1:14-18

[NOTE: For more references on the Day of the Lord, see also Isaiah 2:12-21; 13:9-16; 34:1-8; Joel 1:15-2:11; 3:9-12; Obadiah 15-17].

The Day of Christ, on the other hand, is always seen as a day of rejoicing, boasting, celebration, and salvation; it is the day that the believer in Christ is expectantly looking for—the Rapture, the Blessed Hope. Note the following passages:

<sup>7</sup>Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you *eagerly wait* for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. <sup>8</sup>He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the *day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

— 1 Corinthians 1:7-8

<sup>6</sup>Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the *day of Christ Jesus...* <sup>10</sup>so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the *day of Christ.*

— Philippians 1:6, 10

<sup>14</sup>Do everything without complaining or arguing, <sup>15</sup>so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe <sup>16</sup>as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the *day of Christ* that I did not run or labor for nothing.

— Philippians 2:14-16

As you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the *day of the Lord Jesus.*

— 2 Corinthians 1:14

NOTE: In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul exhorted the Corinthian Church to hand the immoral man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (sinful nature) so that his spirit could be "saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus" (KJV); the NIV incorrectly reads "Day of the Lord," but the Greek

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reads “Day of the Lord Jesus.” The Day of the Lord Jesus is here seen as a day of salvation, not destruction.

In the Book of Revelation, the Church is mentioned 19 times in chapters 1 through 3, but is never seen again until the Marriage of the Lamb in Revelation 19:6-9; never once is the Church mentioned as being here on the earth during the Tribulation. When Christ returns to the earth at the end of the Tribulation, His Bride returns with Him (Revelation 19:14) – this makes sense if the Church was raptured before the Tribulation! But if Jesus were coming for the Church after the Tribulation (as the post-Tribulationists maintain), this would be impossible!

### ***Summary of Reasons Supporting the Pre-Tribulation Rapture View***

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1. In the Rapture, both the dead in Christ and those still *alive* are caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17); all saints who come out of the Tribulation had *died*, either by famine, beast or sword (Revelation Chapter 13).
2. Throughout the New Testament, believers are encouraged to look forward to the Day when they would be caught up to meet their Lord in the air (Rapture), escaping the terrible Tribulation that would come thereafter (Luke 21:34-36); no one in their right mind would be looking forward to 3½ years, 7 years, or even one day in the Great Tribulation!
3. The Tribulation is the “Great Day of God’s Wrath” (Revelation 6:17); Christians have not been appointed to suffer wrath but salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10).
4. The Thessalonians were troubled by a letter falsely stating that the Day of the Lord (Tribulation) had already come (2 Thessalonians 2:1-5); if Paul had taught them that they would have to go through the Tribulation before meeting Christ, they should have been rejoicing! But if they thought they had missed the Rapture and were now in the Tribulation, it is easy to understand why they were so disturbed.
5. Paul had to deliver Hymenaeus over to Satan to teach him not to blaspheme; he was destroying the faith of the believers in the Church, teaching that the resurrection (Rapture) had already taken place (implying, as with the Thessalonians, that they had missed the Rapture and were now left to face the antichrist in the Tribulation).
6. Paul also taught in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 that the Restrainer (Holy Spirit) must be taken out of the way *before* the antichrist can be revealed (during the Tribulation); the only sensible interpretation for this passage is that the Holy Spirit (in the Church) is taken away when the Church is raptured.
7. In Revelation 12, only the Male Child is snatched up (raptured) to God’s throne—the Woman is left behind for 1,260 days (first 3½ years of the Tribulation).

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8. Before God can deal with Israel as a nation in the second half of the Tribulation, all those believing Jews who, together with believing Gentiles, were joined into one body, the Body of Christ, must be removed; this requires the Church to be raptured *first* before the Tribulation.

### **Daniel's 70th Week (Daniel 9:24-27)**

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In Daniel 9:24-27, there is a profound prophecy which most scholars agree has important end times implications. Jesus referred to this prophecy in Matthew 24:15, when He talked about the “abomination that causes desolation” spoken of by the prophet Daniel. Clearly, Christ placed that part of the prophecy in the context of the Great Tribulation. Here is what Daniel wrote:

<sup>24</sup>“Seventy ‘sevens’ are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the Most Holy. <sup>25</sup>“Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the Ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. <sup>26</sup>After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. <sup>27</sup>He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an *abomination that causes desolation*, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.”

Let us examine this passage verse by verse in order to understand its relevance to the Great Tribulation:

**Daniel 9:24** – The “sevens” here are actually weeks or periods of seven years [see Leviticus 25:3-4, 8]. Thus “seventy ‘sevens’” represents 490 years. This prophecy is specifically for “your people,” i.e., for Israel and the “holy city” Jerusalem; this is particularly important when we come to the final or 70<sup>th</sup> week.

**Daniel 9:25** – This predicted the rebuilding of Jerusalem after Artaxerxes’ decree was issued [see Nehemiah 2:1-8; 2 Chronicles 36:15-20]. His reign began in 465 B.C.; the decree came in the 20th year of his reign (Nehemiah 2:1) or 445 B.C., the 1st of Nisan or March 14. The rebuilding would take “seven sevens” or 49 years [NOTE: The Jewish month is 30 days, thus one year is 360 days].

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**Daniel 9:26** – There would be “sixty-two sevens,” or 434 years from the time of rebuilding Jerusalem to the cutting off of the Anointed One at the Cross. If we calculate the 69 weeks of years (483 years) from the 1st of Nisan (March 14, 445 B.C.) and multiply 483 years by 360 (days in a year), the result is 173,880 days. This places the day that Christ made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem shortly before being crucified at April 6, A.D. 32! Notice how He rebuked them at that time for failing to recognize the time of God’s coming to them, i.e., the fulfillment of Daniel’s and Zechariah’s prophecies:

<sup>41</sup>As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it <sup>42</sup>and said, “*If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.* <sup>43</sup>The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. <sup>44</sup>They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because *you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.*”

Here Jesus confirmed the destruction of Jerusalem foretold by Daniel (“ruler who will destroy the city and the sanctuary”) which was literally fulfilled in A.D. 70. Soon after, Jesus the Messiah was cut off exactly as Daniel had predicted. So 69 of Daniel’s 70 weeks were fulfilled when Jesus was crucified at Calvary. But what happened to the 70<sup>th</sup> week? Actually, there has been a long pause or parenthesis between the 69th and the 70<sup>th</sup> weeks—that is precisely where we are living today! The 70<sup>th</sup> week refers to the seven-year Tribulation, as described in the next verse...

**Daniel 9:27** – This 70th week (Tribulation Period), is a time when God’s special focus is back on the Israelites (v.24: “decreed for your people”) as a people distinct from the Gentiles and the Church. As mentioned before, this does not seem to be a time when the Church, with its distinct calling and purpose, could be present; if the Church were present, there would be no distinction between Jew and Gentile. The antichrist is unveiled immediately after the Restrainer is removed (Rapture); he makes a 7-year treaty with the Jews (probably promising to help rebuild temple and restore temple sacrifices). According to Daniel 9:26, the antichrist will be of the people who destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, i.e., the Romans. Many believe there will be a revived Roman Empire in the last days, consisting of an alliance of ten nations, perhaps some revised European Union. Israel must rebuild the temple at the beginning of this 7-year period, because sacrifice and offerings will be resumed like that of the Mosaic Law period. After 3½ years (“in the middle of the ‘seven’”), the antichrist will betray Israel and break his treaty with them. The antichrist then sets up the “abomination that causes desolation” (Matthew 24:15-22), desecrating the temple and erecting a statue of himself, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 13:5-15 – for “42 months”). Jesus was very specific that these events will take place *in Israel*:

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<sup>15</sup>"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—  
<sup>16</sup>then let those who are *in Judea* flee to the mountains.

— Matthew 24:15-16

### ***Summary of the First 3½ Years of the Tribulation***

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1. The 6 seal judgments (Revelation 6-8) – A horrible time of persecution, war and bloodshed.
2. Multitudes of believers who were left behind when the Rapture occurred refuse to worship the antichrist and are put to death (Revelation 12-14):
  - a. In Revelation 12, only the Male Child is caught up to the throne – the woman is left behind for 1,260 days (3½ years).
  - b. In Revelation 13, the antichrist is given power to make war against the saints for 42 months (3½ years) and to put them to death.
3. After 3½ years, the 6th seal is opened (Revelation 6:12-14), and the sun is darkened, the stars fall, etc. This corresponds to the passage in Matthew 24:29-31 which describes the resurrection of the Tribulation Martyrs:

<sup>29</sup>Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. <sup>30</sup>At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup>And He will send His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

4. Those resurrected are they who "came out of the Great Tribulation" (Revelation 7:9-14):
  - a. The only way to come out of the Tribulation and be saved is to refuse the mark of the beast and die (Revelation 13:15). NOTE: There are no living believers caught up here as were in the Rapture – this cannot possibly be the same group or event as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17!
  - b. There will be a "great multitude" referred to as a "harvest" gathered up by the angels (Mark 13:26-27; Revelation 14:12-16); this is again in contrast to the Rapture, where the saints meet Jesus in the air.

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- c. 144,000 Jews are sealed in order to protect them from the antichrist's persecution during the last 3½ years of the Tribulation (Revelation 7:1-8).
- d. NOTE: Most scholars agree that all of the New Testament Scripture had been written before A.D. 70, with the exception of one key book, the Book of Revelation. There is also a consensus concerning the date of John's writing of Revelation—A.D. 95. That is extremely significant, especially in light of end times prophecy. For instance, there are those who believe that everything Jesus predicted in Matthew Chapter 24 was fulfilled by A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus of Rome. But John was given a vision of the Great Tribulation (and other future events) 25 years later! The Tribulation Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24 could not possibly have taken place in A.D. 70. In the Christ's messages to the 7 churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, it is clear that neither the Rapture nor the Tribulation had taken place yet.

### ***Summary of the Last 3½ Years of the Tribulation***

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1. Begins with the opening of the 7th seal (Revelation 8), and progressively worse plagues are poured out upon the earth.
2. Known as "Jacob's Trouble" because the antichrist turns his full wrath and fury against Israel after breaking his covenant with them:

How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a *time of trouble for Jacob*, but he will be saved out of it.

— Jeremiah 30:7

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.

— Daniel 12:1

3. For 1,260 days (3½ years), two Jewish witnesses will prophesy and work wonders in Jerusalem; they are finally killed by the beast and resurrected three days later (Revelation 11:1-12).
4. At the end of the 3½ years, Jesus returns with "thousands of His saints" in order to make war and execute judgment upon the wicked (Jude 14-15) at the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:11-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). [NOTE: The Marriage of the Bride and Groom (the Rapture) has already passed by this time (Revelation 19:6-8)].

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- a. This will be a horrible day of judgment and not a day of comfort or joy (Zechariah 14:1-5); it is called the “*Great Day of God’s Wrath*” (Revelation 6:16-17).
- b. Jesus returns and “stands” on the earth - no one will be caught up at this time (Job 19:25-26; Zechariah 14:4).
- c. All shall see the Son of Man - it will not be secretive nor sudden (Revelation 1:7).
- d. The beast and the false prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 19:20).

### ***Conclusion***

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The Great Tribulation, a period of seven years that immediately follows the Rapture of the Bride of Christ, is referred to in various places in Scripture as an “hour” (Revelation 3:10), a “day” (Luke 21:34), and a “week” (Daniel 9:27) – the emphasis being not on the specific length of time, but rather, on the uniqueness of the event. The Tribulation, or as it is often called, the “*Day of the Lord*,” is a time of judgment, wrath and distress unparalleled in human history. It is a time of spiritual darkness, when the power of Satan and antichrist have full reign over the earth. Jesus and the apostles encouraged believers to watch and pray so that they might escape this terrible time of God’s wrath and punishment on the wicked.

The seven years of Tribulation are divided into two distinct halves: during the first half of the “week,” the antichrist helps the Jews while he fiercely persecutes the Christians who were left behind (the remnant of the Woman’s offspring) after the Rapture; in the second half, the antichrist turns against the Jews and defiles their temple in Jerusalem. The dispensation ends at the Battle of Armageddon, with Christ and His Bride returning to the earth to destroy the wicked, and cast the beast and false prophet into the Lake of Fire. Satan is captured and bound in the Abyss for 1,000 years. This marks the beginning of the next dispensation, the Dispensation of the Millennium.

# DISPENSATION OF THE MILLENNIUM

## (REVELATION 20:1-15)

<sup>4</sup>I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. <sup>5</sup>(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

—Revelation 20:4-6

**T**HE WORD MILLENNIUM LITERALLY MEANS A THOUSAND YEARS. The whole doctrine of the Millennium is based primarily upon Revelation Chapter 20, although there are many other passages in the Scriptures that describe this period of time.

It is generally accepted that these are 1,000 literal years, although some take it more figuratively, saying that “a thousand years” simply signifies a long period of time. A number of passages from both the Old and New Testaments speak of a time of worldwide peace when the earth will be restored to an Edenic paradise similar to that found at the beginning of creation. Paul seemed to be looking forward to the Millennium as he spoke of a time when the creation would be liberated from frustration and decay:

<sup>19</sup>The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

—Romans 8:19-22

### ***The Messianic Kingdom of Israel Restored***

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Many of the promises God made to Abraham and his physical descendants, the nation of Israel, will be fulfilled during this time. Israel will be the chief of nations, and Jerusalem will be the capital of the world! God will finally “restore the kingdom to Israel” [see Acts 1:6-7]. After the

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Battle of Armageddon, when Christ returns to earth, He will establish Himself as King in Jerusalem, sitting on the throne of David [see Luke 1:32-33].

According to the timeline given by the prophet Zechariah, at the end of the 7-year Tribulation when Christ returns to earth, something astounding occurs: after Christ defeats all the forces of the antichrist in the Battle of Armageddon and He defends the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Jewish people finally recognize Jesus as their Messiah. God pours on them the Spirit of grace and supplication, and they mourn as they realize they had pierced and crucified their Messiah:

<sup>8</sup>In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the LORD before them. <sup>9</sup>It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup>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 firstborn. <sup>11</sup>In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. <sup>12</sup>And the land shall mourn, every family by itself.

— *Zechariah 12:8-14*

The apostle Paul boldly stated in Romans that a time is coming when “all Israel will be saved”:

<sup>26</sup>And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. <sup>27</sup>And this is My covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

— *Romans 11:26-27*

This seems to coincide with the events described by the prophet Zechariah, for the prophet continues in the following verses prophesying about a future cleansing for sin and idolatry that will take place in Israel:

<sup>1</sup>In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. <sup>2</sup>It shall be in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land.

— *Zechariah 13:1-2*

So, by the start of the Millennium, sometimes referred to as the “Messianic Age,” there is a spiritual awakening in Israel. The house of David and all of the inhabitants of Jerusalem finally welcome Yeshua (Jesus) their Messiah.

## Dispensation of the Millennium

The unconditional covenants demand a literal, physical return of Christ to establish the Kingdom. The Abrahamic Covenant promised Israel a land, a posterity and ruler, and a spiritual blessing (Genesis 12:1-3); the Palestinian Covenant promised Israel a restoration to the land and occupation of the land after their regathering [see Deuteronomy 30:1-10]; the Davidic Covenant promised a ruler for the throne of David [see 2 Samuel 7:12-16]; the New Covenant promised Israel forgiveness—the means whereby the nation could be blessed [see Jeremiah 31:31-34].

Throughout the Millennium, there will be no wars or violence, and even the wild beasts will be tame and friendly! The whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of God:

<sup>6</sup>The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. <sup>7</sup>The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup>The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. <sup>9</sup>They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup>In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to Him, and His place of rest will be glorious.

— *Isaiah 11:6-10*

Because the whole earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord, all nations will worship God. People from every nation will come up to Jerusalem to seek and worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob:

<sup>1</sup>This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: <sup>2</sup>In the last days the mountain of the LORD'S temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. <sup>3</sup>Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup>He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

— *Isaiah 2:1-4*

<sup>20</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, <sup>21</sup>and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat the LORD and seek the LORD Almighty. I myself am going.' <sup>22</sup>And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat Him." <sup>23</sup>This is what the LORD Almighty says: "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the

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hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

— Zechariah 8:20-23

In Zechariah 14:1-11, the prophet describes the Battle of Armageddon and Christ’s return to the earth, when He stands upon the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. In the verses that follow, Zechariah describes a time where the Lord will be King over all the earth, and Jerusalem will be peaceful and secure. All nations will go up to Jerusalem every year to worship the Lord and celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles; if any nation does not go up, they will have no rain. It is generally accepted that he was speaking about the Millennial Kingdom in Israel. Note the verses that follow in Zechariah 14:16-21:

<sup>16</sup>Then the *survivors from all the nations* that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. <sup>17</sup>If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain. <sup>18</sup>If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The LORD will bring on them the plague He inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. <sup>19</sup>This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. <sup>20</sup>On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD’s house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. <sup>21</sup>Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty.

There is a question concerning the Millennium that often arises: We know from Revelation 7:1-8 that 144,000 Jews were preserved from the Tribulation period to repopulate the millennial earth; but if all the wicked were destroyed in the Battle of Armageddon, where do the nations of people come from who inhabit the earth during the Millennium? The passage just quoted seems to shed some light on the subject. Verse 16 speaks of the “survivors from all the nations,” indicating that God will somehow preserve a remnant of nations to repopulate the earth during the thousand-year reign of Christ.

During the Millennium, people will live long lives much like the early generations descended from Adam, many of whom lived more than 900 years [see Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 20, 27]. Methuselah, for instance, almost reached a millennium, dying at a ripe old age of 969! Isaiah spoke of an era in the future where God’s people would live as long as trees and the 100-year-old person would be considered a “mere youth”:

<sup>19</sup>I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in My people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. <sup>20</sup>“Never again will there be in it an infant

## **Dispensation of the Millennium**

who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; *he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth*; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed... For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of My people; My chosen ones will long enjoy the works of their hands. <sup>23</sup>They will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup>Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. <sup>25</sup>The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain," says the LORD.

– *Isaiah 65:19-25*

[NOTE: Because of the specific references to "My people" in this prophecy, some believe that passages like this one prove that it will be only the Jews who enjoy long lives during the Millennium.]

### ***Satan Bound, Released, and Judged***

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In Revelation Chapter 20, we discover the main reason why there is peace and paradise on the earth for 1,000 years during the Millennium: *the devil is locked up!* Thus, many of the works and activities which Satan has been instigating for centuries—temptation, lies, spiritual blindness, deception, murder, sickness, and oppression to mention just a few—will cease! John must have been ecstatic when he saw this vision:

<sup>1</sup>And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. <sup>2</sup>He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. <sup>3</sup>He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

– *Revelation 20:1-3*

With the great chain in his hand, the angel forcefully seizes Satan and imprisons him for a thousand years in the Abyss, a place that the demons knew about [see Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:7-11]. Ever since our first parents were deceived in the Garden of Eden, the serpent has wreaked untold havoc on mankind. But we learn in Job chapters 1 and 2 that Almighty God sets limits for the devil, and he can do nothing without divine permission! Better yet, God shows us a powerful truth here: just one angel can overpower and completely subdue the devil! Our adversary may be strong, but he is "not strong enough" (Revelation 12:8).

The last part of Revelation 20:3, which reads: "After that, he must be set free for a short time," is puzzling. The obvious question that arises here is, "Why?" For a thousand years, the earth enjoyed peace and a worldwide spiritual revival. There were no wars, everyone was living a long, healthy life; there was no devil to tempt or deceive man—why on earth would

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God want to let the devil go free again? There is another question that will perhaps help us find some answers: Why didn't God lock up the ancient serpent, the devil, in the Garden of Eden? Surely, He could have done so, preventing Satan from deceiving Adam and Eve and eating the forbidden fruit. But He deliberately left the serpent there *to test them*, to see if they would be loyal to Him and obey His command.

A perfect paradise such as Eden (or the Millennial earth), even though it is free of sickness, pain and death, is still incapable of securing the heart of man. No amount of blessing can take the place of a personal relationship with Christ—knowing His love, pardon, grace, etc. When Satan is released after the Millennium, the nations are *tested* by his temptation. After enjoying a thousand years of blessing and bliss, as soon as they are tempted, as soon as their heart is tried, they fall headlong into the devil's arms! The nations are deceived by Satan, forming a massive coalition “like the sand on the seashore” to attack Jerusalem and God's people. Such is human nature apart from the saving, transforming grace of God!

<sup>7</sup>When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup>and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are *like the sand on the seashore*. <sup>9</sup>They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city He loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. <sup>10</sup>And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

— Revelation 20:7-10

How quickly the masses come back under Satan's spell! One has to wonder what was in their hearts during those many years of blessing prior to the devil's release. Herein lies one of the great and final purposes of the Millennium: to prove that the ultimate source of all evil is *not* Satan, the corruption of society, or man's environment—*man* is the problem—his fallen sinful nature. This is God's final proof that Jesus is the only hope for this world—not political reform or improvement of world conditions. What ensues is the final rebellion against God, the battle of Gog and Magog, coming a thousand years after the Battle of Armageddon. The exact meaning of “Gog and Magog” is uncertain; the names are mentioned in Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, but the prophetic implications are not clear. Because the Jews in Israel are God's chosen people during the Millennial Kingdom, and Jerusalem is the capital of the world, Satan directs his entire wrath against them in this final battle. The enemies of Israel, inflamed with hatred by Satan himself, come from the four corners of the earth to attack God's beloved city, Jerusalem. But God's fire came down from heaven and devoured them all.

At the close of the Millennium, the trinity of evil that once terrorized the earth during the Tribulation will finally be reunited—in the Lake of Fire! The ancient serpent, whose evil works span all sixty-six books of the Bible, starting in Genesis 3 with his seduction of Adam and Eve, is terminated at last. No matter how the devil's forces of darkness may assail us presently, this

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is how the battle ends: We win and *the devil loses!* Satan is defeated and doomed, and our victory is absolutely certain! "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20). Hallelujah to Jesus!

### ***Reigning with Christ for a Thousand Years***

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While Israel and the nations are enjoying peace and spiritual revival on the earth, there is another group in heaven who reign with Christ for the thousand years:

<sup>4</sup>I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. <sup>5</sup>(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup>Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

— *Revelation 20:4-6*

John seems to describe two different groups here: 1) those who were seated on thrones; 2) those who had been martyred during the Tribulation at the hands of the antichrist. Some believe that those seated on the thrones are the overcoming Bride of Christ, i.e., the saints who were ready to meet Christ in the Rapture. Paul told the Corinthian believers that they would one day "judge angels" (1 Corinthians 6:3), and in one of His messages to the seven churches, Jesus said that the overcomers would have authority to rule over the nations:

<sup>26</sup>To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations — <sup>27</sup>He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' — just as I have received authority from My Father.

— *Revelation 2:26-27*

In Revelation 5:9-10, we see that those whom Christ redeemed with His own blood will one day reign on earth as kings and priests:

<sup>9</sup>And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. <sup>10</sup>You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Daniel saw "thrones" as well as "His Throne," where the Ancient of Days was seated (Daniel 7:9). Jesus promised His apostles "thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," this apparently occurring during the Millennium "at the renewal of all things":

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Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, *at the renewal of all things*, when the Son of Man sits on *His glorious throne*, you who have followed Me will also sit on *twelve thrones*, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

—Matthew 19:28

The second group clearly refers to the Tribulation Martyrs—those who had “come out of the Great Tribulation”; because they had refused to surrender to the antichrist, they paid the ultimate price with their blood. But God in His faithfulness resurrects them so that they can reign with Christ for a thousand years.

The expression in verse 4, “came to life,” needs no interpretation—the next verse eliminates any doubt or confusion: they experienced *resurrection!* God raised them from the dead at the start of the Millennium so that they could rule and reign with Christ for a thousand years. Paul told Timothy that those who suffer with Christ will also reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12). But “the rest of the dead”—everyone except the Bride of Christ taken in the Rapture and the Tribulation Martyrs raised after the first 3½ years of the Tribulation, are not resurrected until the Millennium ends. [NOTE: Some would also include the Old Testament saints such as Abraham, Moses, etc. in this first resurrection group.] Only the Bride of Christ and the Tribulation Martyrs partake in the first resurrection. They are “blessed and holy”—God bestows great honor and privilege upon these who will reign with Christ for a thousand years [See *Figure 2. The First and Second Resurrections* on p. 119].

The second death, a clear reference to eternal damnation for the wicked in the Lake of Fire, has no power over the saints who rule and reign with Christ. They will be priests, serving and ministering unto God—ministering as well, perhaps, to the inhabitants of the earth throughout the Millennium.

### ***The Great White Throne Judgment***

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After the Battle of Gog and Magog has ended, and Satan has been thrown into the Lake of Fire, there is still one bit of unfinished business: Judgment Day! In the concluding section of Revelation Chapter 20, John describes the most awesome sight: The Judge of all the earth seated on His glorious throne! This is the Final Judgment. The light of God Almighty’s countenance will melt the universe; His presence is so overwhelming that all the laws of physics are instantly annihilated. Earth and sky come undone—they literally run away:

<sup>11</sup>Then I saw a Great White Throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. <sup>12</sup>And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup>The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. <sup>14</sup>Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake

## Dispensation of the Millennium

of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.<sup>15</sup>If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

— *Revelation 20:11-15*

Jesus taught clearly that a day was coming when *all* the dead would be raised—not just the righteous, but the wicked as well, to face judgment and damnation:

<sup>28</sup>Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when *all* who are in their graves will hear His voice <sup>29</sup>and *come out*—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

— *John 5:28-29*

God is no respecter of persons. At God's throne of judgment, there is no place for the sinner to hide! Great or small, it matters not; earthly wealth, fame, power or influence is of no value now—for these are the dead. No doubt, they would prefer to run and hide from the face of Him whose fullness “fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23), but they cannot—they are standing before the throne, awaiting His verdict.

At the judgment, it says that “books were opened”—one book is a record of everything each person had done; the other book is the Book of Life which contains the names of all the saved [see Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:22-23]. Thus, the judgment of God is based upon two things: 1) our deeds; 2) whether or not our name is in the Book of Life.

How dreadful when God opens His books that record *all* our deeds—every word we have ever spoken, every thought and imagination, even the secrets that no one knew about. Consider just a few of the many passages of Scripture that reveal how exacting the judgment of God will be:

<sup>14</sup>The Lord is coming... <sup>15</sup>to *judge everyone*, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.

— *Jude 14-15*

<sup>36</sup>But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for *every careless word* they have spoken. <sup>37</sup>For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

— *Matthew 12:36-37*

This will take place on the day when *God will judge men's secrets* through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

— *Romans 2:16*

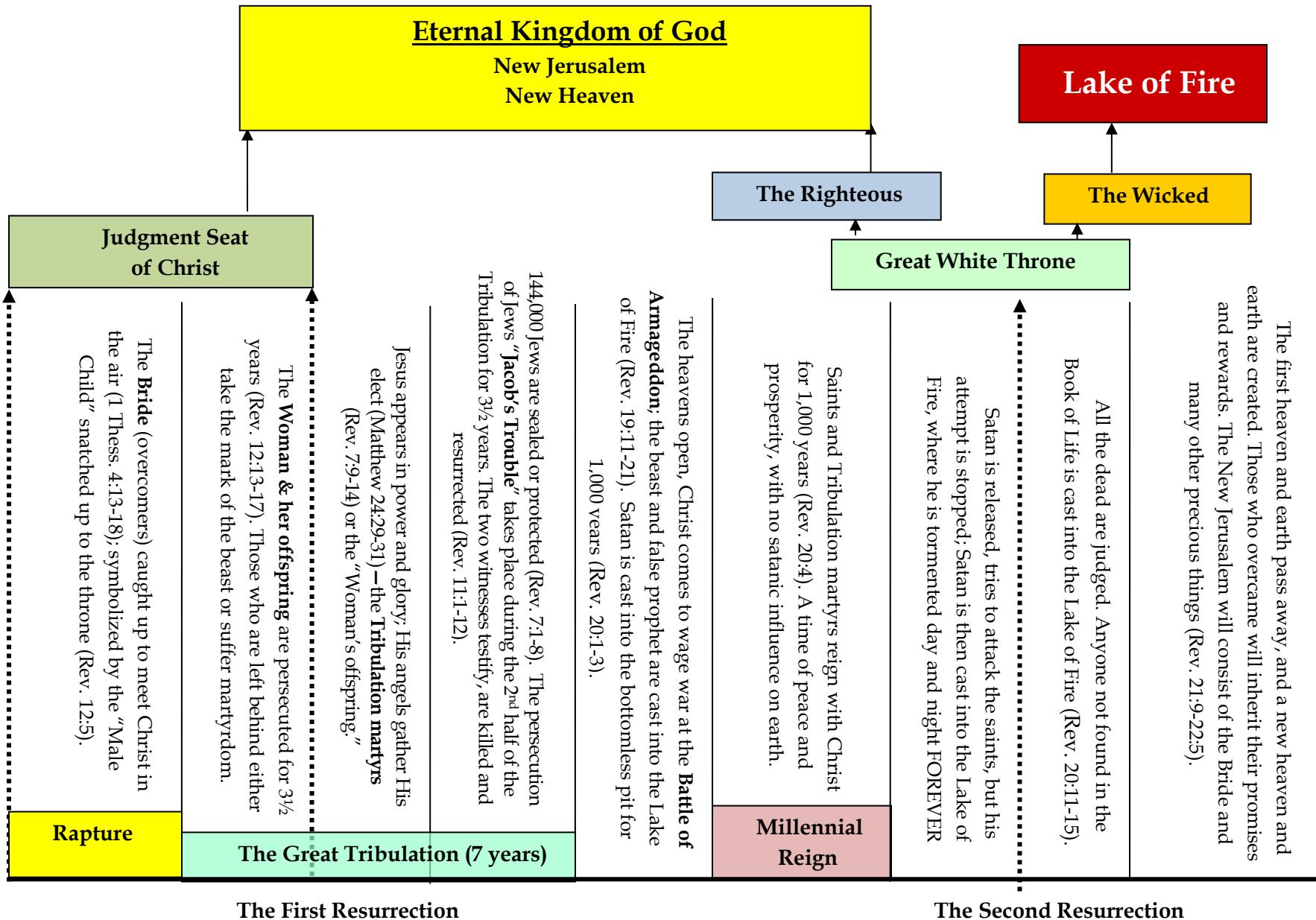
Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. *Everything is uncovered* and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

— *Hebrews 4:13*

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Ultimately, the all-important question is, "Is my name in the Book of Life?" Anyone whose name is not found in the Book of Life will be cast into the Lake of Fire. The term "anyone" leaves no one out—princes, intellectuals, movie stars, sports idols; atheists, philosophers, young and old; rich and poor; humble and proud—*anyone* who never believed in Jesus Christ will be doomed to everlasting fire and torment.

Figure 2. The First and Second Resurrections





# DISPENSATION OF THE ETERNAL KINGDOM

## (REVELATION 21-22)

How great are His signs, how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; His dominion endures from generation to generation.

—Daniel 4:3

<sup>10</sup>Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, <sup>11</sup>and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

—2 Peter 1:10-11

MUCH IS WRITTEN IN BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS about the importance of having an eternal perspective. God is eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27) – before there was time (or any dispensations!), the eternal God inhabited eternity (Isaiah 57:15). And after the completion of the Millennium, time as we know it comes to an end, followed thereafter by eternity! That is why the Scripture repeatedly declares “from everlasting to everlasting you are God” (Psalm 90:2). Man was made in the image and likeness of God, and for that reason, the Scriptures say that God “set eternity in the hearts of men” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). In other words, because man’s spirit and soul are eternal, he has eternity “stamped” upon his very being. In his heart of hearts, man knows there is a “hereafter” – he knows that after physical death, he will exist forever in an “eternal home” (Ecclesiastes 12:5).

The Bible speaks about *many blessings that are eternal* (Psalm 21:6): pleasures (Psalm 16:11), joy (Isaiah 51:11), righteousness (Psalm 119:142), kingdom (Psalm 145:13; 2 Peter 1:11), light (Isaiah 60:19-20), life (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 19:29; 25:46; John 3:15-16), glory (2 Corinthians 4:17), house in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1), salvation (Hebrews 5:9), redemption (Hebrews 9:12), and inheritance (Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:4). But it also speaks about eternal *punishment* (Matthew 25:46), shame and disgrace (Psalm 78:66; Jeremiah 23:40; Daniel 12:2), ruin (Psalm 52:5), fire (Matthew 18:8; 25:41), destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:9), and judgment (Hebrews 6:2).

### ***God’s Eternal Purpose***

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God’s purpose is eternal (Ephesians 3:11) – everything that He has done throughout the ages and various dispensations is with a view toward His eternal Kingdom [see *Revelation 21:6 notes* on p. 128]. Someone has accurately noted, “God doesn’t have problems... He has plans” – eternal plans! And because God is eternal, all of His works are also eternal:

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I know that *everything God does will remain forever*; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.

— Ecclesiastes 3:14

With such emphasis on eternity throughout the Bible, it is not surprising that the believer is exhorted to have his eyes and hope fixed on eternal things above, and not on earthly things:

<sup>1</sup>Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

— Colossians 3:1-2

Certainly, Christ gives us hope of a better life now (peace, health, etc.), but Paul warned us in 1 Corinthians 15:19 that “if we have hoped in Christ *in this life only*, we are of all men most to be pitied” [“most miserable” – KJV]. In other words, our primary focus should always be on our eternal hope. With this eternal focus, the trials and sufferings of this present life seem small by comparison (and they are for a definite purpose – to transform us and conform us to the glorious image and likeness of Christ):

<sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup>So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. <sup>19</sup>Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

— 2 Corinthians 4:17-5:1

<sup>18</sup>I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us . . . <sup>28</sup>And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. <sup>29</sup>For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

— Romans 8:18, 28-29

It is clear from these Scripture passages that God is far more concerned about our spiritual condition 10,000 years from now than our present comfort or happiness! His primary focus is on fulfilling His eternal purpose in our lives, not just giving us a good life in the here and now.

### ***Introduction to Revelation Chapters 21 and 22***

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In the final two chapters of the Bible (Revelation 21-22), the apostle John describes the glorious realities of God’s eternal Kingdom. Heaven has always been the hope of God’s saints, and John takes us on a brief tour of that marvelous place. Specifically, John describes *three* distinct places in heaven: 1) New Earth; 2) New Heaven; 3) New Jerusalem. In John 14:2-3, Jesus told His

## Dispensation of the Eternal Kingdom

disciples that there are “many rooms” [Greek *mone*, which literally means “residences, dwelling places, or mansions”] in His Father’s house, but He was going to prepare “a place” [Greek *topos*, which means “a particular spot or location”] for them:

<sup>2</sup>In My Father’s house are *many rooms*; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare *a place* for you. <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am.

In Revelation 21:3 (NKJV), it is announced that “the Tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.” It is very significant that the Greek word *skene* is used here; this is the word used throughout the New Testament to refer to the Tabernacle of Moses in the Old Testament. This is the word John uses in John 1:14, where he literally writes that Christ, the eternal Word “tabernacled” among us: “The Word became flesh and *made His dwelling* among us.” The writer of Hebrews often compares and contrasts Moses’ tabernacle with another tabernacle, which he calls the “True Tabernacle” in heaven. Note the following:

<sup>1</sup>The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, <sup>2</sup>and who serves in the sanctuary, the *true tabernacle* set up by the Lord, not by man. <sup>3</sup>Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. <sup>4</sup>If He were on earth, He would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. <sup>5</sup>They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”

—Hebrews 8:1-5

<sup>11</sup>When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, He went through the *greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made*, that is to say, not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup>He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption... <sup>23</sup>It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. <sup>24</sup>For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; *He entered heaven itself*, now to appear for us in God’s presence.

—Hebrews 9:11-12, 23-24

So the earthly tabernacle which Moses erected in the wilderness was only a shadow of the real tabernacle where God dwells in heaven; and Moses constructed his tabernacle by copying the “pattern” of the heavenly tabernacle which God showed him on Mt. Sinai. In the Tabernacle of Moses, there were three distinct places: 1) Outer Court; 2) Holy Place; 3) Most Holy Place. The Outer Court was the first area of the Tabernacle, open to any circumcised Israelite who

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entered through the gate with a sacrifice to bring to the brazen altar. But that was as far as he could go; the other areas of the Tabernacle were open only to the priests. The priests had to pass through a veil into the Holy Place which contained the Table of Consecrated Bread, the Golden Lampstand and the Altar of Incense. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest passed through a second veil into the Most Holy Place which contained the Ark of the Covenant—there dwelt the Shekinah Glory of God between the cherubim.

These three places in the Tabernacle seem to correspond to the three places John saw in heaven: 1) Outer Court was a type of the New Earth; 2) Holy Place was a type of the New Heaven; 3) Most Holy Place was a type of the New Jerusalem. The writer of Hebrews makes it very clear that Jesus, our High Priest, entered within the veil into the Most Holy Place, and made atonement with His own blood. He did not go into Moses' tabernacle, but into the True Tabernacle in heaven:

<sup>1</sup>Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary.

<sup>2</sup>A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lampstand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. <sup>3</sup>Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, <sup>4</sup>which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant. This ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. <sup>5</sup>Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover. But we cannot discuss these things in detail now. <sup>6</sup>When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry. <sup>7</sup>But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. <sup>8</sup>The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing... <sup>11</sup>When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup>He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

— Hebrews 9:1-8, 11-12

The writer of Hebrews, using the same imagery of the Tabernacle, encourages all believers, telling us that our hope is in the Most Holy Place, where Jesus the High Priest went as our "Forerunner," and that we have confidence to enter there through His blood:

<sup>19</sup>This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind the veil*, <sup>20</sup>where the Forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

— Hebrews 6:19-20 (NKJV)

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<sup>19</sup>Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup>by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

— Hebrews 10:19-22

Coming back to John 14:2-3, Jesus told His disciples that there were many rooms in His Father's house, but that He was going to prepare *a special place* for them and that He would come back and take them to be *with Him where He is*. In Revelation Chapter 21, we discover that New Jerusalem is the Wife of the Lamb. If New Jerusalem is Jesus' bride, common sense would tell us that Jesus is right there with her! And John tells us that Jesus *is* the lamp and the temple of that Holy City; the throne of God and the Lamb are in New Jerusalem, and, like the Most Holy Place in Moses' Tabernacle, the city is filled with the glory of God.

We also learn in Revelation 21 that there are kings and nations on the New Earth who will walk by the light of the New Jerusalem; they will bring their splendor, glory and honor into the Holy City. Not much is known about the New Heaven—Revelation 11:19 may be a reference to it, and it speaks about God's temple in heaven and the Ark of the Covenant there.

What follows below is a verse by verse commentary on Revelation chapters 21 and 22, as this seems to be the easiest way to explore these final chapters of God's revelation.

## REVELATION 21

### Revelation 21:1

*Then.* After (and *only after!*) the dead have been judged, Satan, sin and all the forces of evil have been destroyed, does God make all things new [see *Figure 2. The First and Second Resurrections* on p. 119].

*I saw a new heaven and a new earth.* Peter writes that because of God's promise, we are looking forward to a "new heaven" and a "new earth":

But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

— 2 Peter 3:13

God's "promise" in this passage seems to be an allusion to two passages in Isaiah that make reference to new heavens and a new earth:

Behold, I will create *new heavens* and a *new earth*. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.

— Isaiah 65:17

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"As the *new heavens* and the *new earth* that I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure."

—Isaiah 66:22

**For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.** "Passed away" is the Greek word *parerchomai*, which can also be translated "perished." The same word is used in Matthew 24:35, where Jesus predicted that "heaven and earth will pass away"; it is also found in 2 Peter 3:10, where Peter says the "heavens will disappear":

<sup>7</sup>By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men... <sup>10</sup>But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The *heavens will disappear* with a roar; the elements will be *destroyed* by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare [“burned up” - KJV]. <sup>11</sup>Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup>as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the *destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.*

—2 Peter 3:7, 10-12

**And there was no longer any sea.** This verse has puzzled many: why would God want to do away with the sea? From a natural standpoint, the sea is what separates and divides the continents and nations of the world; in eternity, all people will live together in unity and harmony. In the Bible, the sea is a picture of perpetual unrest, roaring and churning, and thus the wicked are likened to the "tossing sea" [see Isaiah 57:20]; in the eternal Kingdom, there will be glorious and everlasting peace! Spiritually, the beast had arisen out of the sea [see Revelation 13:1], perhaps symbolizing the political turmoil that gave rise to the antichrist; and the sea had now given up its dead [see Revelation 20:13]. [NOTE: The only thing resembling the sea in heaven is something that John saw before the throne of God that "looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal" (Revelation 4:6; 15:2)].

### Revelation 21:2

**I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.** KJV includes "I, John, saw..." The Holy City comes down out of heaven, that is, the New Heaven (the first heaven has now passed away). There is an earthly Jerusalem in Israel today, but there is also a heavenly Jerusalem above, as the New Testament writers inform us:

<sup>25</sup>Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But *the Jerusalem that is above* is free, and she is our mother.

—Galatians 4:25-26

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<sup>22</sup>But you have come to Mount Zion, to the *heavenly Jerusalem*, the *city of the living God*. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, <sup>23</sup>to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, <sup>24</sup>to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

— Hebrews 12:22-24

*Prepared as a Bride beautifully dressed for her Husband.* “Prepared” here is the same Greek word *hetoimazo* found in Revelation 19:7, where it says that the Bride “made herself ready.” Christ’s Bride is “beautifully dressed”—this is the Greek word *kosmeo*, from which we get the word “cosmetics”; it is sometimes translated “adorn” [see 1 Timothy 2:9]. Adornment refers not only to clothing, but jewelry, etc., as seen in Isaiah 61:10:

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a *bride adorns herself* with her jewels.

### Revelation 21:3

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying.* The voice John hears comes not from the *throne*, but, as the KJV more accurately translates, “out of heaven.” It is likely an angel who makes the announcement that follows.

*Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them.* “Dwelling” is best translated, as it is in the KJV, “tabernacle” from the Greek word *skene* [see *Introduction to Revelation Chapters 21 and 22* on p. 122 for a complete discussion of the Tabernacle].

*They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.* God Himself will dwell with His people *in person*—not by faith or by His Spirit, as He had done while the Church was on earth, but in all of His fullness and glory, God will be with them! We will no longer be seeing Him with eyes of faith—“we shall see Him [lit. “just”] *as He is*” (1 John 3:2).

### Revelation 21:4

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes.* This same expression is found in the Old Testament in Isaiah 25:8; and again, in Revelation 7:17, where God promises the Tribulation Martyrs that their sufferings were over.

*There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.* Death, mourning, crying and pain were all a familiar part of the former earthly life God’s people had lived. The Bible tells us that we must pass through “many hardships” and sufferings to enter the Kingdom of God [see Acts 14:22]. But now John hears the blessed words, “*No more!*” The last enemy, death, has finally been destroyed and swallowed up in victory; mortality at last is clothed with immortality [see 1 Corinthians 15:27, 54].

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### Revelation 21:5

*He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"* Whether this is God the Father, or Jesus the Lamb, we cannot ascertain; it is definitely not an angel. God has made new heavens, a new earth, and a New Jerusalem, and here announces that in His Kingdom, *everything* will be fresh and new!

*Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* John is once again commanded to write down what he saw or heard.

### Revelation 21:6

*He said to me: "It is done".* This declaration is remarkably similar to Jesus' final words on the Cross, "It is finished" [see John 19:30]. With absolute finality, God seems to be saying, "After eons of time, My great work of redemption, salvation, and restoration is at last complete: the dead have been raised, the wicked have been judged, all of My enemies (including sin and death) have been destroyed, the heavens and the earth are renewed, and all of My saints have been rewarded. My eternal purpose is fulfilled." Hallelujah! Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the mystery of God's will and the ultimate fulfillment of His purpose after the completion of all the dispensations:

<sup>9</sup>And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup>to be put into effect when the *times* will have reached their fulfillment ["in the *dispensation of the fullness of times*" - KJV] – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

– *Ephesians 1:9-10*

<sup>9</sup>And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup>His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, <sup>11</sup>according to *His eternal purpose* which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

– *Ephesians 3:9-11*

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.* The same words God had spoken to John at the beginning in Revelation 1:8 are repeated here and finally in Revelation 22:13. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In other words, God is saying, "I am A to Z! I am before everything and I am after everything. I am Almighty, Bread of Life, Chief Cornerstone, Deliverer, Emmanuel, Father, Great God, High Priest, I AM, Jesus, King of kings, Lord of lords, Mediator, Nazarene, etc., etc. I am everything you will ever need!" God is the initiator and the finisher; He is from eternity to eternity; He started everything and He completes everything!

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*To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.* This is clearly a reference to a thirst or longing that is spiritual, not physical [see John 7:37-39]. This is a deep yearning for God and His life, the soul panting for God like the deer pants for water [see Psalm 42:1-2]. Revelation 22:17 is very similar, although there it is worded in the form of an invitation: "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

### Revelation 21:7

*He who overcomes will inherit all this.* "Overcomes" is the Greek word *nikao*, which means "to subdue, conquer, prevail or get the victory." The follower of Christ has many enemies to overcome: sin, Satan, temptation, the flesh, the world, trials and difficulties, just to name a few! Each one of the messages to the seven churches ends with this challenge: "To him who overcomes" [see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21]. In Revelation 12:11, it talks about the saints who overcame the devil; finally, here God says that it is the overcomer who will inherit all things. The overcomer who has persevered and prevailed will be richly rewarded: "All this is yours!" The expression "all this" is an all-inclusive term that refers to everything John has seen and described here in Revelation 21: the New Heaven, the New Earth, the New Jerusalem; no more pain, tears or death; drinking the water of life freely; God Himself dwelling with him forever!

*And I will be his God and he will be My son.* "He" is emphatic: he in particular and in a special sense—above all others. It should read, "*He* will be a son to *Me*," emphasizing how special he will be to God.

### Revelation 21:8

*But the cowardly.* Having now stated who would inherit all the glories and delights of His Kingdom, God proceeds with a long list, explicitly defining those who would not. The cowardly refers to those who were not valiant for God and His truth; they feared man and his opinions more than God. Jesus explained that the best cure for cowardice is to fear God:

*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

— Matthew 10:28

*The unbelieving.* Those who have no faith are hopelessly lost, for the Scripture makes it clear that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6) and "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23 – NKJV). The Good News of Christ and His salvation can only be apprehended by a believing heart.

*The vile.* The Greek word here is *bdelusso*, which literally means "to stink; to be detestable, abhorrent, or abominable." These people were guilty of sins so filthy and abominable that they were a foul stench in God's nostrils. Perhaps Paul was referring to people in this group when he

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wrote to the Romans about homosexuals, perverts, and those having a depraved mind [see Romans 1:24-29].

**The murderers.** Those who take the life of another human being; those who kill and commit homicide intentionally.

**The sexually immoral.** This is a broad group that would include prostitutes, whoremongers, fornicators and adulterers.

**Those who practice magic arts.** Taken from the Greek word *pharmakeus*, which literally means “a pharmacist or druggist.” More specifically, it refers to sorcerers who used potions and spell-giving drugs to practice witchcraft and other forms of magic.

**The idolaters.** Anyone who worships an image, an idol, or any created thing rather than the Creator [see Romans 1:22-25]; idolatry is putting anything above God.

**And all liars.** God places special emphasis on this last sin with the word ALL—all liars and hypocrites, every single deceiver, etc., perhaps because lying is so akin to the devil who is the “father of lies.” Jesus said that lies are Satan’s “native language,” and liars belong to their father, the devil [see John 8:44].

**Their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.** “Second death” is a reference to eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire [see Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8]. Death cuts off from life, and so the second death cuts off from eternal life. Death puts an end to all our earthly hopes, but the second death ends all hope forever! The first death refers to physical death; the second death refers to everlasting separation from God in the Lake of Fire. The destiny for all those listed in this verse (the cowardly, unbelieving, etc.) is everlasting torment in the Lake of Fire—the second death. That is their “place”—literally, their “portion, share or allotment.”

### **Revelation 21:9**

**One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the Wife of the Lamb.”** This same angel had previously shown John the Great Prostitute in Revelation 17:1; he now invites him to see the Bride of Christ.

### **Revelation 21:10**

**And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high.** In order to see the Holy City, Jerusalem, John was: 1) carried away in the Spirit – this was a spiritual revelation; 2) taken to a mountain great and high – to Mount Zion, the highest pinnacle in God’s Kingdom [see Revelation 14:1-5].

**And showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.** John was no doubt looking for a woman, “the Wife of the Lamb,” but instead, he sees a city! But what an amazing revelation: the Bride of Christ is the Holy City, Jerusalem! The overcoming Church is the eternal dwelling place of God! All of the things John describes about the Holy City in the

## **Dispensation of the Eternal Kingdom**

verses that follow – its glory and brilliance, the walls, gates and stones – are actually depictions of the glorified Church of God in her eternal state! This is absolutely profound!

### **Revelation 21:11**

*It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.* The Church is glorious, radiant, shining with the very glory of God [see Ephesians 5:27; 2 Corinthians 3:18]. Later we are told that the wall, the street and the river of the New Jerusalem are all clear and transparent [see Revelation 21:18, 21; 22:1]. There is an important truth to be found here: God's saints need to be pure and transparent, i.e., have a clear conscience and pure heart, with no hidden sin, impurity or darkness.

### **Revelation 21:12**

*It had a great, high wall.* The wall of the city absolutely prevents and prohibits anything impure from entering in to pollute or defile that holy place [see Revelation 21:27].

*With twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.* Note the repeated occurrence of the number "twelve" in John's description of the New Jerusalem: 12 gates, 12 angels, 12 tribes of Israel, 12 foundations, 12 apostles, 12 precious stones, 12 pearls, 12,000 stadia, 144 (12 x 12) cubits, 12 crops of fruit on the Tree of Life. Perhaps the angels mentioned here are cherubim, like those guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden [see Genesis 3:24].

*On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.* There is no reason for us not to take this literally – Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham – God's covenant people, will occupy a prominent place in God's eternal Kingdom. The description sounds much like that found in Ezekiel 48:30-34:

<sup>30</sup>"These will be the exits of the city: Beginning on the north side, which is 4,500 cubits long, <sup>31</sup>the gates of the city will be named after the tribes of Israel. The three gates on the north side will be the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah and the gate of Levi. <sup>32</sup>On the east side, which is 4,500 cubits long, will be three gates: the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin and the gate of Dan. <sup>33</sup>On the south side, which measures 4,500 cubits, will be three gates: the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar and the gate of Zebulun. <sup>34</sup>On the west side, which is 4,500 cubits long, will be three gates: the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher and the gate of Naphtali."

### **Revelation 21:13**

*There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.* Note the similarity once again with the passage just cited from Ezekiel 48. We learn in verse 25 that these gates are continually open, allowing the nations from the New Earth to bring their glory and honor into the city.

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### Revelation 21:14

*The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* We are told in Hebrews 11:10 that Abraham was looking for a “city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” John is obviously describing the same city that Abraham had longed for, and one of the key features is its foundations. The fact that the names of the twelve apostles are written on these stones corroborates what Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

<sup>19</sup>Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, <sup>20</sup>built on the *foundation of the apostles and prophets*, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.

—Ephesians 2:19-20

### Revelation 21:15

*The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls.* The measuring of Jerusalem shows how precise God is about the formation of the Church. As the Master Architect, He must make sure that every part is level and plumb [see Amos 7:7-8; Isaiah 28:16-17], built exactly according to His blueprints and plans! Nothing but a golden measuring reed could be used to measure the golden city, denoting just how glorious and precious the Church is! The measurement of Jerusalem is also mentioned in the Old Testament in Zechariah 2:1-2:

<sup>1</sup>Then I looked up—and there before me was a man with a measuring line in his hand! <sup>2</sup>I asked, “Where are you going?” He answered me, “To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.”

### Revelation 21:16

*The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide.* The city is a perfect square—there are no crooked or irregular walls; it is “fitly framed” [see Ephesians 2:21 - KJV], just as a skilled carpenter does with his square and level when building a house. The Church of God must be built without “cutting corners,” i.e. without compromises, without accommodating to suit circumstances, etc.

*He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long.* The NIV margin indicates that 12,000 stadia are approximately 1,400 miles! This is a monstrous city, in the shape of a cube 1,400 miles high, long and wide!

### Revelation 21:17

*He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using.* The wall of the city is strong and impenetrable, being about 200 feet thick!

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### **Revelation 21:18**

*The wall was made of jasper.* Jasper is an extremely hard, durable stone, said to be almost indestructible.

*And the city of pure gold, as pure as glass.* The transparency of the city allows the light and glory of God to shine throughout!

### **Revelation 21:19**

*The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald.* Adorning the city with every hue and color of the rainbow, these 12 stones are said to be “precious,” i.e., costly or valuable.

### **Revelation 21:20**

*The fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.* Much has been written about the significance of each of the 12 stones mentioned, but any interpretation would be subjective and quite speculative.

### **Revelation 21:21**

*The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl.* Pearls are objects of great beauty and are extremely costly because of their rarity [see Matthew 13:45-46].

*The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.* See Revelation 21:11 notes on p. 131. All those who travel the streets of the New Jerusalem must walk on gold, symbolizing the walk of faith that the saints there had experienced [see 1 Peter 1:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:7].

### **Revelation 21:22**

*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.* There is no structure or shrine within the city where worshipers must go—the whole city is a temple! God’s glorious presence fills all in all! He is the temple. The phrase “Lord God Almighty” is found a number of times in the Book of Revelation [see Revelation 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22]. It is a powerful expression in the original Greek: *kurios* [“supreme in authority, controller”] *theos* [“God, supreme Divinity or deity”] *pantokrator* [“the all ruling, absolute, omnipotent, universal Sovereign”]! He is the Most High, all powerful sovereign God who rules over everything! His name be exalted forever!

### **Revelation 21:23**

*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.* Such is the reward of those who learned to “walk in the light as He is

## TEN BIBLICAL DISPENSATIONS

in the light" (1 John 1:7)—for all eternity they will bask in the glorious light of Jesus' face! And never again will there be night or any darkness.

### Revelation 21:24

*The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.* The KJV more correctly reads, "The nations of them *which are saved* shall walk in the light of it." This is a profound revelation: the New Jerusalem is the Bride of Christ, but there are other saved people living on the New Earth. Jesus made a bold assertion concerning John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11, stating that he was the greatest saint who had ever lived up to that time. But He went on to say that the least one in the Kingdom of God (i.e., the Bride of Christ) is greater than John. In other words, there is a great divide between the saints of the Old Testament and those from the Church who inhabit the New Jerusalem:

I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

—Matthew 11:11

John's own testimony was that he was a "*friend* of the Bridegroom," not the Bride:

The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The *friend* who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

—John 3:29

So there will be many saints who were saved, dwelling on the New Earth; they enjoy the light of the city, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it, but they are *not* the city! The overcoming Bride of Christ, unlike the saved on the New Earth, will not visit the New Jerusalem—she *is* a permanent part of the structure and will never leave it:

<sup>11</sup>I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.  
<sup>12</sup>Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from My God; and I will also write on him My new name.

—Revelation 3:11-12

### Revelation 21:25

*On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.* All are welcome at any time; there is never night there, as there is continual worship and praise filling every corner of the city! There are no thieves, robbers or invaders to fear, so the gates are never shut.

## **Dispensation of the Eternal Kingdom**

### **Revelation 21:26**

*The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.* As discussed in verse 24, these are the nations on the New Earth—they bring their praise, worship and gifts to the Lord in the New Jerusalem.

### **Revelation 21:27**

*Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.* This is simply a rhetorical statement—there is *not* anything impure, shameful or deceitful present in heaven—everything unclean and everyone not found in the Book of Life was *already* cast into the Lake of Fire at the Great White Throne Judgment.

## **REVELATION 22**

### **Revelation 22:1**

*Then the angel showed me the River of the Water of Life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.* The Garden of Eden was a mere shadow of the eternal purpose of God—the true Paradise of God in the New Jerusalem:

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the *Tree of Life*, which is in the *Paradise of God*.

— Revelation 2:7

Eden and the New Jerusalem share a number of significant similarities: (1) both have a River of Life [see Genesis 2:10-14]; (2) both have a Tree of Life [see Genesis 2:9], mentioned in Revelation 22:2; (3) both are a perfect paradise—there is no curse, toil, pain or death; (4) a marriage takes place in both: Adam and Eve in Eden are a shadow of the Marriage of the Lamb with His Bride [see Genesis 2:20-24; Ephesians 5:25-32; Revelation 21:2, 9]. NOTE: There is one significant difference—there is *no more serpent* in the true Paradise of New Jerusalem! The River of Life, like the wall and the street, is clear as crystal; it flows with the pure, pristine, unpolluted water of life.

### **Revelation 22:2**

*Down the middle of the great street of the city.* This makes it clear that Chapter 22 is a continuation of John’s description of the “great city” from Revelation 21. The street of the New Jerusalem is flowing with the water of life—it is a living city!

*On each side of the river stood the Tree of Life.* This is the tree that Adam and Eve were banished from, for had they eaten of it, they would have lived forever in their sinful, conscience-stricken state [see Genesis 2:9; 3:22]. The Tree of Life symbolizes the immortality and

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eternal life that all enjoy in the blessed New Jerusalem. We learn in verse 14 that it is the obedient and pure that have the right or privilege to access the Tree of Life.

*Bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.* There is a continual, bountiful supply for all!

*And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.* This is not to suggest that there will be sickness in heaven, but rather, the leaves will sustain health for the nations on the New Earth.

### Revelation 22:3

*No longer will there be any curse.* The curse had resulted from Adam's transgression [see Genesis 3:16-19]; it included sickness, vanity, frustration, pain, and death. The full effect of Christ's redeeming sacrifice [see Galatians 3:13] is finally realized: *No more sin, no more curse!*

*The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city.* And the overcoming Bride is seated with Christ on His throne!

*And His servants will serve Him.* Here we come to an extremely important truth: those who enjoy the blessedness of eternal paradise in the New Jerusalem are "His servants" [Greek *doulos*, which literally means "slave or bond-servant"]. In their earthly life, they served, worshiped and ministered unto Him; now, in eternity, their chief joy is to do the same —they will serve Him for ever and ever!

### Revelation 22:4

*They will see His face.* Jesus said that the "angels in heaven always see the face of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:10), but the Scriptures make it clear that mortal man cannot look at the face of God and live—His glorious light is presently unapproachable:

<sup>15</sup>God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup>who alone is immortal and who lives in *unapproachable light*, whom *no one has seen or can see*. To Him be honor and might forever. Amen.

— 1 Timothy 6:15-16

Moses wanted to see God's face, but his request was denied:

<sup>18</sup>Then Moses said, "Now show me Your glory." <sup>19</sup>And the LORD said, "I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. <sup>20</sup>But," He said, "*you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live.*" <sup>21</sup>Then the Lord said, "There is a place near Me where you may stand on a rock. <sup>22</sup>When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup>Then I will remove My hand and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen."

— Exodus 33:18-23

## **Dispensation of the Eternal Kingdom**

Even John fell as a dead man when he caught a glimpse of Christ's face shining like the noonday sun [see Revelation 1:16]; but in the New Jerusalem, such privilege shall finally be granted to His servants: "They will see His face!" And they will see Him "just as He is" (1 John 3:2)! During their earthly pilgrimage, they saw Him dimly through eyes of faith; now faith has become sight!

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then *we shall see face to face*. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

– 1 Corinthians 13:12

***And His name will be on their foreheads.*** This description is similar to that of the 144,000 on Mount Zion [see Revelation 14:1-5]; these are servants of God who belong to Him! It is openly known to all that they are His property! Some believe the inscription on the forehead is an allusion to the golden plate on Aaron the high priest's forehead that was engraved with the words: "HOLY TO THE LORD" [see Exodus 28:36-38].

### **Revelation 22:5**

***There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.*** This is a repetition of what was already stated in the previous chapter, perhaps to emphasize the certainty of it. Night and darkness speak about the absence of light: every corner of God's Kingdom will be filled with light!

***And they will reign for ever and ever.*** They had already reigned with Christ for a thousand years over the nations living on the earth during the Millennium [see *Reigning with Christ for a Thousand Years* on p. 115]; but this is the eternal Kingdom—they rule and reign for ever and ever!

### **Revelation 22:6**

***The angel said to me, these words are trustworthy and true.*** Once again, the angel affirms the truth of everything that has been spoken.

***The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets.*** See 1 Corinthians 14:32; God came and impressed upon His prophets messages and revelations of future events, the apostle John being one of them.

***Sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.*** A repetition of Revelation 1:1.

### **Revelation 22:7**

***Behold, I am coming soon!*** Christ's promise, repeated in verses 12 and 20 for emphasis. This is the main thing that "must soon take place!"

***Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.*** Throughout the Book of Revelation, John makes it very clear that what he is writing is "prophecy," mentioning this numerous times throughout the book [see Revelation 11:6; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18-19].

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### Revelation 22:8

*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.* This is the fifth and final time John “signs his name,” as it were, to the document [see Revelation 1:1, 4, 9; 21:2; 22:8]. John, both an eye- and ear-witness, takes the witness stand and testifies to the truth and accuracy of his revelation.

*And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me.* This is the second time John is about to worship the angel [see Revelation 19:10], showing how prone even the holiest of men are to fall into sin again and again, particularly the sin of idolatry. What propensity to idolatry exists in the human race—even the best of saints can succumb to it! This angel must have had a commanding presence or glorious appearance, for John bowed at his feet to worship him! But the messenger forbade him and told him to worship God, reminding him that he also was a servant of God.

### Revelation 22:9

*But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”* This is the second warning issued to John, with a stern reminder: *Worship God and Him alone!*

### Revelation 22:10

*Then he told me, Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near.* Unlike the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Daniel, who were ordered to seal their prophecies for a future time [see Isaiah 8:16; 30:8; Daniel 8:26; 12:4, 9], John is told *not* to seal his prophecy. There is a very important point here: *The Book of Revelation is not a sealed book*—it is an *unveiling* of hidden things, because the time is near.

### Revelation 22:11

*Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.* Some take this to be a reference to the permanent condition of all in eternity—sinners in hell will continue to sin eternally; the righteous in heaven will continue to live righteous and holy lives for ever and ever. Others interpret it as a statement concerning the present human condition—the wicked are becoming increasingly wicked, and the saints are continually growing in righteousness and holiness. In any event, it in no way condones or encourages the continuance of wickedness and wrongdoing, for the next verse warns that Christ is coming again to reward each person’s works.

### Revelation 22:12

*Behold, I am coming soon!* See Revelation 22:7 notes on p. 137.

*My reward is with me.* This is a direct quote from Isaiah 40:10, Christ thus claiming that He is the Sovereign Lord:

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See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and His arm rules for Him. See, His reward is with Him, and His recompense accompanies Him.

This indicates that the Bride of Christ appears before the Judgment Seat of Christ at the time of the Rapture to determine each one's rewards [see 2 Corinthians 5:10]. There are numerous references in the New Testament to rewards [Greek word *misthos* = "to pay for service; hire, wages"; see Matthew 5:12, 46; 10:41-42; 16:27; Hebrews 10:35; 11:6, 26; 2 John 8].

*And I will give to everyone according to what he has done.* This is the Biblical meaning of "reward"—God pays back everyone for what he has done [see Romans 2:6].

### **Revelation 22:13**

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.* He is the Author of eternal salvation, and He is the Finisher as well; He originated the whole plan, and now its consummation is an eternal reality.

### **Revelation 22:14**

*Blessed are those who wash their robes.* The KJV reads quite differently: "Blessed are they that do His commandments." Whichever translation is correct, the meaning is the same: Anyone entering the Holy City must be pure and obedient—we were washed by the blood of the Lamb and cleansed through the water of His Word in order that we might walk in obedience, fulfilling the righteous requirements of God's law [see Romans 8:1-4].

*That they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the city.* Their "right" to the Tree of Life is better understood if we use the words "privilege" or "freedom"—they have been granted free access to the tree and into the city.

### **Revelation 22:15**

*Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.* This is either a reference to the holiness and purity of the Church in this present age, or, as pointed out in Revelation 21:27 [see notes on p. 135], is an ironical statement, for all the immoral and the wicked are already forever OUTSIDE in the Lake of Fire.

### **Revelation 22:16**

*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this testimony for the churches.* Just as John personally attested to the veracity of the Revelation account [see *Revelation 22:8* notes on p. 138], Jesus appears here to explicitly confirm and ratify everything the angel had communicated.

*I am the Root and the Offspring of David.* Jesus is both the root (ancestor) and the offspring (descendant) of David—this is the great mystery of the Incarnation. And this was the very question that Jesus challenged the Pharisees with, in Matthew 22:42-46:

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<sup>42</sup>"What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The *son of David*," they replied. <sup>43</sup>He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, <sup>44</sup>"The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" <sup>45</sup>If then *David calls him 'Lord'*, how can he be his son?" <sup>46</sup>No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask Him any more questions.

As the eternal Word, Jesus created David, and thus, was his predecessor; as Son of Man and Son of David, Jesus traced his human lineage back through the tribe of Judah to David [see Matthew 1:1-18; Romans 1:3]. It is significant to note that in this final revelation of Himself, Jesus essentially declares that, for all eternity, He is and always will be the Son of David—He is the Jewish Messiah! [See Matthew 9:27; 12:23; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; Luke 1:32, 69; John 7:42].

*And the bright Morning Star.* This is no doubt a reference to the Messianic prophecy found in Numbers 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." The morning star is an indicator that the night is finally over!

### Revelation 22:17

*The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!"* Here we have two different persons speaking with one voice—what a mysterious thing! This reveals something profound about the Bride of Christ—she became one with the Holy Spirit! Two cannot walk together unless they are in agreement [see Amos 3:3]: the Bride had so yielded herself to the Holy Spirit, walking and living in the Spirit that they two became as one voice. Paul exhorted the Galatian believers to "keep in step with the Spirit":

<sup>16</sup>So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature... <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law... <sup>25</sup>Since we live by the Spirit, let us *keep in step with the Spirit*.

—*Galatians 5:16, 18, 25*

What were the Spirit and the Bride saying? "Come!" Christ has already announced two times in verses 7 and 12 that He is coming soon; the third time the announcement is made in verse 20, there is a response: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Throughout her earthly pilgrimage, the Bride, guided by the Spirit within her, was crying out for the return of her Bridegroom. This longing for Christ's return is what characterizes the Bride. Paul told the Romans that we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit are groaning in prayer, waiting for Christ to redeem us in the Rapture:

<sup>23</sup>Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, *groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption* as sons, the redemption of our bodies... <sup>26</sup>In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. <sup>27</sup>And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

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– Romans 8:23, 26-27

At the end of his life, Paul was still longing for Christ's appearing

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for ["loved" – NKJV] His appearing.

– 2 Timothy 4:8

The writer of Hebrews points out that Jesus will come a second time for those who are eagerly waiting for and expecting Him:

Christ... will appear a second time, not to carry any burden of sin nor to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who are [eagerly, constantly, and patiently] waiting for and expecting Him.

– Hebrews 9:28 (AMP)

*And let him who hears say, "Come!"* This suggests that there is still time for others to join the Spirit and the Bride in their longing for the return of Christ.

*Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.* "Whoever"—what a blessed word: the free gift of salvation and eternal life is available to anyone and everyone! There is only one condition—he must be thirsty; only those who are aware of their spiritual dryness, emptiness, thirst, and need will heed the Gospel call to come to Jesus:

*Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*

– Matthew 11:28

### Revelation 22:18

*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book.* Commentators are divided over the identity of the one issuing the solemn warnings that are given in this and the following verse: some believe it to be John, while others think it is Christ Himself. The speaker in verses 16 and 20 clearly identifies Himself as Jesus, so it follows more logically that this is Christ speaking. This also makes more sense in light of the gravity of the admonitions given.

*If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.* The warning not to add or subtract from the revelation God gave to John is similar to that given by Moses to the Israelites:

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.

– Deuteronomy 4:2

See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

– Deuteronomy 12:32

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Because every Word of God is inspired [see 2 Timothy 3:16-17] and true, we dare not tamper with it in any way, shape or form:

<sup>5</sup>Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. <sup>6</sup>Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you a liar.

— Proverbs 30:5-6

### Revelation 22:19

*And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the Tree of Life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.* Anyone attempting to discount or discredit the entire revelation given would be in danger of losing his salvation.

### Revelation 22:20

*He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.”* This is Christ's third and final reminder that He is coming soon [see verses 7, 12].

*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.* This is the appropriate response of the Church to Christ's promised return: *Come back quickly Lord Jesus!*

### Revelation 22:21

*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people.* How fitting that in this 404<sup>th</sup> and final verse of Revelation, God gives His last word: *Grace!* [NOTE: In Malachi 4:4, the final word of the Old Testament was “Curse!”] God's saints were saved and transformed by grace, and in the coming ages and for all eternity, He will be revealing the exceeding, surpassing, super-eminent, incomparable riches and abundance of His amazing grace! Hallelujah to the Lamb!

<sup>1</sup>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup>And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>in order that *in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace*, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast.

— Ephesians 2:1-9

*Amen.* The End! Truly, verily, surely—so shall everything written in this book come to pass! It is firm and trustworthy! Amen!

# CONCLUSION

<sup>1</sup>LORD, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. <sup>2</sup>Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God. <sup>3</sup>You turn men back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, O sons of men.” <sup>4</sup>For a thousand years in Your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

— *Psalm 90:1-4*

**W**E OFTEN LIKE TO DRAW LINEAR CHARTS OR TIMELINES such as *Figure 2*, on p. 119 to depict the various ages or dispensations, and these can be helpful in visualizing how they all fit into the big picture. However, now that we have examined all of the dispensations, we might need to draw a “time-circle” rather than a “time-line.” What do we mean? Well, God has no beginning and He has no end (Hebrews 7:3). He is the “Beginning and the End” (Revelation 21:6; 22:13). In essence, our timeline begins with eternity (past) and ends with eternity (future). God “inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57:15 – NKJV) — that’s where He lives and has always lived! For Him, it’s one big circle!

The expression is sometimes used, “God stepped into time when He created the universe and all that is in it.” We are told in Genesis 1:1, the beginning of the Bible, that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The *beginning*? Beginning of what? Certainly not God — this was merely the “beginning of His creation” (2 Peter 3:4), and the “beginning of time” (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2). From the Dispensation of Angels right through to the Dispensation of the Millennium, we are looking at God’s dealings and activities in the context of *time*. We call it history. From our perspective, it is a timeline, beginning at point A and ending at point B. But that timeline is a mere sliver (the geometer more accurately calls a segment of a circle an “arc”) of the whole circle. The Bible speaks about the “end of the ages” (Matthew 24:3; Hebrews 9:26), but also a “Kingdom that will *never end*” (Luke 1:33). God’s “world” is a world without end, and He will receive glory “throughout all ages” (Ephesians 3:21).

This is all very difficult for us time-bound earthlings to comprehend! As the psalmist David, said, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me!” (Psalm 139:6). Nevertheless, in the mystery of His will, the eternal God has now called and included us into His realm of eternity. The saint is promised eternal life, an eternal Kingdom, and we will soon be inhabiting eternity with Him!

At the time of this writing (and your reading), we are still in the Dispensation of Grace. But all of the signs indicate that our dispensation is about to close. That means we could be just a little more than 1,007 years away from eternity (7-year Tribulation + 1,000-year Millennium)! Because God is eternal, so is His purpose. Though His administration of law, grace, and justice changed throughout the ages, His purpose has always been the same. He who knows the end from the beginning has declared that His purpose will stand and He will do all that He pleases:

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.  
I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.

— *Isaiah 46:10*



# **APPENDIX A. OUTSTANDING JEWISH CONTRIBUTIONS IN ARTS & SCIENCES**

(For complete listings go to [www.jinfo.org](http://www.jinfo.org))

## **1. Jewish Nobel Prize Winners**

At least 197 Jews and persons of half- or three-quarters-Jewish ancestry have been awarded the Nobel Prize, accounting for 22% of all individual recipients worldwide between 1901 and 2016, and constituting 36% of all U.S. recipients during the same period. In the scientific research fields of Chemistry, Economics, Medicine, and Physics, the corresponding world and U.S. percentages are 26% and 39%, respectively. **[Jews currently make up approximately 0.2% of the world's population and 2% of the U.S. population!]**

Chemistry (36 prize winners, 21% of world total, 31% of U.S. total)

Economics (30 prize winners, 38% of world total, 50% of U.S. total)

Literature (15 prize winners, 13% of world total, 33% of U.S. total)

Peace (9 prize winners, 9% of world total, 10% of U.S. total)

Physics (52 prize winners, 26% of world total, 37% of U.S. total)

Physiology or Medicine (55 prize winners, 26% of world total, 39% of U.S. total)

## **2. Famous Jewish Musicians**

In modern times, Jews have played a major role in music as performers, conductors, and composers. Of the one hundred leading virtuoso performers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century listed at [www.muzieklijstjes.nl/100players.htm](http://www.muzieklijstjes.nl/100players.htm), approximately two-thirds of the violinists, half the cellists, and forty percent of the pianists were, or are, Jews. Of the one hundred leading conductors of the 20th century listed at [www.muzieklijstjes.nl/ 100conductors.htm](http://www.muzieklijstjes.nl/100conductors.htm), approximately one-fourth were, or are, Jews. Among the leading classical composers, the Jewish representation is a more modest ten percent (cf., Great Composers). Jewish composers have, however, played a predominant role in the development of the American musical theater and in the development of film music; approximately one-half of the membership of the Songwriters Hall of Fame is Jewish.

A few examples of well-known Classical Jewish songwriters & composers are: Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Felix Mendelssohn, Johann Strauss, Sr.; popular songwriters: Irving Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Neil Diamond, Bob Dylan, Art Garfunkel & Paul Simon, George & Ira Gershwin, Oscar Hammerstein II, Billy Joel, Carole King, Barry Mann, Barry Manilow, Laura Nyro, Richard Rodgers, Neil Sedaka, Carly Simon.

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### 3. Famous Jewish Composed Musicals

A few of the many famous Broadway & Hollywood Musicals written by Jews [Note: w = words, m = music]:

- ANNIE GET YOUR GUN*, Irving Berlin (w&m)
- BEAUTY AND THE BEAST*, Howard Ashman (w) and Alan Menken (m)
- BRIGADOON*, Alan Jay Lerner (w) and Frederick Loewe\* (m)
- BYE BYE BIRDIE*, Lee Adams 1 (w) and Charles Strouse (m)
- CABARET*, Fred Ebb (w) and John Kander (m)
- CAMELOT*, Alan Jay Lerner (w) and Frederick Loewe\* (m)
- CHICAGO*, Fred Ebb (w) and John Kander (m)
- FIDDLER ON THE ROOF*, Sheldon Harnick (w) and Jerry Bock (m)
- GODSPELL*, Stephen Schwartz (w&m)
- GUYS AND DOLLS*, Frank Loesser (w&m)
- HELLO, DOLLY*, Jerry Herman (w&m)
- THE KING AND I*, Oscar Hammerstein II\* (w) and Richard Rodgers (m)
- MARY POPPINS*, Richard and Robert Sherman (w&m)
- MY FAIR LADY*, Alan Jay Lerner (w) and Frederick Loewe\* (m)
- OKLAHOMA!*, Oscar Hammerstein II\* (w) and Richard Rodgers (m)
- PETER PAN*, B. Comden/A. Green/Carolyn Leigh 1 (w) and Mark Charlap/Jule Styne (m)
- PORGY AND BESS*, Ira Gershwin (w) and George Gershwin (m)
- SHOW BOAT*, Oscar Hammerstein II\* (w) and Jerome Kern (m)
- THE SOUND OF MUSIC*, Oscar Hammerstein II\* (w) and Richard Rodgers (m)
- SOUTH PACIFIC*, Oscar Hammerstein II (w) and R. Rodgers (m)
- TITANIC*, Maury Yeston (w&m)
- WEST SIDE STORY*, Stephen Sondheim (w) and Leonard Bernstein (m)
- THE WIZARD OF OZ*, E. Y. Harburg (w) and Harold Arlen (m)