



Understanding the Will of the Lord

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Michael Hatcher, Editor**

Understanding The Will Of The Lord

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THEME OF THE BIBLE

Wayne Blake

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INTRODUCTION

A growing problem is one of Biblical illiteracy; not just by those in the world but also in the Church. How bad is it? Fewer than half of all adults can name the four accounts of the life of Christ. Many who profess to be Christians cannot name the disciples or even five of the Ten Commandments. Silly as it might sound, if one were pressed to explain what the Sermon on the Mount is, he might answer, “a political speech given by President Obama”! Biblical illiteracy is like a poison, wreaking havoc in the lives of individuals, in our churches, and in our communities.

God’s people have always been destroyed by a lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:1, 6). Where there is a lack of God’s Word, the people are faint (Amos 8:11-13). In ignorance, they make the wrong choices. When they stumble, they do not know where to turn. Without a knowledge of God’s Word, a person has no real direction in life and no true joy or peace in life (Psa. 119:105, 111, 165). How many lives are being destroyed? How many people are stumbling through life because they do not have the light of God’s Word guiding them?

Churches languish for lack of teachers, and if teachers are found, their lack of knowledge is profound (Heb. 5:12). Churches are being led astray by false teachers and false doctrine, for how can the ignorant know what is false (2 Pet. 2:1-3)? How many churches are “dying on the vine” or have slipped into apostasy because their members cannot discern between truth and error?

Our standards for morality are skewed, where good is evil and evil is good (Isa. 5:20). We slaughter the innocent, spare the guilty, and reward the wicked at the expense of the good. Divorce is made easy, adultery looked upon lightly, and fornication and homosexuality are nothing more than an “alternative lifestyles.”

Perhaps you have heard people say things like, “Oh, you don’t read the Bible, do you?” or “Why, the Bible is just another book; you ought to read this or that book instead.” How many times have we heard about a teacher who degraded the Bible before his or her students, ridiculing those who read it? There are those who are proud to have a Bible on their bookshelf, but only as one book among other *greats* of literature.

The Bible is more than simply one of the *greats*. The Bible is unique, meaning “one and only.” It is different from all others, having no like or equal. It was written over a period of about 1600 years. It was written over a span of 40 generations. It was written down by 40 authors from every walk in life: fishermen, herdsman, cup bearers, doctors, tax collectors, tentmakers, just to name a few. It was written from a wilderness, a dungeon, hillsides, prison walls, on islands, and various other places. The Bible was written in times of war and times of peace. It was written during times of great joy and times of great sorrow and despair. It was written from Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. Within its pages man finds his origin, the nature of God, the nature of man, sin, and man’s redemption. The Bible is truly a unique book, and yet so many today know of its name—but nothing regarding its content.

From Genesis to Revelation, there remains one distinct theme: God’s plan for the redemption of man from sin. This theme is vital for us to understand and apply. If we do not love the Bible, we will never take the time to search and find this theme. That theme is the greatest news of all ages, that God loves us and has provided the way for each of us to be saved from our sins. What a glorious and praiseworthy God we serve. The main theme word of the Bible is **reconciliation**. When reading through the Bible, we are reminded

that man is not able to live a sinless life; we sin. God is willing to take us back, but we must submit to His plan or we will be eternally separated from Him.

DISCUSSION

God's plan for the redemption of man from sin begins with promises made in Genesis that were fulfilled with the coming of Christ (Gen. 3:15; 12:1-3; 22:18; Acts 3:25-26; Gal. 3:16). The Bible tells us how we can be reconciled to God (Rom. 5:8-11). It reveals the Gospel whereby we can be saved (1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). The Gospel has both commands and promises (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38-39; 3:19; 22:16). Through the Word of God, we are given a new life in Christ with freedom from the guilt of sin and freedom from the power of sin (1 Pet. 2:22-23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:7; Rom. 8:11-14). The opportunity promised us is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). The promise given us by Jesus is the opportunity for an abundant life (John 10:10).

In Colossians 1:20-23 Paul uses *reconciliation* which refers to man being made friends with God and being at peace with Him. Reconciliation takes place when we obey what will allow the blood of Jesus to cleanse our sins.

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, *I say*, whether *they be* things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in *your* mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister (1:20-23).

Going all the way back to Genesis 3, we find that Adam and Eve were in need of salvation because they had sinned against God by being disobedient. That need could only be supplied by death and shedding of blood, which was intended for them, but would be spared through the promise of the Savior (3:15). Jesus is preeminent

and superior to all others (Col. 1:18-19), and it pleased God that through Him we can be reconciled.

When we sin, we separate ourselves from God and are at spiritual war with God. We need to be reconciled to God, or we will not have His favor or forgiveness. God has taken the initiative in reconciliation by offering His only begotten Son upon the cross for our sins. We are then reconciled to God when we believe, repent, confess that we believe Jesus is the Son of God, and are baptized.

Romans 5:8-11 teaches us that it was love that motivated God to reconcile man to Himself through Jesus Christ. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. Looking again at Colossians 1:20: "to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him" (NKJV), *Himself* refers to God. The New Testament never talks of God being reconciled to the world, but always of the world being reconciled to God. Man is the one who walked away, and man is the one who has to come back.

Reconciliation and peace between man and God is brought about by the blood which Christ shed on the cross. The blood of Christ possesses sufficient power to reconcile those who died prior to Jesus' sacrifice (Heb. 9:14-18). The benefits of Jesus' blood flowed backward in time to cleanse the obedient of previous ages, including Abraham, David, and multitudes of others that obediently used animal blood. Hebrews 9 teaches that the faithful under the Old Testament had never received complete cleansing of their sins in the use of the blood of animals; however, when Christ shed His blood on the cross, the power of it reached back to bring about a complete cleansing of those who faithfully offered animal blood.

When Christ died, Abraham and the other righteous souls who had passed from this world were residing in the Hadean realm of Paradise. Luke 23:43 and Luke 16:19-31 teach that Hades is divided into two parts. One part is where the righteous dead go, and the second part is where the unrighteous dead go. The souls of each wait there either in comfort or in torment until the second coming of Christ and the judgment day. The eternal future for all the faithful in the Old Testament will be a good future, for the blood of Christ

was sufficient to cleanse them of their guilt. Those living on this side of the cross have open access to the benefits of Christ's blood (1 Pet. 1:18-25; Rom. 5:8-9; Mat. 26:28; Rev. 1:5; Eph. 1:7).

In view of the points that we have been discussing, those in the heavenly realm of Paradise received the benefits of the Lord's death, and those living since His death are likewise offered those benefits. In other words, Jesus' blood flowed backward from the cross and it flows forward to all generations that have lived this side of the cross. This explains what has been discussed in Colossians 1:20, "whether things on earth or things in heaven" (NKJV).

Looking back at Colossians 1:21, we learn that before one is reconciled to God, one is alienated or separated and enemies with Him due to mistaken ideas and disobedient works that God looks upon as evil works. The majority of men and women of Colossae were probably religious, but their religion was wrong, and their lives were wrong. This was their condition despite good intentions.

Mistaken ideas and disobedient works describe all unbelievers, even those who have never obeyed the Gospel. Their lives are out of harmony with God's will; their thinking is wrong; they are separated from God. There are no innocent unbelievers. The reconciliation required the actions of God and the individual. God took the first steps by sending Christ to execute the eternal plan of redemption. However, reconciliation requires both parties of the separation to be willing participators in the plan. It was sin on the part of each accountable person that created the estrangement; it is the individual who must return to God, for the Father did not move. In 2 Corinthians 5:20 all are commanded: "be ye reconciled to God"!

Colossians 1:22 teaches that reconciliation is made possible through Christ's death so the reverse of alienation to God will exist so that one will be holy and acceptable to God. The whole being of Christ was involved in the sacrifice He made for lost men and women. Christ's physical body was cruelly put to death in the most horrible way. Jesus' spirit was separated from the Father while Jesus was on the cross and bearing the sins of men and women (Mat.

27:46). For a brief time, while all the sins of mankind were on Jesus, Jesus and the Father were separated!

The aim of Christ's sacrifice was to make it possible for men and women to obtain remission of their guilt and be able to be presented unto God as holy, blameless, and above reproach in His sight. The time of this presentation will be the Judgment Day. There will be no opportunity to make changes then, so our character and lifestyle must be right when we depart this world. Our character and lifestyle will become right as, on a daily basis, we study and obey God's Word and live as God teaches.

Colossians 1:23 teaches that to remain reconciled and friends with God, the Christian must be obedient and faithful to Him. Faithfulness to Christ is obviously taught here and elsewhere in the Bible. We can only wonder at the reason many deny the demand made in the Bible for faithfulness! "Once saved, always saved" is not taught in this or any other Bible passage.

To become "grounded and steadfast" in the Gospel is to become spiritually mature. To be *grounded* is for one's life to be set on a sure foundation and not shaken by the wind of false doctrines or by the winds of immoral temptations. To be *steadfast* is to be firm and consistently doing what one knows the Bible teaches them to do.

To "*be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard" (1:23) is to not take one's focus off the hope of going to heaven that we read and learn about in the New Testament. Hope is a desire coupled with expectation. The desire and expectation to go to heaven! The Christians hope "laid up for you in heaven" (1:5).

At the time Paul wrote the letter to those of Colossae, the church had been in existence for several years. Evangelism and mission work had been done so diligently that Paul and other Christians had spread the Gospel to every living person. Every generation of Christians should make it their goal to try and make the Gospel message available to every person throughout the world.

In the very last part of the last phrase in Colossians 1:23, Paul makes the statement, "I Paul am made a minister." *Minister* means servant. Every Christian is spoken of as a servant throughout the

New Testament. Each Christian, like Paul, should do his part in helping teach and spread the Gospel message throughout the world during the generation in which he lives.

So the question is, “Why do I obey the Bible?” It is a fact that it does us no good if we read the Bible, believe its contents, and love it **if** we are unwilling to obey it!

OBEDIENCE IS NECESSARY AS TAUGHT BY:

Jesus

We must obey the Bible to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Mat. 7:21-23; Luke 6:46). It is not enough to believe in Jesus as Lord. It is not enough to do many things in His name. We must do the will of the Father in heaven; we must do what Jesus says. We do what is necessary to qualify as good soil (8:15). It is not enough to hear the Word of God. It is not enough to do initially what the Word says. We must receive the Word with good and noble hearts. We must bear fruit with patience.

We do what is necessary to be faithful disciples of Christ (Mat. 28:18-20). It is not enough simply to believe in Jesus. It is not enough to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We must be disciples of Christ, and we must do as He says.

Apostles

We learn that to be saved we must obey (Heb. 5:9). Jesus is the author of eternal salvation but only for those who obey Him! We obey to avoid God’s wrath (Rom. 2:4-11). The goodness of God is designed to lead one to repent. The righteous judgment of God is coming. Eternal life will be given to those who do good, and indignation and wrath to those who do not obey the truth.

There are blessings that come to those who obey. Jesus taught us that one will be able to withstand the storms of life (Mat. 7:24-27). We then are able to be in the family of God (Luke 8:21). Through these things we can have the key to joy and peace in this life (John 13:17). Obedience will bring deliverance from the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:16-18). Obedience will purify the soul (1 Pet. 1:22-23). Lastly, obedience saves and blesses one’s soul (Jam. 1:21-25).

CONCLUSION

The Bible guides us through life. During our youth, the Bible gives us role models that inspire us: Joseph, who was able to resist temptation (Gen. 39:9); Daniel, who purposed in his heart to do what was right (Dan. 1:8); Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who faced the fire with faith (3:16-18). God reveals accounts regarding Josiah, David, and others to bring to mind exciting lessons that we carry on into adulthood.

With the Bible as our guide, we can avoid the pitfalls that plague us like immorality and materialism. We can learn to make good choices regarding our friends, marriage, family, and work. When we stumble, the Bible offers grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ and encourages us to get back up and press on (1 John 1:9; 2:1-2; Phi. 3:12-14).

Into our old age we can be inspired to follow role models that we read about also: Moses, who at age 80, accepted a new calling (Exo. 7:7; Psa. 90:10); Joshua, who started at age 80 to lead Israel and was the height of faithfulness to God (Jos. 24:29); Caleb, who at age 85, said “give me that mountain” and was so full of life (14:6-12); Daniel, who continued to serve God and man into his 90s (Dan. 6:1-3, 10).

We continue to receive wise counsel from Proverbs pushing us to increase in understanding (Pro. 1:5-6). Ecclesiastes always reminds us about what is important in this life (Ecc. 2:24-26; 9:9). Jesus, who, through His life, always teaches us to keep our priorities straight (Luke 10:40-42; 12:22-40). The apostles continue to guide our lives as disciples of Christ (Phi. 4:4-9).

With the Bible as our guide, we can face the future with confidence (2 Cor. 4:16-18) and look forward to what the Lord will provide (2 Tim. 4:6-8). As this life comes to an end, the Bible offers us hope of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50-58). The Bible promises us a heavenly city, a new heavens and new earth (Heb. 13:14; 2 Pet. 3:13-14; Rev. 21:1-7). We love the Bible because it introduces us to God and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. We love the Bible because it teaches us the way of salvation through an obedient faith

in Jesus. The Bible guides us to experience an abundant life now and receive eternal life hereafter (Psa. 119:105).

May we never forget the theme of the Bible! God has never turned His back on mankind and expects the same of all of His creatures. From the Old to the New Testament we are reminded that God created us, He cares for us, and He has given us the ability to remain in fellowship with Him—if we will just obey Him.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

THE CHURCH IN THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF GOD

Gene Hill

Carl E. “Gene” Hill, Jr., was born in New Richmond, Ohio. He is married to the former Jerry Booker. They have one son and one grandson.

Gene and Jerry obeyed the Gospel in 1975, at the old Andrews Avenue Church of Christ in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He began studying at the Florida School of Preaching beginning in 1976, and graduated in 1978. This was during the tenure of the late B. C. Carr as the school’s Director. Gene began full-time preaching in 1982, serving congregations in Florida, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. He is currently working with the congregation in Indianola, Mississippi.

INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges facing Christians when discussing the church with their friends, neighbors, and relatives who also profess to be Christians is to have a common understanding of what the church actually is, Biblically speaking. We see this to be the case when the phrases “your church” or “my church” are uttered by those with whom we are talking. These and similar words simply underscore the task the Christian faces when discussing things of a Biblical or spiritual nature. We must define our terms.

The church is that religious institution we read about upon the pages of the New Testament as God meant it to be understood, and not how society has come to think of it. The problem to be overcome is cutting through the detritus of two thousand years cluttering and obscuring the true meaning of *church*. In this lesson we will look at the church under the following headings: Defined, Planned, Purposed, Prophesied, Promised, and Established.

THE CHURCH DEFINED

Under the heading of *assembly*, Vine provides this: “*ekklesia*, from *ek*, ‘out of,’ and *kliesis*, ‘a calling’ (*kaleo*, ‘to call’), was among the Greeks of a body of citizens ‘gathered’ to discuss the affairs of state, Acts 19:39” (42). The church is the “called out.” Its member-

ship being those that were called out by the Gospel (2 The. 2:13-14) by being obedient thereto (1:7-9). Christ is the head of this body of called out ones (Col. 1:18; 2:10-14; Eph. 1:22-23). We should note that once it is determined by the Scriptures how a thing is done, then each time we see results of this call—either stated or implied—then the method of the call will always be the same throughout all time for all peoples in all places.

There are three different manners in which the word church is used in the New Testament. There is the general or universal reference as used by Jesus in Matthew 16:18 when He said, “I will build my church.” Jesus, of course, was referring to the whole idea of the whole of the church in all of its completeness. There is the use of church to refer to the members in an area or region as “the churches of Galatia,” used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:1. Lastly, church is used of a single congregation as in 1 Corinthians 1:2 or in Revelation 2 and 3.

It is safe to conclude from these examples that *church* is never used in the New Testament to refer to any group other than those called by the Gospel and is never used to refer to a denominational group in any sense. Each instance refers to those practicing the same things and professing the same doctrine (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17). The churches of Asia to whom John sent the words of Jesus were told by Jesus to repent and return to that which they were leaving, or their candlestick would be removed (Rev. 2:1, 5; 2:12, 16; 18, 22; 3:1, 3; 14-15, 19). Each of these congregations and their respective members were those that made up what Jesus promised to build (Mat. 16:18), which He purchased (Acts 20:28), and to which He added the saved (2:47).

THE CHURCH PLANNED

The church as defined is not an afterthought of God or even a “plan B,” but rather the church is the focal point in God’s scheme for the redemption of man. Paul tells us the magnitude of the church’s role and when the plan was formulated (Eph. 3:8-12).

We note the church’s existence was part of the plan (1:9-10; Acts 15:13-18; Col. 1:24-29). The church into which the Lord adds

souls being saved (Acts 2:47) is part of God's determinate counsel (Acts 2:23; 4:28). That the church was planned from eternity ought to be beyond serious discussion. To read the following passages and draw any other conclusion other than the church was in God's mind from eternity is to deny words their everyday meaning:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love (Eph. 1:4).

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (3:11).

In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began (Tit. 1:2).

It was planned that in Jesus' death He would shed the price of redemption for all faithful souls of all time. John the Baptizer said as much on two successive days in front of his own disciples (John 1:29-37). Jesus Himself claimed His blood would be shed for the remission of sins (Mat. 26:28) whereby we are redeemed (Eph. 1:7). We know such is the case because the prophet Zechariah tells us so: "In that day there shall be a fountain opened To the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem For sin and for uncleanness" (Zec. 13:1). That fountain was opened in Jerusalem upon the death of Jesus (John 19:31-37).

Paul shows us in Ephesians 3:12 that in Christ "we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him." Ephesians 2:18 informs us that it is through Christ we have access to the Father. This is nothing less than a restoration of fellowship that had been broken in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-7; Isa. 59:1-2).

Further demonstration of the Divine Plan is seen in the Seed promise made to Eve in Genesis 3:15, expanded upon in conversation with Abraham in Genesis 12:3, and reiterated in 18:18 and 22:18. Paul cited this promise in support of Jesus being that planned Seed in Galatians 3:8, 16, 28. We see the actuality of that fulfilled plan in Ephesians 1:3, Colossians 3:11, and Revelation 7:9.

THE CHURCH PURPOSED

Through the centuries many have worn the name, “Christ-like,” but as a cloak covering lives that did not resemble Him at all. The *core* of Christianity is not the *wearing* of a name, or the *assembling* to worship, or the *teaching* of a doctrine. The core is the *putting away of one’s own self image and the putting on the image of Christ*, so that—in maturity—Christ’s life is what shines from the body of His follower. “Christ in us” will ensure, then, that we wear the name with honor, that we worship in earnestness, that we teach with purity and love. But these things will be the *result* of the total image, not just a shell with no substance inside (Choate back cover).

To have a plan and not have a purpose would be absurd. God had a purpose in mind: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10; 1 John 4:9-14). The purpose is the salvation of the souls of man. To accomplish that end, a perfect sacrifice needed to be offered. Jesus was that perfect sacrifice: “But, with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

The purpose behind the plan is for man to be sanctified, able to be of use to God in His service (2 Tim. 2:19-21). When Adam and Eve transgressed God’s Law (Gen. 3:1-7), the bond of fellowship had been broken (Isa. 59:1-2; Hab. 1:13). For the fellowship desired by God to be restored, man needed to be sanctified which was accomplished through the offering of blood (Heb. 9:15-22). As Hebrews 9:15 indicates, all animal sacrifices were made and accepted in view of the death of Jesus, which is the better sacrifice sufficient for the remission of sins (9:23; 10:4). The final offering is Jesus (10:5-18).

The purpose (man’s sanctification) is affected through the details of the plan being followed. What are those details? While it may seem obvious that hearing and learning are first, still it must be stated to be able to clear up any confusion (John 6:44-45; Isa. 2:3; 54:13; Jer. 31:33-34; Mic. 4:2; Eph. 4:21-22; 2 The. 2:13-14). Unless one hears of a thing, he will not believe in it for such would otherwise be impossible. So is obedience to the Gospel impossible

until one has been taught—thus the need for the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49). Next, it is necessary that the Gospel is believed (John 8:24). Jesus required repentance on the part of those that believed (Luke 13:3). Repentance from sin is a change of mind which brings about a change of heart which results in a change of action (Mat. 21:28-32). Confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God follows (10:32-33; Rom. 10:8-10). Immersion, in water, unto the remission of sins is the next step Jesus commands (Mat. 28:19; Mark 16:16).

The purpose for this process is for the penitent believer in Christ to be sanctified in the blood of the Lamb (Heb. 9:12-21; 10:22; 13:12; Rev. 1:5; 7:14). Everyone acknowledges that the blood of Jesus sanctifies man, but the question is **when** the blood sanctifies the soul of the penitent sinner. Paul says, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). The apostle Peter would also agree (1 Pet. 3:21).

Paul provides further enlightenment as to the **when** in Romans 6:16-18 in which he says, “ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (6:17b-18). The doctrine is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). The form is dying to sin (repentance—Rom. 6:2), being buried by baptism into Christ (6:3), and rising up to walk in newness of life or being resurrected (6:4).

We find this process mirrored in the events that unfold on the first Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension of Christ as recorded in Acts 2:1-47. The apostles, being empowered by the Holy Ghost as promised (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4), so convincingly preached Jesus that the assembled Jews were “pricked in their heart” and asked “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37). Luke records, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (2:38). After further exhortation by Peter (2:40), “Then they that gladly

received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls” (2:41), and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (2:47).

PROPHESED

As previously noted, the church existed in God’s mind in eternity or prior to the foundation of the world (creation). Paul declared such to the church in Ephesus (Eph. 1:3-6).

Prophets in the Old Testament uttered prophecies concerning the church. From a reading of Isaiah 2:2-3, Daniel 2:44, and Joel 2:28-29 we glean the following:

- The kingdom would be established in the last days (Heb. 1:2)
- The church would be established in the tops of the mountains (Gen. 22:2, 14; 2 Chr. 3:1; 2 Sam. 24:18; Luke 19:28)
- All nations would flow into it (Acts 2:5-12; 10:28, 34-35; 11:18; 15:7)
- The Spirit of the Lord would be poured out upon all flesh (2:1-4; 10:44)
- The time of its establishment would be in the days of the kings of the fourth kingdom—Rome (Luke 2:1-7)
- Jerusalem would be the place from which the law would go forth (Acts 1:8; 8:4)
- It would consume all other kingdoms and last forever (Dan. 7:13-14; Mat. 16:18-19; Acts 2:17; Heb. 12:22-23, 28).

PROMISED

Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18-19 to build His church. The gates of Hades (ASV) or death shall not prevail against it. The figure is of the gates of opposing cities from which armies would rally forth to war against each other. Jesus tells us in advance that His city and armies would carry the day (1 The. 4:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-56). He informs Peter that to him (and to an extent the other apostles—Acts 2:14) would He give the keys to the kingdom of heaven (the keys also being prophesied—Isa. 22:22; Rev. 3:7). Peter was given certain power, represented by the keys, for a given action (Luke 11:52;

Rev. 1:18; 9:1; 20:1). At the appropriate times He opened the door to the kingdom of heaven (Acts 2:14-47; 10:1-48). In both occasions souls were added to the church (2:41, 47; 10:48).

ESTABLISHED

The church purchased by God's blood (20:28) began in the right place—Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Luke 24:47) and in the fullness of time (Dan. 2:44; Luke 3:1; Gal. 3:8, 16; 4:4). Jesus promised that those of that generation then listening to Him would live to see the promised kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1). Jesus told His apostles to tarry in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father and to be endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49). Now note this: some hearing Him would still be alive to see the kingdom come with power, the apostles (which were some of those listening to Him in Mark 9:1) were to receive power as promised while they tarried in Jerusalem, and that when the power came, the kingdom would come. Luke again records Jesus reiterating His promise of power, and that would come with the baptizing of the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:4-8).

We see the culmination of Planning, Purpose, Prophecy, and Promise coming together in Acts 2:1-47. We see the Holy Ghost come with power as promised and prophesied. In verses 1-5 the apostles receive the Holy Ghost and the power they would need to carry out their office. The sound as of a rushing mighty wind, the cloven tongues like as of fire, and the speaking in tongues previously unknown demonstrate this power. The promised establishment of the church happens with the coming of the promised power. Beginning in verse 14, Peter (speaking with the eleven) uses the keys as promised by Jesus in Matthew 16:18 to open the doors of the kingdom.

With the doors flung wide, penitent obedient souls submit to the command to be immersed for the remission of sins to have their sins washed in the shed blood of the Lamb (Acts 2:38-41; Rom. 6:16-18; Heb. 5:8-9; 9:10). Upon their obedience, the Lord Himself adds them to the church He has purchased through the efficacy of His blood (Acts 20:28).

God's eternal purpose to obtain a people for His own Name (Acts 15:14; Rom. 1:5; 1 Pet. 2:9-10) to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29; 2 Tim. 1:9; Eph. 1:3-14) was fulfilled on Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2.

This group of souls newly sanctified in the Lamb's blood became a royal priesthood offering up spiritual sacrifices having obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:5, 9-10; Phi. 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16). The saved are also likened to a temple or dwelling place (Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). The dwelling places God dwelt and the people among whom God walked had to obtain and maintain a sanctified condition. Israel, the tabernacle, and then the temple were typical of Christians and the church. Just as the people and their worship facilities were to be sanctified and remain that way (Heb. 9:15-22), in like manner so is the church and those who make up its membership to obtain and then maintain sanctification (10:1-22; 1 John 1:6-10).

This is the process of the Eternal Purpose of God, to provide a plan for the sanctification of a people for them to conform to the image of His Son (Eph. 1:3-12).

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ARRANGEMENT OF THE BIBLE

Jerry C. Brewer

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INTRODUCTION

Bible study must begin with an overview of it. While it has a central theme—the redemption of man through Jesus Christ—its divisions, inspiration, canon, and arrangement must first be understood. Paul told Timothy to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). In this passage, the American Standard Version reads, “handling aright the word of truth.” Both readings indicate that there is a right way and a wrong way to handle the Bible—God’s Word. It is the wrong way of handling it that has created such a babel of confusion among those who profess to follow Jesus Christ.

There is no such thing as “understanding the Bible differently.” If it is understood at all, it is understood alike. It is either understood, or misunderstood, but **never** “understood differently.” Nor is it impossible to understand it. Man can **know** the truth—God’s Word (John 17:17). The Bible is both so simple that a child can understand it but so deep that the greatest minds of the ages will never plumb its depths. But Jesus said we **can** know it (8:32).

THE LIBRARY OF GOD'S WORD

The Bible is unique. No other book on earth can compare with it. One of its unique features is that while it is a single volume, it is actually a library containing 66 books, which are divided into two great sections in the Bible—the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains 39 books and the New Testament contains 27 books. Understanding these divisions will greatly facilitate one's study of the Bible.

The Old Testament

The books comprising the Old Testament begin with Genesis and end with Malachi. All of these books are subdivided into what Jesus called, “the law of Moses...the prophets, and...the psalms” (Luke 24:44). Others divide the Old Testament into five subdivisions, which are known as, The Law, History, Wisdom Literature, Major Prophets, and Minor Prophets. This division of the Old Testament divides the Prophets into two categories, based upon their length. The Minor Prophets were no less important than the Major Prophets; they are called “Minor Prophets” simply because they are shorter books than the Major Prophets. Divided into five subdivisions, the Old Testament books are as follows:

The Law

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

History

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings,
1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther

Wisdom Literature

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Major Prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

Minor Prophets

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The books of Law include the creation account, the call of Abraham, his faithfulness, God's promise of a redeemer through His seed, the bondage of Israel in Egypt, their deliverance, the giving of

the Law of Moses at Sinai, and Israel's wilderness wandering until they came to the banks of Jordan, poised to enter Canaan.

The books of history recount the conquest of Canaan, Israel's settlement in it, the period of the Judges who ruled the land, and finally the kings. These books relate the history of Israel until after the death of Solomon when ten northern tribes revolted and formed the kingdom of Israel, leaving the tribes of Judah and Benjamin as the southern kingdom. These two kingdoms existed side by side until the Assyrians carried the northern kingdom away in 722 B.C., never to return to the land. Judah lasted until it, too, was carried away by the Babylonians in three waves (606 B.C., 597 B.C., 586 B.C.) and then was restored to the land by the decree of the Persian King Cyrus in 536 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4). Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther relate that period when Judah was restored to their land, and then the history of the Jews in the Old Testament ends.

The Wisdom Literature is composed, to a large extent, of poetry, the most notable of which is Psalms. It also contains the Proverbs of Solomon and his wisdom expressed in Ecclesiastes.

The Major Prophets contain five books, authored by four prophets. Isaiah prophesied before the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied just prior to and during Jerusalem's fall to the Babylonians, and his book of Lamentations is one of mourning over the fall of that city. While it is a short book, it is included among the Major Prophets because its author was Jeremiah and it immediately follows that book which is so named. Both Ezekiel and Daniel were prophets during the Babylonian Captivity.

The Minor Prophets deal with various issues. Like all the prophets, these were written by men whom God sent to Israel to call them to repentance, to warn them of impending doom if they did not repent, and to offer hope that, in spite of all that would befall Israel, the Messiah would come.

The New Testament

The 27 books comprising the New Testament can be classified under the headings of Biographical Books—so-called because they

recount the life of Jesus—History, Epistles and Prophecy. Here is how the New Testament is subdivided:

Biographical Books

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

History

The Acts of the Apostles

Epistles

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude

Prophecy

Revelation

Most epistles were letters written to either churches or individuals. Those written to churches were: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Those written to individuals were: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John. A few we term “General Epistles” were written to no particular person or church, but to individuals in general. They are: Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, and Jude.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are accounts of the life of Jesus upon the earth, from His birth to His ascension back to heaven. Jesus lived and died under the Law of Moses, and, while He was on earth, He obeyed every precept of that law. His law—the Gospel—did not become effective until after His ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. These books were written to produce faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God (John 20:30-31). They were never intended to instruct one on how to become a Christian, but they give us principles by which to live.

Acts is called “History” because it describes the beginning of the church Jesus established and its historical progress for a number of years afterward. Acts is also called the “Book of Conversions” because it recounts the conversions of various individuals throughout its pages, beginning in Acts 2 with the conversion of 3,000 people on the day the church came into being. The reader will notice that

in every case of conversion—without exception—those converted were baptized. It is Acts in which one finds the **how** of becoming a Christian.

The epistles of Romans through Jude address various subjects in the life and conduct of Christians, both in worship and in secular affairs. Neither were the epistles designed to instruct one on how to become a Christian. Their purpose was to instruct those who were already Christians how to live their lives to please God.

Revelation was written to the Seven Churches of Asia to exhort them to faithfulness in the face of coming persecution. With that exhortation came the assurance that God would preserve His faithful servants. Revelation not only warned them of the trials—and even death—that they would face but serves as assurance to Christians today that God will preserve the faithful and punish the wicked.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

A profitable study of the Bible cannot be undertaken without a proper understanding of its inspiration. Paul wrote:

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Inspiration is translated from the Greek, *theopneustos*, which means, “God-breathed.” The Scriptures, including what Paul wrote in the above passage, were literally “breathed out” from God. He is the source of every word found in the Bible. Someone may ask, “You mean Satan was inspired when he lied to Eve about the forbidden fruit? That’s in the Bible.” The answer is: “No.” Satan was not inspired when he lied, but the account of his lie that Moses wrote in Genesis **is** an inspired account of it.

About 40 different men wrote the Bible over a period of about 1,600 years. They were a diverse lot that included shepherds, kings, fishermen, a physician, and a tax collector, among others; when their writings were gathered into that single volume we call the Bible, there was not—and is not—a contradiction between any of them.

The only way to account for that is to understand that while they wrote in their own styles, God gave them the very words He wanted to convey to men. That is what we call “verbal inspiration”—inspiration that extends to the very words of the Bible, not just the thought. Paul put it this way: “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor. 2:13). God did not give the writers of the Bible an idea to express in their own words, but expressed His own will in words of **His** choosing. There is a void between spirits, and the only way that void can be bridged is for one to express himself in words to another. That is what Paul meant, saying, “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (2:11). As one person cannot know what is in another person’s mind until, and unless it is revealed to him—so no man could have known the will of God without Him revealing it, in His own words in the Bible through inspired men.

THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

Canon is used to identify the authentic books of the Bible. Tom Bright explained it in this manner:

The word **canon** came from the ancient Greeks who used it in a literal sense. A **canon** was a rod, ruler, staff, or measuring rod. It has been suggested that it was a derivative of the Hebrew *kaneh*, meaning a measuring rod (Eze. 40:3). From the literal **ruler** the word was extended to refer to a rule or standard for anything. In early Christian times, it soon came to mean a rule of faith, normative writings, or authoritative Scripture.

Today we speak of the “canon of Scripture” in reference to those books recognized as comprising the Bible. In short, it is an allusion to that which came from God to man through inspired men (311).

Who determined the canon of Scripture? Who decided which books should be included in the Bible? The short answer is that God did. That was the subject Tom Bright dealt with at the Ninth Annual Shenandoah Lectures in 1995. It has been claimed through

the centuries that the Catholic Church gave us the Bible. That is absolutely false.

God never intended for “the Church” to establish what was and was not from heaven.

The truth of the matter is, God is the “determiner” of canonicity. By this, I simply mean that through the means of inspiration, God long ago determined that a writing was **Scripture**. Would any deny this premise: If a writing is inspired, it is Scripture; if it is Scripture, then it is canonical.

Canonicity is determined by God. A writing is not inspired because men made it canonical. It is canonical because God inspired it! It is not antiquity or the church which makes a book authoritative. We need to understand this principle: a book is authoritative because it is canonical; it is not considered canonical simply because man looks upon it as valuable (313).

The 66 books comprising the Old and New Testaments are canonical (authoritative) because they are inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:21).

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE BIBLE’S BOOKS

A study of the Bible will be more fruitful if the student understands that the books as we have them arranged in our English Bible are not in chronological order. The Old Testament begins with Genesis, which was written by Moses. The time period of this book would be around 1400 B.C. However, scholars are agreed that Job is one of the Bible’s oldest books and was probably written around the time of the events Moses records in Genesis.

Some of the Bible’s books were originally parts of others. For instance, the books of 1 and 2 Samuel were originally written as one volume, as were the two books of 1 and 2 Kings. However, the division of these into two separate books does not detract from their canonicity or inspiration. An important component of Bible study is to determine the time frame of their writing as closely as possible. That is easily done with many of the prophetic books by comparing them with the historical books of Kings and Chronicles. The prophets often gave the names of kings who reigned during the time of their prophecies, such as the opening verse of Isaiah. “The

vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (Isa. 1:1). The same kind of information is found in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Jeremiah’s prophecy was given to him in the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign. It further came from Jehoiakim’s reign to the eleventh year of Zedekiah’s reign, until the fifth month of the Babylonian captivity (Jer. 1:1-3). Ezekiel pinpoints the time of his prophecy as during the time of Judah’s captivity.

Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the river of Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity (Eze. 1:1-2).

The student should also remember that the last three books of the Old Testament—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—were written about the same time as the events chronicled in Ezra and Nehemiah. Determining the time frame of historical books and where the prophets fit into those is important in the Old Testament. The New Testament books do not necessarily require the time frame to be determined for an understanding of their contents. However, it should be noted that most of the epistles penned by Paul fall within the historical context of Acts, and that book should be consulted when studying Paul’s epistles.

The division of the Bible into chapters and verses was not part of the original writing by inspired men. That was done much later in an effort to aid in study and to facilitate locating certain passages. Of the chapter divisions, Schaff and Herzog note:

Common opinion concerning chapter divisions attributes them to Cardinal Hugo of Saint Cher (q.v.) for use in his concordance to the Latin Vulgate (c. 1240, first printed, with modification, at Bologna, 1479). This opinion rests on the direct testimony of Gilbert Genebrard (d. 1597), that “the scholastics who with Cardinal Hugo were authors of the concordance” made the division. Quétif and Echard, a century and a half later than Genebrard, ascribe to Hugo only the subdivision of the chapters presently to be men-

tioned. The better opinion is, that Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1228), made the chapter division to facilitate citation (113).

The division of the chapters of the Bible into verses was made about 300 years later by a man named Henry Stephens.

In the canonical Old Testament they appear in the oldest known manuscripts...though they were not used for citation by the Jews till the fifteenth century. The earlier printed Hebrew Bibles marked each fifth verse only with its Hebrew numeral. Arabic numerals were first added for the intervening verses by Joseph Athias, at Amsterdam, 1661, at the suggestion of Jan Leusden. The first portion of the Bible printed with the Masoretic verses numbered was the *Psalterium Quincuplex* of Faber Stapulensis, printed at Paris by Henry Stephens in 1509. In 1528 Sanctes Pagninus published at Lyons a new Latin version of the whole Bible with the Masoretic verses marked and numbered. He also divided the Apocrypha and New Testament into numbered verses; but these were three or four times as long as the present ones (Schaff & Herzog 114).

Verse divisions in the New Testament were made by Stephens with the publication of his Vulgate (Geneva) Bible in 1555. There has been criticism of the arbitrary way in which many of the verses were inserted:

the division often coming in the middle of the sentence, instead of forming it into convenient and logical paragraphs, an arrangement which has seldom found favor. But their utility for reference outweighs their disadvantage (Schaff & Herzog 114).

The Bible must be studied in its context. While the chapter and verse divisions are certainly helpful in locating passages, they can be a hindrance unless the student keeps the context in mind. One example of this is Acts 1:26, where Matthias replaced Judas as an apostle. The last phrase of that verse says, "and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." Acts 1 ends there and Acts 2:1 begins, "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." Unless the context is considered and the last word of Acts 1:26 is taken into account, one might fail to understand who the "they" were of Acts 2:1. This word, a pronoun, obviously has as its antecedent, "the apostles" of Acts 1:26. One

should not think the division into chapters and verses means a break in the subject matter or context. The first verse of Acts chapter eight actually belongs in the context of chapter seven—“And Saul was consenting unto his death.”

One final note about Bible study and arrangement concerns the words printed in italics. The King James translators sometimes inserted words that were not in the original language for the purpose of clarifying the meaning of a verse. While the italicized words of the Bible can sometimes be helpful, they can also detract from the meaning of the text. A prime example of that is in Ecclesiastes 12:13 which speaks of, “the whole *duty* of man.” *Duty* is inserted in italics, but a better rendering would be, “this is the whole of man,” indicating not just a duty but that the very reason for man’s existence and well-being is to: “Fear God, and keep his commandments.”

One more example along this line should suffice to illustrate this point. Jesus told the unbelieving Jews, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am *he*, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Notice *he* is italicized. The translators evidently thought Jesus was referring to Himself as the Messiah, but it is more likely He was making a claim to Deity. Leave out the supplied word *he* and the phrase reads, “for if ye believe not that I Am, ye shall die in your sins.” When God appeared to Moses in Midian, He told Moses, “I Am that I Am,” indicating eternal self-existence that is only possessed by Deity (Exo. 3:14). Jesus also made that claim again, saying, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58) and as a result the Jews tried to stone Him because He claimed to be Deity.

CONCLUSION

Anyone who approaches the Bible as the very Word of God, inspired in every part, and respects it as being breathed out from God will know His will. It will never be understood as it should be with any other approach. Even Satan can quote Scripture (Mat. 4:6), but he does not respect it as God’s Word. He may know what it says, but he misuses it. That is the bane of the denominational world whose preachers may know what the Bible says, but do not respect it as the verbally inspired Word of God.

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DISPENSATIONS OF TIME

Dub McClish

Dub McClish is a native Texan, the son of a Gospel preacher, grandson of an elder, father of a Gospel preacher, and son-in-law of a Gospel preacher. He attended Freed-Hardeman College and received a B.A. degree from Abilene Christian College.

He has done local work in Idaho, Texas, Alabama, Kentucky, and New Mexico. Dub is a well-known author, editor, debater, publisher, and speaker who has preached the Gospel in several states and foreign countries. He has delivered special lectures at various schools of preaching. He has contributed numerous articles to various brotherhood publications as well as hundreds of bulletin articles and chapters in almost 200 books. He has extensive radio preaching experience.

Dub was the director of the Annual Denton Lectures (1982-2002) and edited all 21 Annual Denton Lectureship books, along with editing the Annual Schertz Lectures (2003-2004). He is the Founding Editor of *The Gospel Journal* (2000-2005).

After 35 years of work as a local preacher in five states (the last 12 years of which were with the Pearl Street Congregation in Denton, Texas), Dub began devoting time to combined works of Gospel meetings, mission trips, lectureships, and to writing and editing sound Biblical materials. He began helping with the establishment of Northpoint Church of Christ, Denton, Texas, in September 2005, for which he preaches (gratis) when he is not traveling.

Dub and his late wife Lavonne (James) have three children (Bronwen, Hal, and Andy), seven grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

Time is a fascinating, bewildering, imponderable, and yet so vastly important subject to consider. Accordingly, it has called forth numerous interesting observations concerning it, such as the following, gleaned from hundreds of others at *thinkexist.com*:

Yesterday is a canceled check; tomorrow is a promissory note; today is the only cash you have—so spend it wisely.

We all have our time machines. Some take us back, they're called memories. Some take us forward, they're called dreams.

Time is more valuable than money. You can get more money, but you cannot get more time.

Time is free, but it's priceless. You can't own it, but you can use it. You can't keep it, but you can spend it. Once you've lost it you can never get it back.

The Website also referenced the terrible pun by Groucho Marx: “Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana.” On a more serious note, Ben Franklin, the Colonial patriot, wisely quipped, “Time is the stuff life is made of.” Since time is truly the most basic measure of life and all that pertains to our universe, it has always been of intense interest to mankind.

TWO FACETS OF TIME

Personal Time

Time relates to each human being in a very personal way because from one’s birth until his death constitutes all of his *time*. The foregoing quotations pertain to this personal feature of time. Since our lives are our *time*, we should not be surprised that the Bible gives considerable attention to this subject. Thus, Solomon advised young people concerning the passing of time: “Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ecc. 12:1). The Lord cautioned His hearers: “Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not” (John 12:35).

Paul urged the prudent use of time: “Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16; cf. Col. 4:5). Time machines that can take one into the past for a “do-over” exist only in science fiction. Paul does not suggest any such impossible “redemption” of time. He is urging us to make the best use of time and opportunity to the Lord’s glory and the advancement of His Cause. The motivation for doing so when he wrote these words yet prevails—“because the days are evil.”

Historic Time

The other facet of time is the long view that embraces the interval from the beginning point of the material creation to the end of it. This is “time in the aggregate,” including all that will eventually take place between those two epochal boundaries. It is not an interruption between two eternities, but is better described as a “paren-

thesis” in the one eternity. It is a peculiar portion of eternity that is partitioned into regular segments of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries, and millennia. The Bible discusses the beginning and end of time and provides the God-related history of time from its beginning until He revealed the fulness of His plan to redeem mankind from sin.

The third word in our English Bible is *beginning*: “**In the beginning** God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). At the moment God created the physical universe, He created time—time began. In response to the Pharisees concerning divorce, the Lord Jesus twice ratified Moses’ account of “the beginning” as factual: “And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he who made *them from the beginning* made them male and female...?” and “**from the beginning** it hath not been so” (Mat. 19:4, 8). John began his Gospel account with words identical to those of Moses: “**In the beginning** was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The late Guy N. Woods correctly observed: “The beginning of time and the beginning of creation were contemporaneous. Time began with creation” (22).

The Bible sets forth the end of time even as it does its beginning. Since the beginning of all things material marks the inception of time, so the end of all things marks its end. Our Lord spoke of this occurrence when He promised the apostles that, as they continued to faithfully execute His commission, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mat. 28:20). In applying the parable of the tares, Jesus said, “the harvest is the end of the world,” at which time the wicked shall be separated from the righteous (13:39, 49). This time of separation will be at the coming of the Lord in His glory (25:31-32) (additional facts pertaining to the end of the world/time will be discussed in greater detail subsequently).

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF “DISPENSATIONS”

In historic time, God has dealt with mankind through different periods and different law systems, all of which relate to the one great aim—to provide a means of reconciliation of humankind to Himself. These we commonly refer to as *dispensations*. The Apple Ma-

Intosh Online dictionary gives the following as the second usage/definition of our English word, *dispensation*:

A system of order, government, or organization of a nation, community, etc., esp. as existing at a particular time: scholarship is conveyed to a wider audience than under the old dispensation. In Christian theology, a divinely ordained order prevailing at a particular period of history: the Mosaic dispensation.

Dispensation appears five times in the American Standard Version and four times in the King James Version. It translates the compound word, *oikonomia*, from *oikos*, a house and *nomos*, a law (our English word, *economy* comes directly from this word). Bauer lists “management of a household, direction, office” as its first meaning, with “arrangement, order, plan” as its second (562). It literally refers to administering the “law” or affairs of a “household,” whether one’s own, or that of another (thus a “stewardship,” as the ASV renders the term in 1 Cor. 9:17). Therefore, *dispensation* is not synonymous with *age*, *epoch*, or *period of time*, as is commonly thought. It rather has to do with “a mode of dealing, an arrangement, or administration of affairs” (Vine 174). T. Pierce Brown stated correctly: “It can be seen, therefore, that the word has to do with the type of administration or method of dealing with an individual or group.” While one who administers affairs or deals with others will do so for a certain period of time, there is no time element involved in the meaning of *oikonomia*, *dispensation*. Thus, Biblical “dispensations” are the respective ways God has administered (and still administers) His will to men. The Bible reveals that these devolve into distinguishable periods of time.

Bible students have long observed the existence of three major distinct divisions of its historical material and of all of historic time, however long it may continue, which we routinely call “dispensations.” There is perhaps no greater or more common fallacy in Bible hermeneutics than the failure to distinguish between the dispensations, especially the latter two, which underscores the significance of this study. Uninspired men have assigned descriptive names to these three periods, and they serve well to provide a framework for Bible study and for making proper application of the Biblical message.

However, we will also consider some “sub-dispensations” within these major dispensations. We now turn our attention to a consideration of these three periods.

THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION

The word *patriarch* appears only four times in the Bible, twice in the singular and twice in the plural, and all in the New Testament. *Patriarch* is directly transliterated from the Greek word, *patriarches*. It is a compound of *patria*, a family, clan, people, or nation, and *archo*, a ruler, one in authority, a chief, a prince (Bauer 113, 642; Vine 463, 540). Its first usage is in Peter’s Pentecost sermon, in which he refers to “the patriarch David” (Acts 2:29). Stephen twice used the term to describe the sons of Jacob as “the twelve patriarchs” (7:8-9). The fourth occurrence of the term refers to “Abraham, the patriarch” (Heb. 7:4). We readily see why Abraham and the sons of Jacob are called “patriarchs,” for they are in the fullest sense (particularly Abraham) heads of vast families of people. One of God’s promises to Abraham was to make of him “a great nation” (Gen. 12:2). He repeated the promise to Jacob (46:3), both of which promises were fulfilled through his twelve sons, as they became the chiefs/princes of the vast descendants of Jacob/Israel. How does David deserve this term, since he did not found a nation or live in the same era as Abraham and his grandson and great-grandsons? A. C. Hervey comments on this question as follows:

The term *patriarch* is elsewhere in Scripture applied only to Abraham and the twelve sons of Jacob (Heb. 7:4; Acts 7:8-9). It is a title of dignity, signifying the head of a house. It seems to be here applied to David, because he is spoken of as head of the family from which Christ sprang. Abraham was the head of the whole Hebrew race: “Abraham our father.” The twelve patriarchs were the heads of their respective tribes (18:53).

Clearly, *patriarch* is capable of shades of meaning, for David was not a “patriarch” in the same sense as Abraham and the sons of Jacob. Wholly in keeping with our customary use of **Patriarchal Dispensation**, Hervey then notes: “In common parlance, the term is also

applied to those chief persons who lived before the time of Moses, and have their records in his books” (18:53).

In the foregoing quotation, the beginning parameter of this dispensation is implied in the expression, **those who lived before the time of Moses**. From the time of Adam to the giving of the Law of Moses, God administered His will to men **only** in a very personal, individual, and direct way (which is not to imply that He ceased all such personal revelation after His written revelations began). There is no record of any written law from God in this period. He generally spoke to principal men of the clans or families (i.e., the “patriarchs”). He thus spoke directly to Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abram, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 1-9). God gave orders exclusively to some that were never given to others (e.g., forbidding Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—2:17, commanding Noah to build the ark—6:14-16, ordering Abram to leave his homeland and kindred—12:1).

However, he also gave some orders that applied to all (e.g., offering a specific kind of burnt offering), as noted in the case of Cain and Abel (4:3-5). It seems evident that the burnt offerings—from the one Noah offered (8:20) to those Jacob offered many generations afterward (35:1-7)—were the same that Abel offered, which God “respected” (4:4). The religious *system* was on a family basis, led by the family “patriarchs” to whom God spoke and who served as priests and who approached God through said offerings on family altars.

Although God did not communicate His will to the patriarchs in written documents, He nonetheless administered both moral and religious law to which those of that dispensation were accountable. While we see portions of it somewhat incidentally and occasionally—and sometimes by implication—God’s moral law is most certainly evident. Only where law exists is sin possible: “But where there is no law, neither is there transgression” (Rom. 4:15). God’s “moral law” existed from the beginning, as implied in the expression, “the tree of the knowledge of **good and evil**” (Gen. 2:17). God warned Cain not to sin (4:7), which he did when he murdered Abel

(4:8-11). As confirmed by the Lord and by Paul (Mat. 19:5; Eph. 5:31), God's marriage law ("from the beginning") is clear in Moses' statement: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). "The wickedness of man was great in the earth, and...every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (6:5) is sheer nonsense (not to mention an impossibility) apart from a God-given standard of behavior—moral law.

The Pre-Mosaic Sub-Dispensation

We know when the Patriarchal Dispensation began, but when did it end? Some are under the impression (or at least **leave** the impression) that Patriarchy ended in about 1500 B.C. when God gave the law to Moses, but this is not the case. This question introduces the fact that two "sub-dispensations" existed within the Patriarchal Dispensation. This conclusion inheres in the fact that the administration and application of that system of law did not remain constant for all mankind throughout its duration.

The first of these sub-dispensations spanned from Adam to the revelation of Moses' Law, during which span the patriarchal worship and moral laws were **universally** applicable. As far as God's favor was concerned, there were no distinctions between "nations" before Sinai. Thus, as noted earlier, the altars of burnt offerings and the moral laws applied to all men of that era.

The Mosaic-Law-Forward Sub-Dispensation

The second sub-dispensation began when Moses received the Law, which Law limited the applicability, thus the administration, of the patriarchal laws dramatically. Their authority no longer applied to the descendants of Jacob/Israel. God gave them a new, distinct law system, centered in the Ten Commandments. Concerning this Law (under the figure of a "covenant"), Moses reminded Israel: "Jehovah **made not this covenant with our fathers** [i.e., the patriarchs], but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deu. 5:3). Therefore, God did **not** give this new Law for/to any who were not the posterity of Abraham through Jacob/Israel.¹ This Law was some-

thing unprecedented and superior to the previous law. Moses asked Israel: “And what great nation is there, that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (4:8). Moses stated an important intent and effect of the Law: “For thou art a **holy people** unto Jehovah thy God: Jehovah thy **God hath chosen thee** to be a people for his own possession, **above all peoples** that are upon the face of the earth” (7:6). *Holy people* means a people set apart from others, “chosen” to be “above all peoples” in God’s care and favor. So Moses’ Law created a grand cleavage between the Israelites and non-Israelites (i.e., thereafter known as “Gentiles” or “the nations”).

Since the Law of Moses was for Israel alone (except for proselytes), what then became of the status of the other nations regarding Divine law? Some teach that the Gentiles were no longer under **any law** from God, misapplying Paul’s *God-gave-them-up* statements (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). Such is sheer absurdity. Were it so, the Gentiles could no longer sin or be held accountable for their behavior. This assertion conveniently overlooks such phenomena as God’s declaration that Nineveh was wicked and evil five centuries after God gave the Law to Moses (Jon. 1:2; 3:10). The Gentile nations did not cease to be amenable to the laws of patriarchy by the arrival of the Law of Moses. For Israel, Moses’ Law superseded those laws, but for all others, they remained in effect until that time and event that would mark the cessation of the authority of all earlier Divine law—both of Patriarchy and of Moses.

Genesis provides the history of the patriarchal administration, barely overlapping into Exodus. This history provides the foundation for and introduction to the dispensation that follows. Without knowledge of the patriarchs and their history, Bible readers would be left with a huge vacuum of knowledge and superabundance of head-scratching questions and curiosities. Compared to subsequent dispensations, God’s revelation to the patriarchs is not only unwritten, but comparatively sparse. Since stars give little light compared to other heavenly bodies, the Patriarchal Dispensation, compared with those that follow, is often characterized as the “Starlight Age.”

Nevertheless, the story of redemption is firmly imbedded in the history of those ancient times as Moses, the inspired historian, unfolds them (e.g., Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; etc.).

THE MOSAIC DISPENSATION

The second dispensation of God's Law was obviously (and appropriately) named for Moses. God chose him to lead the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, give them His exclusive law, and bring His chosen nation—through many toils and tears—to the threshold of Canaan. Moses was the towering figure of the dispensation until God's "prophet...like unto me"—Whom Moses prophesied—appeared among men fifteen centuries later (Deu. 18:15; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). The dispensation is also named for Moses because the Law that God gave through him and named after him (i.e., "the law of Moses"—Jos. 8:31-32; 1 Kin. 2:3; Ezra 3:2; Luke 24:44; etc.) remained in force for fifteen centuries. While a family system of religion characterized the Patriarchal Dispensation, the Mosaic Dispensation involved a national system. As did the Patriarchal Dispensation, the Mosaic Dispensation also contained two major "sub-dispensations."

The Pre-Matthew Sub-Dispensation

Beginning with the closing pages of Genesis, all of the Old Testament and the first four books of the New Testament record the history of God's chosen nation, at various times known as "Hebrews," "Israelites," and "Jews." This focus continued as long as that law was in force.² Throughout this period, Biblical history generally notices "Gentiles" only as the Israelites interact with them. The Mosaic Dispensation was characterized by an exclusive priesthood, charged with various rituals, but especially with offering a wide variety of sacrifices, at least one of which had its roots in Patriarchy. The practice of the new religion God established through Moses' Law was centered first in the tabernacle, constructed and furnished according to a very specific God-given pattern (Exo. 25:40; 26:30; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5). It would later be succeeded by a series of temples, the first of which Solomon built, also according to a God-given pattern (1 Chr. 28:11-19), followed by that built by Zerubbabel (after

the Jews' return from Babylonian/Persian captivity), and finally by Herod's temple—the one in use at the close of the Mosaic Period. The Law of Moses contains not only very specific religious ritual, but specific laws concerning morals and ethics as well. Moreover, it served as the civil law for the newly-created nation of Israel. Repeated apostasy, rebellion, idolatry, and infidelity dominate most of Israel's history.

Besides having the foregoing purposes, Moses' Law had another purpose as well. Paul explained: "What then is the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made" (Gal. 3:19). Milligan suggested the following as the meaning of Paul's words: "It was added to convince and to convict men of sin, by giving to them a perfect standard and code of morality" (84). This statement fits well with another statement by Paul: "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Howbeit, I had not known sin, except through the law: for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7).

Paul stated yet another purpose of the Law: "So that the law is become our tutor *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). This passage indicates that the Law's intent was to train and prepare Israel for the coming of the Christ. Paul declared that "Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4). His point is not that the Law of Moses ended with Christ (His death in particular), though true (Col. 2:14; etc.), but that the Law incessantly pointed to Christ as its aim. By its types, shadows, symbols, and prophecies it did its work, pointing to Him and His Dispensation. However, it could have its effect only to the degree that the hearts of the Jews were attentive to it. The scholars in—and avowed sticklers for—the Law (i.e., scribes, lawyers, Pharisees, Sadducees) who, of all people, should have been aware of this facet of the Law's purpose, were clueless. So Jesus repeatedly decried and denounced them for their spiritual blindness and deafness (Mat. 13:15; 15:14; 23:16-19, 24; Mark 8:18). Those

who should have been the first to recognize and embrace Jesus as their Messiah of the prophets became His crucifiers.

A close and vital relationship exists between the Mosaic Law and the New Testament and between the respective religions they produced. Numerous features of the Mosaic Dispensation foretold features of its successor through types and shadows. These included the priesthood, the tabernacle/temple, the unblemished lamb as a sin offering, and even Moses himself, plus many others, as especially expounded in the Hebrews' epistle. During the Mosaic Era, God sent numerous prophets to Israel, beginning with Moses and not ending until the appearance of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 7:26-27; Acts 3:22-23). God sent many of these to call Israel to repentance (Jer. 35:15) and/or to pronounce judgment upon various nations (e.g., 1:4-10). However, many of them prophesied concerning persons, things, and events that would characterize the dispensation to come (e.g., Deu. 18:15; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Isa. 2:2-3; 40:3; 53:1-12; Jer. 31:31-34; Dan. 2:44; Joel 2:28-32, et al.).

The John/Jesus Sub-Dispensation

Readers of the New Testament cannot mistake the dramatic change in emphasis and aim—and even practice in one respect—with the arrival of John the Baptist and Jesus. The Lord remarked on this phenomenon: “The law and the prophets *were* until John: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it” (Luke 16:16; cf. Mat. 11:13). He did not mean that the authority of Moses' Law ceased when they began their work. He simply called attention to the fact that they came preaching and practicing something unprecedented, not in denial of any of the Law, but in fulfillment of it (5:17-18; John 1:23; Acts 3:23-24). The **Gospel of the kingdom is preached** is a synecdoche for their words and works.

Many previous prophets had come with a message of repentance, but none before John had come preaching, “Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” and declaring himself to be the forerunner of the Lord (Mat. 3:2-3). Further, none before had come administering “baptism...unto remission of sins” (Mark 1:4). After

Jesus' baptism by John and His wilderness temptations, Matthew records: "From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 4:17). Afterward, upon their selection, Jesus commissioned the twelve: "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (10:6-7). Elsewhere we learn that the apostles also preached and practiced baptism, doubtless with the same import as John's: "When therefore the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples)" (John 4:1-2).

John's work was to "prepare the way of the Lord" by making ready a company for the soon-to-come kingdom, a figure for the church Jesus said He would build (Mat. 16:18-19). In this same context, He declared: "Verily I say unto you, There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (16:28; cf. Mark 9:1). The work of the apostles had the same end as John's work. Further, the Lord sent out an additional seventy disciples with the same instructions and powers He had given to the twelve, and preaching, "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:1-9). Meanwhile, Jesus was not only uttering His astounding words, but also performing countless miraculous works. The purpose of the latter was to confirm the Truth that He spoke, not only about the kingdom, but about His own identity as well (John 20:30-31).

Note Paul's statement (i.e., in Gal. 3:19) that the Law was added "till the seed should come to whom the promise hath been made." This statement not only accentuates the existence of this sub-dispensation. It also declares without dispute that the Law of Moses was not God's final Word, but that its authority would cease when "the seed should come." Paul had earlier said that "the seed" in God's promise to Abraham referred to the Christ (3:16), and so it does in verse 19. We learn from this that the terminal point of Moses' Law, regarding its authority, was in the work of the Christ. Accordingly, Jesus announced:

Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished (Mat. 5:17-18).

In *destroy* (*kataluo*, “to destroy utterly, to overthrow completely”—Vine 164), Jesus was talking about the very existence of the Law—He would not obliterate it so it no longer existed and men no longer had access to it. Rather, he would “fulfill” it, and in Him it would “be accomplished.” Without some knowledge of the Law, it would be all but impossible to understand much of the New Testament (e.g., in the Gospel accounts, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, etc.). Paul argued the value of knowledge of the Law:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.... Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come (1 Cor. 10:6, 11).

While Christ did not cause the Law (with its invaluable history and examples) to pass from existence, He indeed “abolished” (*katargeo*, “to reduce to inactivity”—Vine 3) the **authority** of the Law (Eph. 2:14-16). When He died on the cross, the **authority** of Moses’ Law died with Him (Col. 2:14; Heb. 10:8-10; etc.), thus bringing to an end the Mosaic Dispensation. Likewise, the laws of Patriarchy were repealed with the death of the Lord. The new Law of Christ was for “every nation,” “all the world,” and “every creature,” allowing no other spiritual law to exist (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16).

The Mosaic Dispensation involved revelation and provided spiritual light in great abundance compared to that of the Patriarchal dispensation. Therefore, the Mosaic Age is commonly called the “moonlight” age in comparison to the “starlight” age of the Patriarchal Era.

THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION

We have already cited inspired statements to the effect that the authority of Moses' Law (and thus the Mosaic Dispensation) ended with the death of Jesus, the Christ, upon the cross. The end of the Dispensation of Moses marks the beginning of the Dispensation of Christ, generally known by Bible students as "The Christian Dispensation." Likewise, the end of the authority of Moses' Law marks the beginning of Christ's Law.³ As God gave His law through Moses in the former dispensation, so He did/does through Christ in this one:

For I spake not from myself; but the Father that sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life eternal: the things therefore which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto me, so I speak (John 12:49-50; cf. 14:10, 15, 24; 17:18; Mat. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-2).

John, Jesus, the apostles, and the seventy all promised that the time had come for the everlasting kingdom of the prophets—the church of Christ—to begin, and so it did. The Lord allowed Satan to crucify Him so men could be cleansed by His sinless shed blood (John 10:17-18; Heb. 9:22; 10:4; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). However, the Father did not allow Satan to keep Him in the tomb after his cruel death on Calvary (Acts 2:32; 17:31; Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12; etc.). Just before Jesus ascended to His throne at the Father's right hand, He gave His apostles some final instructions. These included preaching the Gospel to all nations throughout the world, beginning at Jerusalem (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47). He also told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem where they would receive "power from on high," which He identified as baptism in the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8). They did so, assembling in anticipation with about 120 other disciples (apparently these were all that proved steadfast among multitudes that heard the appeals of John, the Lord, the apostles, and the seventy over a period of about three and one-half years).

On the Jewish Pentecost (fifty days after Jesus was crucified), the promised power of Holy Spirit baptism came upon the apostles,

enabling them to speak in languages they had never learned—to the amazement of the throngs of people gathered from all over the world (2:1-13). Peter began explaining the occurrence by quoting Joel’s prophecy, which said that “in the last days” God would pour forth His Spirit (2:16-21). Peter then proceeded to set forth evidence that Jesus, whose crucifixion they had demanded seven weeks earlier, was the Christ of prophecy, that God had raised Him from the dead, and He had now ascended to His throne in Heaven (2:22-36). Upon these powerful words, some were deeply stirred and convinced and interrupted Peter’s sermon with the plaintive question to the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37). In response to Peter’s command that they must—on the authority of Christ—repent and be baptized to receive forgiveness of their sins, about 3,000 yielded obedience that day, whereupon the Lord added them and others day by day to His church (KJV).

From this point forward to its end, the Biblical text chronicles the growth, development, activities, characteristics, and sufferings of the church as it was established on the wings of the Gospel message. It not only had the specific entrance requirements to which the 3,000 on Pentecost were obedient, but it also engaged in five authorized acts of worship in each of its several congregations each first day of the week (20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). These were universal, as indicated by Paul’s statement that he taught the same things everywhere in every church (4:17). These acts included:

- Partaking of the Lord’s supper, established by Him to memorialize His death (Mat. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)
- Addressing the Father in prayer through Christ (Col. 3:17)
- Singing songs of praise and edification (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)
- Giving money to do the work of the congregation (1 Cor. 16:1-2)
- Studying a message preached from God’s Word by a brother (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:8-12)

The Christian Dispensation is the final period of human/world history. God inspired some of the Old Testament prophets to refer

to it as “the latter days” and like expressions (Isa. 2:2-3; Dan. 2:28; 44-45; Joel 2:28; Mic. 4:1). Peter said that the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost was the fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32, and he identified the Pentecost event as “the last days” (Acts 2:17).⁴ Paul referred to the appearance of Christ as “the fullness of the time” (Gal. 4:4). In a like expression, he wrote of the “dispensation of the fulness of the times” in which God “sum[med] up all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). It was with this in mind that Jesus told the apostles that, as they carried out His commission, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Mat. 28:20). The Christian Dispensation also contains two “sub-dispensations.”

The Miraculous Sub-Dispensation

Jesus had empowered the apostles and the seventy to perform miracles as they preached the soon-to-come kingdom (Mat. 10:8; Luke 10:9, 17). However, in His upper room discourse before His betrayal, trials, and death, Jesus promised additional powers for the apostles. He said that His Father would send the Holy Spirit upon them, further empowering them. These powers included teaching them all things, reminding them of the things He (Jesus) had taught them, guiding them into all the truth, and declaring unto them the things that were to come (John 14:26; 16:13). Jesus linked the promised sending of the Holy Spirit upon them with their baptism in the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4, 16-21).

The apostles alone possessed and exercised miraculous powers in the earliest days of the church in Jerusalem, confirming their words thereby as Truth and confounding the Sanhedrin. The twelve demonstrated the degree of power with which they were entrusted when they enabled seven brethren to work “great wonders and signs” by laying hands on them (6:6, 8; 8:5-7, 13). As indicated in Acts 8 (just cited), Philip, one of the seven, preached the Gospel and exercised his recently received powers with great effect in Samaria. However, he could not pass this power on. Not until Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid their hands on them could any others work miracles (8:17-18). Likewise, only when Paul (an apostle) laid his hands on the dozen brethren in Ephesus were they able to proph-

esy and speak in languages they had never learned (19:6). There is no hint that any besides an apostle had this power of transmission. Paul may have alluded to this fact when he wrote of “the signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12).

These gifts were necessary for both revelation and confirmation. The various documents of our New Testaments were not dumped into the minds of the inspired men in one *lump*, but the inspired men received revelations of the Truth and “prophesied in part” (1 Cor. 13:9). Having no written record of all the Truth (into which the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles—John 16:13), they had to have a means of confirming that their words were from God. The “signs and wonders, and... manifold powers, and... gifts of the Holy Spirit” provided the needed confirmation (Heb. 2:3-4).

The revelation and the confirmation were companions that traveled together. As long as revelation was incomplete, confirmation was required, and when revelation ceased, miraculous confirmation likewise ceased. Paul argues this very point:

Love never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall be done away; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

When the perfect/completed Word was achieved, the miraculous gifts such as prophecy, tongues, and knowledge would no longer be needed for confirmation, and they would thus “be done away.”

Since the apostles alone could impart the gifts to others, it must follow that with the death of the last apostle (John, apparently, at the very close of the first century), there was no means of further empowering others. With John’s book of Revelation, the New Testament reached its perfect/complete state. This achievement was according to the Lord’s promise that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles “into all the truth”—meaning that by the time the last apostle died, all of the Truth would be revealed. Thus, the completion of revelation marked the end of the need for the confirmatory gifts, and the death of John marked the end of the source of them.

So all miraculous gifts ended with the death of the last brother or sister on whom an apostle had laid hands. At the latest this would likely have not been beyond the middle part of the second century.

The Non-Miraculous Sub-Dispensation

This second sub-dispensation begins with the end of the miraculous manifestations necessary for the infancy of the church (13:11) and will continue until the Lord returns. We are blessed with the final and complete revelation of God's Word. It is "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). It is all that anyone needs to enable him to reach Heaven at last:

All **scripture** *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for **doctrine**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **instruction in righteousness**: That the man of God may be **perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works** (2 Tim. 3:16-17—KJV).

And now I commend you to God, and to **the word of his grace**, which is **able** to build *you* up, and to **give you the inheritance** among all them that are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

There will not be another age or dispensation of time upon the earth. Jesus promised the apostles that, although He would soon leave them to return to the Father, "I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also" (John 14:3). Inspiration describes the events that will transpire at the Lord's coming: the resurrection of the dead, the instantaneous change of the mortal bodies to immortal bodies of those alive at His coming, the gathering of all who have ever lived for Judgment by Jesus, the ascension of the righteous to meet the Lord in the air, and their being delivered up by the Lord to the Father where they shall ever more be (Mat. 25:31-32; John 12:48; 1 Cor. 15:21-24, 42-53; 1 The. 4:13-17). Peter terms the Lord's return as "the day of the Lord," saying that when He returns, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10).

While the New Testament gives us the *what* of Jesus' return in some detail, neither man nor angel can know the *when* of the Lord's return (Mat. 24:36-51; 1 The. 5:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:10; Rev. 3:3). It is

certain, however, that when the Lord returns, all time and earthly history will cease. Each human being who has lived since Adam and who was capable of responding to the Will of God will either enter Heaven, the place of eternal bliss with God and His Son or will be cast into Hell, the place of eternal torment with the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:34, 42, 46; John 5:29; Rom. 2:9-10; 2 The. 1:9; Rev. 20:11-15). Let us all heed the Lord's warning: "Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh" (Mat. 24:42).

The Christian Dispensation can only be described as the "sunlight" age, for in it we have the consummation and revelation of God's plan to reconcile man to Himself through His Son.

CONCLUSION

A movie projector may serve to illustrate the progression of spiritual light and revelation through the dispensations. In a movie theater, if one is near the screen and looks up toward the projector, he can see dust particles in the light coming from the projector. At the point of the projector, the beam of light is very small, but the nearer to the screen it gets, the broader it becomes until it finally strikes the screen with the projected image. So it is with God's revelation. It begins very small in the time of the patriarchs. It gradually becomes fuller in and throughout the Mosaic Dispensation. With the coming of Christ and His completed revelation, the picture of grace, redemption, and salvation fully bursts upon the screen of time.

What great privileges we have to live in this age in which we have the fullness of God's revelation. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away *from them*" (Heb. 2:1).

ENDNOTES

¹This fact alone demonstrates the folly of the multitude of Catholic and Protestant sects—composed entirely of Gentiles—that often turn to the Law of Moses to justify their religious practices.

²None should infer that (from the fact that the Gospel accounts continue the Old Testament **history** of the Jews) the first four books of the New Testament therefore belong in the Old Testament—as some erroneously advocate. While the Law of Moses was still in effect when Christ was born (He was born and died "under the law"—Gal. 4:4; Col. 2:14), He nonetheless proclaimed a new message/

law that would take effect with the beginning of—and would usher in—the subsequent dispensation. While the **history** in the Gospel records is Old Testament **history**, the **message** in these books is **Gospel**, the **New Testament message** (Mark 1:1). They are correctly positioned as the beginning books of the New Testament.

³Yes, Christ has a law, contrary to the denials of the grace-only advocates who contend that grace and law are mutually exclusive. Inspired writers did not so believe or teach. Paul stated the obvious fact that in absence of law, transgression is impossible (Rom. 4:15; 5:13; 7:8). If Christ has no law, how does one explain New Testament references to the law of Christ (8:2; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; Jam. 1:25; 2:12)?

⁴Premillennial dispensationalists consistently misapply *the last days*, saying this phrase points to alleged cataclysmic events that are to take place immediately before the Lord's return. They are grievously wrong. In the first place, there are no such "signs of the times" that warn of the Lord's coming. In the second place, the entire administration of God through His Son, beginning at Calvary and ending with His return, constitutes "the last days." Men have been living in "the last days" since Pentecost (Acts 2:17).

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PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION

Michael Hatcher

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Michael directed the North Texas Lectureship and currently is director of the Bellview Lectures. He has written articles for several brotherhood publications and a weekly newspaper (from 1987-1994). He was the associate editor of the *Shield Of Faith* and now is editor of *Defender*, the *Beacon*, and the Bellview Lectures book. He is co-author of a book, *Hatcher/Schweitzer Exchange*, an exchange of letters with a Lutheran minister on the subject of Total Hereditary Depravity and other subjects. He also had a debate on the subject of instrumental music in worship with Baptist, Bob L. Ross.

INTRODUCTION

There is another lesson dealing with dispensations of time, thus I will not elaborate on this. However, *dispensation* is from “dis-pense” and is, thus, a dispensing of something. In relation to time, it is how God saw fit to divide that portion of His divine economy known as time. That division was into three periods: Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian. During each of these divisions, God established a system of government in which He dispensed His laws to man. Our discussion will center on the first of these, the Patriarchal Dispensation.

PATRIARCHY

Patriarchal is made up of three parts: *patri* meaning “father,” *arche* meaning “rule,” and *al* meaning “pertaining to.” Thus *patriarchal* is that period of time pertaining to father rule. God was dealing directly with the head of the house instead of working through prophets and priests.

We see the seeds of Patriarchy when God said to Eve: “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16).

We again observe the nature of this system when God says about Abraham:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him (18:19).

With Abraham we learn that he was acting as the spokesman for God (prophet) in relationship to his family.

The head of the family was also to act as the representative of the family to God. We observe the patriarch Job doing this:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.... And it was so, when the days of *their* feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings *according* to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually (Job 1:1-2, 5).

Job, as the head of the family, was offering burnt offerings for each of his children. As such, he was acting as the priest to God on behalf of his children. Thus, the head of each family was managing his family as being both the prophet for God and the priest for his family.

God is revealed not just as a God of a tribe (i.e., a tribal Deity) but also as the God (Judge) of all the earth. After declaring to us that Abraham will command his children, we learn this universal nature of God when Abraham asked:

That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Gen. 18:25).

God was not only concerned with the family, but Abraham recognizes his right to Judge the entire world.

When Moses flees Egypt after killing the Egyptian to save an Israelite, he travels to Midian. We then have recorded for us: "Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew

water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock" (Exo. 2:16). We later learn this is Jethro (called Reuel in 2:18 and Raguel in Num. 10:29), and he gives his daughter Zipporah to be Moses' wife. After Moses brings the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, Jethro meets Moses and gives him some sage advice (Exo. 18). Jethro was serving as a priest for the Midianites to God; however, we would not know this without his association with Moses. We learn that God was concerned and dealing with other people and nations even though we might not have a record of such.

During this time of Patriarchy, it has been rightly stated that Patriarchy is a family-type religion, Judaism a national religion, and, finally, Christianity a universal religion. Yet, while being primarily a family type religion based upon the head of the family, we see that God dealt with some on a nationalistic basis.

PATRIARCHAL LAW

Within this dispensation, God gave laws or commands. We observe this from the beginning of time. God commanded Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, to have dominion over every living thing, and not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When their two sons (Cain and Abel) brought an offering to God, it implies they have been instructed to bring an offering. God accepted Abel's offering while rejecting Cain's. We are told that God accepted Abel's because he offered it by faith (Heb. 11:4). Since faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17), there had to be some instructions (a law) to make an offering to God. One thing that differed in this law from the other dispensations is that this law was unwritten while the Mosaic and Christian are written down for us. Thus, the instructions God gave regarding making an offering would have been oral and not written.

In both of these situations, we also learn there is punishment for violating God's laws. Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden (Gen. 3:23-24). God refused to accept Cain's offering. God asked him, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him" (4:7). This is the first time *sin* is

mentioned in the Scriptures. Since sin is the transgression of the law (1 John 4:7), there had to be a law regarding offerings made to God. We also know “for where no law is, *there is no transgression*” (Rom. 4:15); Cain violated God’s law. He then murdered Abel and after hearing his punishment, he responded:

My punishment *is* greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, *that every one that findeth me shall slay me* (Gen. 4:13-14).

This is consistent with what God reveals after the flood, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (9:6). Thus, we see the beginning of various laws that will be incorporated into every dispensation being established in the Patriarchal Dispensation.

Soon in the course of history, Moses recorded God’s dealings with the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph) and to a great extent dismissed His dealings with others. While going through the history of Abraham, we soon come across Melchizedek who is king of Salem (which means “peace”) and “priest of the most high God” (14:18). The fact that Melchizedek was serving as a priest of God shows that God had not totally forgotten other peoples and nations.

When God promises the land of Palestine to Abraham, He also says that Abraham’s descendants would go into Egypt and return “in the fourth generation” (15:16). The reason God gives for not giving Abraham the land then is that “the iniquity of the Amorites *is not yet full*” (15:16). That the Amorites have iniquity (sin) shows they were given a law from God to which they were accountable.

Shortly thereafter, we see God’s attitude toward another sin—Sodomy. Because the sin of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain “is very grievous” (18:20), God is going to destroy them. God had revealed at the beginning the nature of man and woman by allowing Adam to name the animals, and, in doing such, learn there was no help meet for him (2:20). God then made Eve from one of Adam’s ribs and presented her to him (2:21-24). Thus, God

considered the sin of homosexuality very grievous in changing the natural order He created. God views homosexuality in the same way both in the Law of Moses and today as He did then (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:24, 26-28).

Later, when Abraham sojourned in Gerar, he lied to king Abimelech about Sarah. God then appeared to Abimelech in a dream and told him, "Behold, thou *art but* a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she *is* a man's wife" (Gen. 20:3). Because he had done this in the integrity of his heart and with innocent hands, God told him, "I also withheld thee from sinning against me" (20:6). We again see God working directly through individuals during this age. Abimelech then relayed God's message to the people: "Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears" (20:8).

As one considers God's dealings with others, it is still relating to God's dealings with the patriarchs. God's message to Abimelech resulted from his dealings with Abraham. As we study through this dispensation, we observe the same thing as other patriarchs came in contact with nations and peoples. God's dealings with those nations and peoples are as a result of the patriarchs, but God was giving those nations and peoples a law to which they were subject.

PATRIARCHAL TIMEFRAME

It is agreed that the beginning of the Patriarchal Dispensation is with the creation of the world and, thus, with Adam and Eve. The difficulty comes with the end of the dispensation. Prior to the Law of Moses ushering in the Mosaic age, all men were under the Patriarchal Dispensation and thus its law. Many teach that the Patriarchal Dispensation ended with the beginning of the Mosaic Law. However, the Law of Moses was only given to the Israelites. Moses makes this clear when he states to the Israelites:

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant

with our fathers, but with us, *even* us, who *are* all of us here alive this day (Deu. 5:1-3).

The timeframe from the creation to the Law of Moses is rounded off as 2500 years. Ussher gave the date for the creation as 4004 B.C. and the giving of the Law at 1491 B.C.

Since the Law of Moses was given only to the Israelites, the Gentile world obviously had to be subject to some law—remember—if there is no law, there is no sin. Thus, either no Gentile committed sin after the Mosaic Law was given, or the Gentiles were amenable to some law. What we find is that they continued in subjection to the Patriarchal Law. Let us turn our attention to the Gentile world and God's dealings with them.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, was a priest of Midian (Exo. 18:1). We should not assume that when the Mosaic Law was given to the Israelites, Jethro's priesthood ended. What would be more in keeping with what we observe is that God continued to deal with the Midianites in the same way He had been previous to the giving of the Law and that Jethro remained a priest based upon the Law of Patriarchy.

As the children of Israel were traveling to the Promised Land (during the period of the Wilderness Wanderings), they pitched in the plains of Moab (Num. 22). The Moabites and their king, Balak, were afraid of the Israelites. Thus, Balak sent to Balaam to curse the Israelites. Balaam was a prophet of God, yet he was not a prophet in Israel or for the Israelites. When the men who Balak sent are with him, God speaks to him. Initially, Balaam would state, "I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more" (22:18). While he did not remain faithful to this statement, he was still a prophet of God based in Patriarchal Law, not Mosaic Law.

Elijah the Tishbite informed Ahab for God that there would be no rain coming upon the land (1 Kin. 17:1). God instructed Elijah to go eastward to the brook of Cherith, and He would feed him. However, after a period of time the brook dried up. God then told him to go to Zarepheth (a city on the coast of Phoenicia under control of the king of Sidon at this time) and dwell there because

“I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee” (17:9). This widow obeyed the command of God in taking care of Elijah, yet she was not an Israelite. God continued working with those who were not Israelites and giving His law to individuals. Thus, we see the continuation of the Patriarchal Law.

God sent Jonah with the message, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jon. 3:4) to warn Nineveh that He was going to destroy them because of the evil they were doing. However, the men of Nineveh—from the king down—repented. It says, “God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did *it* not” (3:10). Nineveh was going to be destroyed because of their violation of God’s law (sin); they repented. Yet, repentance is effected upon the basis of law. What law did they sin against causing God’s intention to destroy them? Since the Mosaic Law was never given to them, the Law of Patriarchy is the only option. This is also the law by which they repented. Numerous other examples are found in the Scriptures (i.e., Daniel’s dealings with foreign nations, Herod and Herodias, the statements of God’s blessings or condemnation upon nations—Psa. 19:17; Pro. 14:34; etc.), but these serve the purpose to show the Patriarchal Law (Dispensation) continuing for the Gentile nations while the Israelites were subject to the Law of Moses.

Thus, the end of the Patriarchal Dispensation for the Jewish world is when God gave the Law of Moses to them: for the Gentile world, it ended at the cross of Christ, just as the Mosaic Dispensation did. While both laws were nailed to the cross, the effect of what took place at the cross is not seen till later. For the Jews, they continued under the Mosaic Law till Pentecost of Acts 2. Prior to Christ’s ascension, He gave the apostles a progression of the Gospel message:

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The apostles were to wait in Jerusalem till they were endued with this power from on high (Luke 24:46-49). They were not to preach or apply the Gospel till God determined in His own will when it was right (Acts 1:4-7). When the Holy Spirit comes upon them (the apostles), then they would begin speaking this new law, or making this new law applicable to men. However, it would not be made applicable to all men at this time: only to those in Jerusalem. Then they would follow the Spirit's direction into Judah, then in Samaria. This new law became applicable to all men when the Spirit directed them to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. What law were the Gentiles subject to during that time from the cross to Acts 10 (a period of 7-10 years)? They remained under the Patriarchal Law during that time. Thus, the Patriarchal Dispensation began at the creation and continued for all men (1) till the Law of Moses was given for the Israelites and (2) till the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 for the rest of the world.

PATRIARCHAL LAW'S WAGES

By wages, I mean that the wages of sin is death and the wages of righteousness is blessing. During this dispensation we learn that when one fails to be obedient to God's Law, God punishes him. After Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God had said not to eat, they were cursed and cast out of the Garden (Gen. 3). When Cain failed to offer a proper offering to God, God rejected his offering. Then he murdered Abel, again bringing God's punishment, as we noted previously. God brought the flood upon men because "GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually" (6:5). As noted previously, when God promised the land of Palestine to Abraham's descendants, He told Abraham that it was not going to be given to them till the sins of the Amorites were full (15:16), and then the Amorites would be destroyed from off the land.

It would be easy to fill a lesson just with the punishment of sin, both of the Israelites and the Gentile nations. However, as Paul goes through the sins of the Gentiles, showing their need for the Gospel,

he begins by saying, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18) and states three times that God gave them up (1:24, 26, 28).

During this dispensation, we also learn that when one is obedient to God’s law, he would have fellowship with God and receive the blessings He gives. Prior to Adam and Eve’s disobedience, they had fellowship with God when He would come “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). After Cain made his unacceptable offering, God told him, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?” (4:7). “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (6:8) because he did “according to all that God commanded him” (6:22). Thus, God saved him from the destruction of the flood.

Abram was instructed to leave his country and go to a place God would give him (11:27ff). For the next several chapters, we learn of Abram’s obedience to God. We also learn that God is going to bless him:

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (12:1-3).

We later learn that Abraham is called the friend of God (2 Chr. 20:7; Jam. 2:23) and the father of the faithful (Rom. 4, Gal. 3).

These and others not mentioned (Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, et. al.) are all prior to the Law of Moses. Could one who was a Gentile be right with God and blessed by Him after the giving of the Law? Absolutely, and based upon the same principles as those prior to the Mosaic Law.

This explains why God would hear Cornelius’ prayers in Acts 10 when we know that “God heareth not sinners” (John 9:31). Notice how God describes him: “A devout *man*, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” (Acts 10:2). *Devout* means “reverent, pious, devout.”

He was devout based upon his continued obedience to the Law of Patriarchy. Based on this description, he is known to be a proselyte of the gate. As such, he was still recognized as a Gentile. Additionally, we know that he is the first Gentile convert because of the vision that was necessary to convince Peter to take the Gospel to him and those with him. Thus, the terms God used to describe Cornelius show that he was in a right relationship with God and that is why God would hear his prayers. The Gospel at this time becomes applicable to the Gentiles. For Cornelius to remain blessed by God, he must obey the Truth Peter preached to him.

CONCLUSION

There are great lessons to be learned by studying the Patriarchal Dispensation. During this period, we see the need for atonement and God initially revealing His plan for the salvation of man through the one who would bruise the head of Satan (Gen. 3:15). We observe one of the major developments in that atonement in the blessings God makes to Abraham that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (12:3). We also learn the need for obedience to God. If we are obedient then, God will bless us: if we fail to obey, God will punish us. Let us make sure we obey and remain obedient to God to receive His blessings.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

MOSAIC DISPENSATION

Dub Mowery

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The Mosaic Dispensation began after the Israelites, led by Moses, came out of Egyptian bondage and received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. This was in 1491 B.C. The Ten Commandments served as the basic law given unto the nation of Israel. Through Moses, Jehovah gave them additional laws recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Later, other commandments and guidance was given unto them by the prophets, ordained by the Heavenly Father.

Exodus covers the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage, the beginning of their journey through the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, and the setting up of the priesthood under the Mosaic Law. Leviticus includes moral laws, cleanliness, and the kinds of food they were to eat and not eat. Numbers covers their wandering in the wilderness for forty years and receives its name from the census of the people given therein. Deuteronomy includes a repetition of the laws given through Moses unto the children of Israel. This was just before they entered into the promised land of Canaan. It was delivered unto the Israelites by Moses, just before his death, in three formal discourses. The first covers Deuteronomy 1:1 through 4:40, the second begins at 4:44 and goes through chapter 26:19, and the third presentation is in chapters 27:1 through 30:20.

The Mosaic Dispensation was the second of the three dispensations of God having a systematic way of dealing with man. Various Scriptural terminologies for this period and its laws are found in the Bible. It is known as the Mosaic Dispensation because God chose Moses as His spokesman unto the Israelites. The apostle John wrote by inspiration: “For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). It is Scripturally called the first covenant in contrast to the New Testament referred to as the second covenant or new covenant. *Covenant* is a formal agreement between two or more persons. The first covenant was given by Jehovah for the children of Israel to submit unto. In Hebrews 8 the inspired writer contrasted the first covenant (which was received at Mt. Sinai) with the second covenant, which replaced it and became the new covenant. The Mosaic Law was sometimes simply referred to as “the law” in the inspired writings of the New Testament. The apostle Paul often spoke of it in this manner. There have been some who mistakenly thought that Paul was referring to all law. To them, the apostle was saying that those living under the New Testament dispensation were not under any law. That is inexcusable! We are now living under the perfect law of liberty (Jam. 1:25).

Three months after the Israelites had been delivered from their bondage in Egypt, God instructed Moses to prepare them for His coming on Mt. Sinai.

And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Exo. 19:3-6).

We then learn:

And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD

hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD (19:7-8).

God then gave further instructions to Moses of how the Israelites were to prepare for His coming on Mt. Sinai.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, *that ye go not* up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether *it be* beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount (19:9-13).

Moses went down and prepared the people for the coming of the Lord in three days.

Just as the children of Israel were to prepare for the coming of the Heavenly Father on Mt. Sinai, we should be prepared both physically and mentally when we come together on the first day of the week and on other occasions to worship God. It would aid us to be in a worshipful state of mind by praying before we even leave our home to assemble with the saints. It would also be helpful by meditating upon the inspired Word beforehand. As the children of Israel were to prepare their clothing for the occasion of God's coming upon Mt. Sinai, we are to wear suitable clothing when we come together for worship. The facilities where we come together certainly should be prepared.

When Moses went up on Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments (24:12-18), he remained there for forty days and nights. The Israelites became impatient and requested Aaron make them "gods" to go before them (32:1). Aaron, in response, collected golden earrings from the people for the purpose of sculpturing a

golden calf to be worshipped. He then designed, with a graving tool, an image of a calf. We then learn:

And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow *is* a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play (32:4-6).

It is a mystery that the children of Israel, especially Aaron, so quickly turned away from God to idolatrous worship.

On Mt. Sinai, God told Moses what the people were doing. God was so angry He spoke of destroying them. Moses pleaded with Him, and the Lord repented of the evil He would have done unto the people (32:11-14). Yet when Moses came down from the mount and saw what the people were doing, he became so angry he threw the tables of stones down and broke them. He burned the golden calf in the fire and then ground it into powder. Moses then put it in water and made the people drink it. Three thousand of those guilty of worshipping the golden calf were slain by the sword (32:19-35).

The moral laws of the Ten Commandments, such as "thou shalt not kill," were in force from the beginning of time. Cain sinned when he killed his brother Abel. Punishment was bestowed upon him because of his evil deed. The one commandment of the Ten Commandments that was not in effect prior to it being given unto the children of Israel after they left Egypt was the Sabbath. It was first introduced unto them prior to it being included in the basic laws at Mt. Sinai. In Exodus 16, we read of the manna that came down from heaven unto the children of Israel. They were instructed not to gather any of it on the seventh day but to gather a double portion on the sixth day of the week. Moses pointed out unto them that the seventh day of the week was the Sabbath unto the Lord. In answer to those who contend God established it after resting on the seventh day of creation, let us turn unto the writings of Moses in Deuteronomy 5 where Moses said unto the Israelites:

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even us*, who *are* all of us here alive this day (Deu. 5:1-3).

He went ahead and reiterated all of the Ten Commandments immediately after making that statement. It included the Sabbath, and therefore it was not even given unto their forefathers or to other nations.

The Mosaic Law was to remain in effect only until the promised seed, Jesus Christ, came. This is what the apostle Paul states concerning its temporary purpose:

Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; *and it was* ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not *a mediator* of one, but God is one. *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. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Gal. 3:19-25).

The Greek word translated *schoolmaster* in the KJV is rendered *tutor* in other versions. It means the Mosaic Law served as an instructor guiding the Israelites unto the Messiah.

Moses, himself, revealed that God had informed him that a Prophet, like unto him, shall come forth.

And the LORD said unto me, They have well *spoken that* which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require *it* of him (Deu. 18:17-19).

This, of course, was referring unto Jesus the Christ. In the Christian Dispensation the apostle Peter applied those words of Moses unto the Son of God (Acts 3:12-26).

The reason given why the Mosaic Law could not give spiritual life was because of the weakness of the flesh of those who lived under it. Jesus Christ was the only person to have lived it sinlessly. The apostle Paul declared: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). Christ not only died for those living in the Christian Dispensation but for mankind from the beginning of time. He died to redeem those who were under the Law of Moses. The inspired Word states in Hebrews 9:15:

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Someone might be ready to say, "If we are not living under the Law of Moses or the Old Testament, then why should we bother to study it?" Many of the things recorded therein are mentioned by the Son of God while He was here upon earth. This included Jonah being swallowed by a large fish. Jesus said, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Mat. 12:40). If someone had never read about Jonah in the Old Testament, then he would not have any idea of what our Lord was making a comparison to, concerning His being in the tomb. Also, the apostles referred to various things in the Old Testament for the purpose of teaching valuable spiritual truths. The Son of God spoke of Jonah being in the belly of a large fish for three days as a type foreshadowing when He would be buried for three days. There are several other such comparisons. This is a major reason why we should study the Old Testament. Such comparisons are known as types and anti-types. It is to use some person, thing, or event in the Old Testament as types or symbols foreshadowing or representing a person, thing,

or event in the New Testament. That which it prefigures is known as the antitype. We now better understand why the apostle Paul said concerning the Old Testament in Romans 15:4: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

Looking unto Numbers 21, after the Israelites were delivered by the Lord from their slavery in Egypt, they should have been thankful. The Lord had even provided them the manna bread which rained down from heaven. Yet, as they came through the land of Edom, they became discouraged and commenced to complain. They were guilty of speaking out against God and Moses whom the Lord chose to lead them out of Egypt. They said unto Moses, “Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for *there is* no bread, neither *is there any* water; and our soul loatheth this light bread” (Num. 21:5). Because of their ungrateful attitude, the Lord immediately sent poisonous snakes, referred to as “fiery serpents,” among the people. Many of the people were bitten by the snakes and died. The people came unto Moses saying, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us” (21:7). Moses began to pray unto God on behalf of the people. The Lord responded by saying unto Moses, “Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live” (21:8). The Scripture reveals that Moses did make a serpent of brass and put it on a pole. The pole was raised so the brass serpent could be seen by the people. If anyone was bitten by one of the poisonous snakes they would look upon the brass snake and be healed.

Notice that the poisonous snakes were not removed but the people realized without complying with the Will of God, they would die. During the personal ministry of Jesus, He declared: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). The Son of God spoke of the brass serpent being lifted as a type which prefigured His be-

ing lifted up on the cross to die for the sins of humanity. Just as the Israelites had to look upon the brass serpent to be healed, everyone living in the Christian Dispensation must look to Jesus Christ for spiritual salvation.

Early in the wilderness at Rephidim the Israelites complained that they thirsted. Moses then turned to God, pleading unto Him. God said unto Moses:

Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel (Exo. 17:6).

Moses struck the rock twice to bring water instead of speaking unto it as God had instructed him to do. He also gave himself and Aaron credit as having done this (Num. 20:10). Because of this, God told Moses: “Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them” (20:12). Moses died upon Mt. Nebo at the age of 120 after getting to look upon the land promised the posterity of Abraham. He did not lose his eternal reward for otherwise being faithful. In the New Testament we learn:

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mat. 17:1-13). The entrance of the Israelites into Canaan was in 1451 B.C.

The rock Moses struck that brought forth water was a type of Christ being the Rock of salvation. In speaking of the children of Israel in the wilderness, the apostle Paul states: “And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4).

The Mosaic Dispensation actually began when Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai and continued through when Jesus was nailed to a cross. The Christian Dispensation began on the day of Pentecost (Col. 2:14-17; Acts 2). Its major events were:

1. **Wandering (40 years)**—Law given, priesthood, festivals, sacrifices
2. **Conquest (51 years)**—Joshua, the land divided
3. **Judges (305 years)**—Deborah, Gideon, Samson, and Samuel
4. **United Kingdom (120 years)**—Saul, David, and Solomon
5. **Divided Kingdom (253 years)**—10 tribes in the North, 2 tribes in Judah, idols
6. **Judah (136 years)**—the fall to Babylon, Jeremiah, Jerusalem destroyed
7. **Exile (50 years)**—Ezekiel, Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar's dream
8. **Post-exile 136 (years)**—the rebuilding of the temple and city
9. **Silence (400 years)**—Alexander the Great, Rome, Septuagint translation
10. **Gospel History (33 years)**—Birth, ministry, and death of Christ

Truly the Mosaic Law was a tutor to bring the Israelites unto Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We are thankful that we are living under the new covenant which is based upon better promises (Heb. 8:6-13).

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION

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INTRODUCTION

Given the error intrinsic to the false theory (or more precisely, the diverse flavors of the false theory) of Premillennialism (which shall be discussed briefly later) it is of utmost importance for people to understand both the significance and the duration of the Christian Dispensation that commenced with the year A.D. 33 and will end with the judgment. This period of time is covered beginning in the New Testament book of Acts through Revelation, which covers the judgment that will come at the end of the Christian dispensation and the end of the world. The teaching of the New Testament in many different passages makes it clear and beyond question that unless an individual obeys the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and remains faithful to Him during the time we correctly refer to as the Christian dispensation, there will be no other opportunity for him to prepare to meet God in Judgment.

THE MEANING OF DISPENSATION

Webster's 50th Anniversary Dictionary defines *dispensation* as "A system of rules for ordering affairs," and "A particular arrangement or provision" (224). *Dispensation* appears four times in the King James Version of the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2; Col. 1:25). The word is translated from the Greek word, *oikonomia*.

Thayer defines it in part as: “The management of a household or of household affairs; specifically, the management, oversight, administration of another’s property” (440).

WHEN DID THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION BEGIN?

Some brethren describe the crucifixion of Christ as the beginning of the Christian dispensation inasmuch as when Jesus died on the cross, He abolished the law of Moses (Eph. 2:15). However, given both the dictionary definition of the English word as well as the meaning of the Greek word that is used in the New Testament, we believe it is more properly said that the Christian Dispensation began on the day of Pentecost, for that is when through the apostles the administration or stewardship of the household of God actually began.

WHEN WILL THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION END?

The Christian dispensation will remain until the end of the world. We take notice of the words of Jesus: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mat. 24:35). When Jesus gave the great commission, He informed His apostles that He would be with them unto the end of the world (28:20). For those who argue the word translated “world” in both the KJV and ASV, actually means the age, remember that Jesus said His Word would never pass away. He also stated, as recorded by John, that His Word would be that by which men would be judged (John 12:48). Further, in Revelation, the apostle John writes: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6).

The New Testament is very plain that when the Lord comes to judge the world, there will be Christians alive. Peter expressed God’s desire that all men come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9), and in the very next verse he begins to describe the destruction of the earth. Using the same phraseology that Paul did to the Thessalonians (1 The. 5:2), that the Lord will come as a thief in the night, Peter then warns in verses 11 and 12:

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? (2 Pet. 3:11-12).

In connection with the “day of the Lord” that both Peter and Paul used, Paul reminded the Thessalonians that some would be alive and remain when the Lord descended. Those would rise to meet the Lord in the air (implying that Jesus never sets foot upon the earth) and those shall ever be with Him (1 The. 4:17).

If it is the case, and it is, that the Lord’s Word will never pass away, that there will be those who are obedient to Him when the world is destroyed, and He judges the world, then Premillennialism which teaches a restoration of the temple and the law of Moses, is not only incorrect, it is out and out blasphemy. The world will end when the Christian dispensation ends.

THE LAST DAYS

Nothing is more plainly taught in the Scripture than the fact that we are living in the last days. If words mean anything, and if we are living in the last days, there can be no days that follow the last days. The last days were prophesied of by the Old Testament prophets Isaiah, Micah, and Joel. Both Isaiah and Micah prophesied that in the last days the mountain of the Lord’s house would be established in the top of the mountains, and that the law of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Mic. 4:1-2). Even though Joel uses the phrase, “come to pass afterward” (Joel 2:28), on the Day of Pentecost the apostle Peter informed the multitude that what Joel was referring to was the last days:

But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams (Acts 2:16-17).

We rightly conclude, then, that because what Peter referred to as the last days, and that the administration or stewardship of the

Lord's house began on the day of Pentecost, the last days and the Christian dispensation are two different references to the same period of time.

THE LAST DAYS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Last days is found five times in the New Testament. It is rendered from two Greek words, *eskhatos* (from which we get *eschatology*, the study of final things), meaning "last in time or in place" (Thayer 253), and *hemera* "the interval between sunrise and sunset" (Thayer 277). The last days, then, are the last days in which the sun will rise and set, as we noted that Peter wrote the earth will then pass away and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. There is information to be gleaned and lessons to be learned from each of the five New Testament passages in which *last days* is found. Thus, we will briefly examine each one. The first passage we will examine is not the first mention of the phrase in the New Testament, but it is the reference that establishes beyond any doubt that we are not living in some period of time that will be followed by some other period, but that we are indeed living in **the** last days.

Hebrews 1:1-2

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

It is beyond comprehension that so many men can read such a precise statement that we are now in the last days but introduce theories which contradict the fact. Sadly, that is what Premillennialism does. Not only so, but its tenets give a false hope to some that they can reject the Gospel of Christ now, only to be saved after "the rapture" during the made-up period of seven years of tribulation. These, the error implies, will have a second chance at salvation. When men reject the simple teaching of the Bible, all kinds of made-up theories result. It is no speculation at all to realize there are people who tell themselves that the rapture has not occurred yet and the tribulation period has not begun; so they conclude they can put off any concern for their souls until later. If they have to

live through the tribulation, so be it. Eat, drink, and be merry for now! When these people die outside of Christ or the trump of God sounds during their lifetime, they will be lost, and part of the reason is that they were fooled by the false teaching of men concerning events that are imaginary and totally contrived by the imagination of men!

Acts 2:17

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

We have previously noted that “last days” used by Peter on this occasion is the same as Joel’s “come to pass afterward.” However, there are numerous points to garner from the context. For instance, Peter further quotes Joel in reference to the signs and wonders. These, he said, would occur before the great and terrible day of the Lord came when all surviving components of the Jewish economy, including the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 would forever vanish away. The church was established on that day of Pentecost, and is the ark of safety in which, by reason of their obedience, the saved were gathered (2:47). The promise, Peter said, was to them and their children, and to all who were afar off that the Lord called (2:39). In the last days, it is not physical Israel who are the chosen people of God, but rather the holy nation that became such by believing in Christ, repenting of their sins, and being baptized into Christ for remission of their sins. The Premillennial teaching that the temple and Judaism will be restored is not just error; it is blasphemy.

2 Timothy 3:1

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

Paul is not here referring to some particular time slot within the Christian Dispensation or last days, but rather is giving a description of some evil things that will be present during the last days. If we go down the list that begins in verse two, we can find ourselves check-

ing off each item on the list with the affirmative statement, “Yes, that is just how things are.” Space prohibits even a brief discussion of all of the elements of the sad condition described by the apostle, but there are three, which need at least a few brief comments.

Despisers of Those Who Are Good

We live in a world where it is not only the case that sin is defended, but also where those who engage in certain sins are defended as persons who were born that way. Obviously, the most prevalent of these sins in our day and in our nation is homosexuality. In the United States, some states are now voting to accept “gay marriage.” However, the trouble does not end there. If one opposes and speaks out against this unnatural, against-the-body and against-God sin, the same sin that resulted in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he is disdained, ridiculed, and branded as narrow-minded and mean-spirited. We once lived in a society where evil was looked down upon, but now those who live righteously find ourselves as the objects of disdain. Yet, we must, as Paul exhorted Timothy to do in this chapter, continue in the things we have learned, abiding by the Holy Scriptures which are inspired of God and profitable for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.

Lovers of Pleasure More Than Lovers of God

It surely comes as a surprise to no one that many people love pleasure far more than they love God, that is, if they love God at all. There are innumerable persons who can name every player on their favorite sports teams, cite all of the statistics and records for players, but who could not begin to name the twelve apostles. Sadly, some of these individuals are members of the church! Given a choice between attending an entertainment event and a Gospel meeting, many will choose the former. The list would no doubt be a very long one of the persons who have been taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but have refused to obey it, because they get too much pleasure out of their favorite sin.

Ever Learning and Never Able to Come to the Knowledge of the Truth

The discoveries, inventions, and advances in everything from electronics to medicine never cease to amaze us. Many of us can tell stories of a now-deceased relative who as a child traveled by covered wagon, saw the introduction of the automobile, the airplane, and finally lived to see a man walk on the moon. Man has not discovered even one thing that was not already known by God, but sometimes he thinks his discoveries equal creating. He becomes puffed up by reason of his knowledge and ascribes to himself a personage that is greater than God Himself is. Some people never come to God even with their knowledge, while others fail to come to God because of it. Knowledge of secular things is valueless without knowledge of God and obedience to His will. However, in these last days, ever learning, even for some learning about religious things, has stood in the way of them coming to a knowledge of what is important—the truth!

Paul concludes his 2 Timothy 3 description with the summation, “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (3:13). Seducers in these last days have in fact become worse and worse, some claiming Jesus was married, others that He was homosexual, and the list goes on and on. These do err not knowing the truth, but they also bring to our attention just how important it is for us to remain loyal to the teaching of the Scriptures, contend earnestly for the faith (Jude 3), and look for with careful faithfulness to the day of Christ’s final coming and the judgment.

James 5:3

Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

It is generally thought that *the last days* in this verse refer to the last days of the Jewish economy. In Josephus’ *The History of the Destruction of Jerusalem* (War of the Jews, Book V, chapter 10), the Jewish historian informs us that when the Romans besieged Jerusalem,

many of the people swallowed pieces of gold to hide it from robbers. When Jesus foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24, He informed the disciples that the only way to be delivered was to believe His prophecy and to flee the city when they saw the signs of the siege. Jesus told the disciples that the temple would be so utterly destroyed that there would not be one stone left upon another. The genealogical records of the people were destroyed; so none in later years could prove their ancestry. The point is that when James tells us these were the last days of the Jewish economy, we understand that it was to be no more. There was no dispensation of Judaism to follow. When the New Testament tells us that we are now living in the last days that is precisely what it means, **the last days!** There will be no dispensation to follow the Christian Dispensation!

2 Peter 3:3-4

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.

Verse 5 of the context implies that such scoffers had already appeared, for Peter uses the present tense, “they willingly are ignorant of,” and not the future tense. The truth is clear; Peter’s generation lived in the last days. Thus, the destruction of the world, when it passed away with a great noise and the elements melted with fervent heat (3:10), would come at the end of the Christian dispensation. That is when time, as we know it, will end and eternity will commence. Because of that, Peter warned his immediate audience and us as well, “*Seeing then that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness” (3:11).

Based upon these New Testament passages, we know: (1) The last days refers to the Christian Dispensation, (2) We live in the last days right now, (3) The last days are perilous times such as we live in now, (4) The destruction of the world comes at the end of the Christian dispensation or last days, and (5) We must live our lives in preparation for the judgment that will follow.

A FATAL ERROR OF PREMILLENIALISM

Certainly, the theory of Premillennialism is based upon many different errors. One of those errors is the claim that the kingdom of Christ has not been established. Jesus came to establish the kingdom—but failed according to the theory. The incredulity of the claim is not our point for this time, but the falseness of the theory. Jesus stated that He would build His church in Matthew 16:18, and in the very next verse He referred to the church as the kingdom. Paul wrote to the Colossians that God “hath [past tense] delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:13). How can one be translated into something that does not exist? Again, when penning Revelation, John affirmed: “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9). Again, how could John be a companion in something with his readers, if that something did not exist?

We can go all the way back to Daniel where we learn in chapter two that it would be in the days of the Roman kings when the God of heaven would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). When we combine this with Daniel 7:13-14, which tells us that Jesus would receive His kingdom when He ascended to the Father (rather than descending from Him), we realize that Premillennialism is totally wrong in its claim that the kingdom has not been established. The point surely is that even one who accepts that false theory understands that the kingdom of Christ would be established in the very last days. If they just realized the Bible teaches that the kingdom is already in existence, they would come to the knowledge that we are living in the last days, and they would know, as the Hebrews writer informs us in Hebrews 9:27: “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”

CONCLUSION

“The Christian Dispensation” and “the last days” may and should be used interchangeably, for they mean the same thing. That is absolutely established by the fact that the Hebrews’ writer wrote, “in these last days,” referring to the fact that God had spoken by His

Son (Heb. 1:2). We are indeed in the last days, because we live in them, we may refer to it as **the Dispensation of Christ**. Thus, we have the same charge Christ gave the apostles before His ascension to receive the kingdom—to take the Gospel to a lost and dying world, for the day that shall come as a thief in the night when Christ returns in judgment will be unannounced, and to the unsaved or sleeping masses, unexpected.

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Periods of Time

Ante-Diluvian

1600 years (4004-2348 B.C.)—Creation to the flood

Books—Genesis 1-8

Post-Diluvian

420 years (2348-1921 B.C.)—Flood to the call of Abraham

Books—Genesis 8-11

Patriarchal

215 years (1921-1706 B.C.)—Call of Abraham to the going into

Egypt

Books—Genesis 12-50

Bondage

215 years (1706-1491 B.C.)—Going down into Egypt to the exodus from Egypt

Books—Exodus 1-14

Wilderness Wanderings

40 years (1491-1451 B.C.)—Exodus from Egypt to the going into Canaan

Books—Exodus 15-40, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

Conquest

1451-1443 B.C.—Crossing of the Jordan to the death of Joshua

Books—Joshua

Judges

1443-1095 B.C.—Death of Joshua to the anointing of Saul as King

Books—Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel 1-10

United Kingdom

1095-975 B.C.—Anointing of Saul to the death of Solomon

Books—1 Samuel 11-31, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles 1-9

Divided Kingdom

975-722 B.C.—Death of Solomon to the fall of Samaria

Books—1 Kings 12-22, 2 Kings 1-17, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, parts of Isaiah and Micah

Judah Alone

722-586 B.C.—Fall of Samaria to the fall of Jerusalem

Books—2 Kings 17-25, 2 Chronicles 32-36, parts of Isaiah and Micah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah

Exile

586-536 B.C.—Fall of Jerusalem to the decree of Cyrus

Books—Daniel, Ezekiel, Lamentations

Restoration

536-400 B.C.—Decree of Cyrus to the end of Malachi

Books—Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, part of Daniel

Inter-Testament

399-4 B.C.—Old Testament history to the beginning of the New Testament

Books—None

Life of Christ

4 B.C.-A.D. 30—Preparatory work of John the Baptist and of Jesus to the beginning of the church

Books—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts 1

The Church

A.D. 30-End of Time—The establishment of the church to the end of time

Books—Acts 2 through Revelation

Editor's Note: The dates used are those from the work of James Ussher, the Archbishop of Armagh (Church of Ireland), released in the 17th century. While some of his dates have come under attack, they are still the standard and are given more as reference than to be exact.

ANTE-DILUVIAN PERIOD

Roelf L. Ruffner, Sr.

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INTRODUCTION

“In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1) is a good place to start in the study of any book, especially a book that claims Divine inspiration—the Holy Bible. “Where did I come from?” is a legitimate question of any human being and demands an answer. We all want to know our origins. Many today, look to the atheistic theory of Evolution for the prehistory of the world. But its *answers* are ever changing and based on assumptions rather than provable scientific and historical facts. Only the Bible provides the real story of ancient man.

Though the Bible is not a book of history, yet, the history mentioned in it is true and often validated by many an ancient record and the archeologist’s spade. More importantly, it was written by men inspired of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Pet. 1:20-21). We will be looking at the period of time from the Creation of the world in 4004 B.C. to its destruction by the Deluge or Noah’s Flood in 2348 B.C. found in Genesis 1:1-7:24, written by the hand of Moses. For the sake of reference, I will be using the Chronology of the Bible developed by James Usher in 1648. It is based on the unbroken male lineage detailed in the genealogies in Genesis. This period is the source of much wild-eyed speculation by pseudo-scholars and assorted professional doubters. However, those who “hunger and

thirst after righteousness” (Mat. 5:6) will only be satisfied with the Divine record rather than the folly of men.

THE CREATION: EVERYTHING FROM NOTHING

It is a thought almost too big to comprehend that God **created** the universe from nothing. Evolutionists and “theistic” evolutionists (those who claim they believe in God but also hold to the evolutionary theory) grasp at scientific straws by supporting the Big Bang Theory. Rather, Moses and the Holy Spirit calmly yet triumphantly proclaim: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The Psalmist David also maintains God spoke it into existence: “For he spake, and it was *done*; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa. 33:9). No Big Bang, but the utterance of, “Let there be.”

Yet the miracle was not complete without life. Like a master painter, God carefully adds the prerequisites for life to the canvas (earth, light, warmth, atmosphere, and water) in Genesis 1 before adding plants and animals, from the tiniest bacterium to the mightiest dinosaur. He also initiated the life cycles of these organisms and their intricate relationships. Only the Eternal Mind could do this. No man in the most modern laboratory or workshop can duplicate the intricate workings of even the most *primitive* one celled organism. Even if they came close, it would only be an unwitting acknowledgement of the Creator’s handiwork done in six twenty-four-hour days in 4004 B.C. Only the Holy Bible reveals this.

It was a mature, fully-functioning world God created; yet in its magnificence it needed something—a sentient being, like the Creator. Genesis 1 mentions the creation of man and woman on day six of the Creation week and gives them dominion over all the other creatures of the earth. Only in Genesis 2 does Moses reveal to us the details of God’s special creation. “And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (2:7). God spoke the other parts of Creation into existence, but the first human being was “formed” and given the Divine spark—an immortal soul. This was not a bipedal primate but a son of God—Adam. He did not “evolve” over

thousands, millions, or even billions of years but made from the dust of the earth in one twenty-four-hour day.

Some theistic evolutionists hold to the “Day Age” theory, speculating that each “day” in the Creation week was actually thousands if not millions of years in length and corresponds to a so-called “Geologic Age.” However, Moses is very specific. After each Creation day he writes, “And the evening and the morning were” (1:3ff). He then uses the same Hebrew word for *day* to emphasize the Sabbath commandment, “For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exo. 20:11). The Sabbath *day* was twenty-four hours long, and the Creation *day* was as well.

PARADISE LOST

God lost no time in creating the Garden of Eden for Adam to tend and study, naming each of the animals. However, Adam could find no spiritual and intellectual equal among them. So the Creator took one of Adam’s ribs from his side and created him a “help meet” (Gen. 2:18). He did not create another male or even two females, but “a woman” (2:22). Like the father of the bride, God brings the first man and the first woman (called Eve) together in what I like to think of as the first and only marriage ceremony recorded in the Bible. So God blessed the first “home” and the institution of monogamous marriage.

God gave His children commandments in the Garden. Among them was, “Be fruitful, and multiply” (1:28), which the first couple did not begin to fulfill until after they left the Garden. Another commandment stated that they could eat of “every herb bearing seed” (1:29) and of any tree of the Garden **except** “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (2:17). If they ate of this forbidden fruit, they would “surely die” (2:17).

Into this paradise came the most vicious, scheming creature ever to exist—Satan. Satan, the spoiler, was desperate to pollute this Paradise with sin. He does this by using a tactic used to this day by false teachers: twisting God’s Word and lying about the penalty for

transgression of God's law (cf. 3:4-5; 1 John 3:4). What happened next has been repeated innumerable times by humanity. Satan used the God-given power of choice against humanity. "For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (2:16). Our fore-mother Eve succumbed to the lies of the deceiver and influenced our fore-father Adam to also eat of the forbidden fruit. Their "fall" was a long one.

The punishment for their sin was both physical and spiritual. Physically their bodies began to age and eventually perish because they were separated from the tree of life. Eve was given the pain of childbirth and subjection to her husband (Gen. 3:16). Adam was given the curse of toiling for his daily food (3:17-19). They were expelled from Eden (3:23-24). Spiritually, they were separated from God or "dead in sin" (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:5). Yet, out of the despair of sin came hope. God promised Satan that from Eve would come the "seed" that would "bruise" his head (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 4:6). In many ways the rest of the Bible centers on this Messianic Seed Promise.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF HUMANITY

The first family was put out of Eden into a world of death and decay. They were not primitive brutes as the degrading theory of evolution falsely presents us. They were highly intelligent creatures taught by God. Their firstborn, Cain, was a farmer and their next son, Abel, was a shepherd. Pseudo-science speculates that both of these activities took thousands of years to develop, but with God's help and with their God-given intelligence, it took a mere generation to domesticate plants and animals.

In this midst of this budding civilization rises a Divine attribute of humanity—the need to worship God. With a grateful heart (i.e. "spirit"—John 4:24), Abel brought lambs from his flock as a blood sacrifice (Gen. 4:4). This may well be the offering God requested (i.e., "truth"—John 4:24) because it pointed to His Son—"the Lamb of God" (1:29). We see this possibility in God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice of "the fruit of the ground" (Gen. 4:3). Abel's sac-

rifice was “by faith” (Heb. 11:4) or the faithful following of God’s Word, while Cain’s sacrifice was not “by faith.”

Cain’s reaction to the rejection of his offering was unrighteous, uncontrolled anger which led to the slaying of Abel: the first murder in human history, in spite of God’s warning (Gen. 4:6-7). Underscoring the preciousness of human life, God punishes Cain with exile (4:10-14).

Cain’s departure begins the first great spiritual division of humanity—the Cainites or followers of this world versus the Sethites or followers of God. The Cainites developed technologically at a rapid pace. Genesis 4 reveals that Cain built the first city (4:17). (Who did Cain marry? A female relative—5:4). His descendents raised cattle, invented musical instruments, and developed the working of copper, brass, and iron (4:20-22). Again, this did not occur gradually over thousands of years but in a few generations. Here was not the picture of a group of Neolithic hunter-gatherers, but of civilization. Unfortunately, Moses also shows us that material advancements do not necessarily bring spiritual and moral improvements. Cain’s great-great grandson, Lamech, was the first polygamist and the second recorded murderer. He boasts of his butchery to his wives, Adah and Zillah (4:23).

The death of Abel seemed to rattle the family of Adam. At one hundred thirty years of age, Adam fathers Seth to replace Abel. Seth grows up to lead a movement to return men to God. Moses records that “then began men to call upon the name of the LORD” (4:26). Many times in human history this world has sunk into such a sorry state that righteous men arise to restore their people to God. Perhaps this was the first such attempt at restoration.

Moses dutifully records the names and lifespans off all of the descendents of Seth who would also be the ancestors of Noah (and us). They all lived several centuries. Why do people not live so long now? The answer may be found in the Flood. After the Flood, Moses records that man’s lifespan gradually declined. About 1500 years after the Flood Moses wrote:

The days of our years *are* threescore years and ten; And if by reason of strength *they be* fourscore years, Yet *is* their strength labour and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away (Psa. 90:10).

The one Sethite which stands out during this period is righteous Enoch. “And Enoch walked with God: and he *was* not; for God took him” (Gen. 5:24). Hebrews informs us that Enoch did not die but was “translated” (Heb. 11:5) because his obedient faith pleased God. In our increasingly dark world, all Christians should seek to please God like our spiritual fore-father Enoch did.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Since our ancestors’ exile from Eden, this world has been corrupted by sin. Satan, the liar and murderer (cf. John 8:44), never gives up on his plans of corruption. The spiritual decline of humanity, begun by the fall of Adam and Eve, continued its downward spiral. In a greatly misunderstood verse in the Bible, Moses explains this spiritual train wreck: “the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they *were* fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose” (Gen. 6:2). **No, angels did not come to this earth and marry humans!** (Angels are asexual beings—Mat. 22:30.) The “sons of God” or the Sethites intermarried with Cainites, and the influence of the Cainite wives won out in the union. This would not be the last time compromise bequeathed surrender among God’s people. “Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33—ASV). Their offspring are referred to as “giants” and “mighty men” (Gen. 6:4). Moses summed up the corruption of the age:

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart (6:5-6).

God’s patience with humanity was not infinite. He gave them one hundred twenty years to repent (6:3). How long He has given the United States of America to repent of its evil ways and corrupt rulers?

Was God to destroy His special Creation without warning? No, He not only warned them of the coming Deluge, but He prepared an ark of safety for those who would heed the warning. He searched the earth for a messenger and did not find him among the “mighty men” but among the Sethites, a simple farmer named Noah. “Noah was a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God” (6:9). This great-grandson of Enoch was appointed a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5) by God to spread the message of repentance and salvation through the ark to the Antediluvian world. Noah would be preaching by the Spirit of Christ to “the spirits in prison” (1 Pet. 3:18-20) or the antediluvians.

God also gave him a monumental task—the building of an ark for the saving of himself, his family, and a pair of every “kind” (Gen. 6:20—equivalent to “genus”) of animal on the earth, and stocking it with food and provisions. He also gave Noah a verbal blueprint of this colossal vessel. Its size was 300 cubits x 50 cubits x 30 cubits. In ancient times the size of a cubit (the length from the tip of the forefinger to the elbow) varied from 18 to 21 inches. Since Moses, the author of Genesis, was Egyptian educated (cf. Acts 7:22), he may have used the Egyptian cubit which was 20.5 inches. This would make the ark 512 feet in length (“Facts on Noah’s Ark”).

The Ark had a ratio (length x width x height) of 30 x 5 x 3. According to ship-builders, this ratio represents an advanced knowledge of ship-building since it is the optimum design for stability in rough seas. The Ark, as designed by God, was virtually impossible to capsize! It would have to have been tilted over 90 degrees in order to capsize (“Facts on Noah’s Ark”).

Of the struggles of Noah with farming, raising/teaching his children, preaching to a belligerent people, gathering building supplies, and building that rectangular barge with no sails or rudder, we know very little. They must have stretched Noah and his family’s faith to the limit. Moses records the highest compliment to Noah that can be bestowed on any mortal man, “Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he” (Gen. 6:22). Will that be said of

you and me as our presence in this world is finally whisked away like a vapor?

The Antediluvian world had become a violent place because of sin (6:11-13). Now, God would end it in a violent manner—a universal Flood; a global catastrophe. As this day of judgment approached, there were no warning signs, only God’s one hundred twenty-year-old warning. Jesus, in describing His Second Coming, said:

But as the days of Noe *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (Mat. 24:37-39).

What happened next cannot be reproduced by any Hollywood special effects or computer animation. Seven days before, God had summoned Noah, Noah’s wife, their three sons, and their wives into the ark along with pairs of all animals, including seven extra pairs of “clean” animals and birds (Gen. 7:1-5). What happened is unparalleled in meteorological history. “The same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights” (7:11-12). (I once witnessed the power of rain several years ago in Hobbs, NM. One evening, I saw it rain six inches in one hour and flood that flat, desert community.) Moses records a fearful historical and spiritual event.

And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: **and the LORD shut him in**...and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained *alive*, and they that *were* with him in the ark (7:16, 23).

It must have been a terrible sound for Noah and his family to hear God shut the only door into the ark, excluding anyone else from entering. The world was to be washed clean of corruption as only God could do.

Thou turnest man to destruction; And sayest, Return, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight *Are but* as yesterday when it is past, And *as* a watch in the night. Thou carriest them away as

with a flood; they are *as* a sleep: In the morning *they are* like grass *which* groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; In the evening it is cut down, and withereth (Psa. 90:3-6).

CONCLUSION

The Flood ended a period of Biblical history that began with the wonder of Creation and concluded with the vengeance of Almighty God on a corrupt, sin-sick world. Yet, God uses this same agency of water today to save a penitent believer in the Messiah from the promised eternal punishment on the Judgment Day.

Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto *even* baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:20-21).

That watery grave of baptism “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38) puts us “in Christ” (Col. 2:12) and adds us to the ark of spiritual safety, the church of Christ (cf. Acts 2:41, 47; Gal. 3:27). By faith we continue in that ark, surviving that turbulent Day of the Lord’s return, to step forth on the dry land of life eternal. Have you obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and been added to His church?

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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POST-DILUVIAN PERIOD

Harrell Davidson

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This period of time suggests the time after the flood until the call of Abraham and the promises to him and his seed that would ultimately find fulfillment in Christ.

The flood was universal. There have been hundreds of floods since but none like this. The stage of corruption had reached such a state that there is no turning back. The question arises, “What about the little children?” Such would be saved even though the flood came. They were not accountable, and it was a blessing for them to be taken in their innocence than when they were mature and turned to sin (cf. Mat. 18). In view of the language, there could be nothing other than a universal flood. The presence of the ark demands this. Even the stratum of the earth was changed; thus it had its impact on all the earth. Probably, this was by design. When men try prying backward and backward, they cannot get back to the time of Adam, but the effects of the flood stops their digging. The evolutionists cannot get over this. The formations and so forth made a difference and our learned men and women who are archaeologists have found this out.

The flood was universal and is proved by the coming of Christ. As the flood was used as a type, if it had been a local flood, then the coming of Christ would not be universal. So the modernists cannot get around this.

The purpose of it was to the destroy evil in the land and for man to start over again. Noah becomes the one through which the promised seed will come as we get down to Abraham. God arranged the place of safety. Noah built that ark to float, and we need to build our lives to faith.

Genesis 8 begins the account following the flood. The things discussed here become the background for the rest of the Bible in many respects. The earth is to start over again, but not from something that was without form or void. The flood was a judgment against sin. It is a lesson for history, and is a reminder that God governs the world and is the sovereign ruler. So He has the right to bring the world to judgment. Here is a judgment that has affected the whole world.

When Noah comes out of the ark, he offers a sacrifice. His sacrifice shows that while the earth has been cleansed of sinners it has not been cleansed of sin. Until Christ comes and undoes what Adam did, the problem of sin will not be completely taken care of. We will see the problem in every Old Testament character until Matthew 1 when Christ is born. This is a solemn reminder that the seed of woman will bruise the serpent's head. Although the flood has destroyed man, the world has not been and is not to be the permanent habitat for man to live.

“And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that *was* with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged” (Gen. 8:1). *God remembered* denotes an activity on the part of God. For instance in 1 Samuel 1:11:

And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

Had God forgotten her? Of course not, but this is pointing to an act of God. We mean by this that Hannah wanted to have a child, and it depended upon an activity of God. Also, Judges 16:28: “And

Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.” Samson asking God to remember him is calling for an activity of God.

This is the same language in Genesis 8:1. God remembered. His remembrance shows His thoughtfulness regarding Noah and his family. In Genesis 8:15 we have God’s command to Noah, followed in verses 21 and 22 by God’s promise. We see God’s thoughts, God’s commands, and God’s promise, which is always the order of God’s activity.

“And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat” (8:4). The ark rested. There must have been some satisfaction to Noah—to feel the house he was in upon firm ground and no longer moving. It rested upon a mountain whither it was directed, not by Noah’s prudence (he did not steer it), but by the wise and gracious providence of God, that it might rest the sooner. God has sustained us over the years and has moored us safely when we have been tossed and tumbled about. God has times and places of rest for His people after our tossing, and many a time He provides for their seasonable and comfortable settlement. Again, this is an activity on the part of God. We mention these matters due to the almost constant misunderstanding about the grace of God.

“And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar” (8:20). This is the first time that *altar* is used in the Bible, although it does not necessarily prove that this was the first altar. Genesis is a book of the beginning of various things and contains many firsts. However, *burnt offerings* is found for the first time in the Bible. Now let us go to Hebrews 10:8: “Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law.” This demonstrates where we are and where we are going.

The last mention of *sacrifice* is found in Hebrews. Notice, Hebrews 10:9-10:

Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

He did not come to do this the way men do it, but once and for all time Christ offered Himself. What we are trying to do is to get us to notice the unity of the Bible—i.e., the harmony of the Divine record.

It is well to remember that it was by direct command that Noah built the ark, entered the ark, and went out of the ark. “Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons’ wives with thee” (Gen. 8:16). What would it be like to be shut up in the ark for about a year? Furthermore, we read about 150 days or 5 months (8:3). This indicates the agitation of the flood all this period of time until the water started to recede. What kind of impact did this have on the earth?

It is very interesting to note that Noah did nothing outside of a command from God. He was patient enough to wait on God to direct his steps. It is almost a constant prayer of ours that men today would have the faith and patience of Noah and that we would respect the authority of the Scriptures. Noah operated on the same principle as stated by the apostle Paul: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). Would to God that we would wait on God to command us. We get so tied up with subjective things that we run ahead of the Almighty. Truth is always objective and objective truth as it pertains to the Scriptures is absolute, meaning that it cannot be changed. The Fount from which it comes is pure, and that Fount (God) does not change (cf. Mal. 3:6). We should learn some distinct lessons from Noah.

A WONDERFUL PROMISE

“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease”

(Gen. 8:22). Evidently for a whole year the seasons have been set aside. This announcement that is made here is still there for us today. This is a new beginning; he is not back in Eden. In Genesis 9 a commission is given to Noah, and while it is similar to that given to Adam, Noah is not back in Eden. It is different. The flood has cleansed the earth, but sin will still persist. Civil government has its origin after the flood.

For the period of about a year the earth has not yielded any fruit or nut crops whatsoever. From the time following the flood there has been and continues to be a time to plant and a time to reap. God did not tell mankind what to sow, but He assured us that when sowing, there would be a crop to reap. God's law in Genesis 1 assured mankind that everything would produce after its kind. For about one year that law has been set aside as far as the earth goes in that it did not produce those things that depended upon the earth. Creatures of the sea could produce after their kind, however. Genesis 8:22 is somewhat of a restatement to assure Noah and his family that the earth would produce, as it should in the seasons as they come and go, and that God would never destroy the things in the earth like that again.

We believe this destroys the global climate or global warming change agenda we hear of almost every day on the news or in the national media. If the hypothesis was true, then God's stated law here in Genesis 8 could not be literally carried out, and this would make God a liar. Noah had God's Word, and so do we. In all such matters, the Word has the final say. Peter, the inspired apostle, wrote about such matters with these words: "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Pet. 3:7). What is it that preserves the heavens and the earth? It is God's immutable Word. Thus the earth is being sustained every day by God's Word. Some years ago we began to hear about the ozone being destroyed due to our carelessness. God creates ozone. Who really wants to take the position that we are destroying more ozone

than God can make available by His sun in the heavens? Such folks have an agenda, and that agenda is not following the Word of God.

While it is the case that Noah is not back in Eden, it is nonetheless a similar situation. For instance, if it had not been for righteous Noah, who was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5), we would not exist today. Man has the opportunity to start over again, similar to that of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve started with no children and had to populate the earth. Noah and his wife start out again with three sons and their wives, and they must repopulate the earth. This is a serious thing that is before them. What they do will depend on how the new population will react to the example of this family. As it was in the beginning with Adam and Eve, so it was with Noah and his family. This new creation depended upon them continuing to live right before God.

We begin Genesis 9:6. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." This becomes the framework through which man will operate. One of the phases of men is the fact of government. We are under civil government today and will continue to be so until time is no more. This decree was announced by God in Genesis 9:6. The origin of nations will soon come into the picture. It is important to see this develop to understand the Bible.

Does this teach capital punishment or the death penalty? We have always believed that it does. Through the length and breadth of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, when confronted with these things, the Bible certainly teaches that those who shed the blood of other human beings willfully is to have their own blood shed by their peers. In Romans 13 Paul wrote:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth

not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil (13:1-4).

Please note it now: We are to be subject to the higher powers, such as governments, as long as they do not interfere with God's Law. Further, we learn that governments could not have power if God did not give power to them. On their own they would have no power, and this goes back to the section of Scripture that we are now looking at, for in the final chapters of the post-diluvian period government was established by the power and will of God. Therefore, one cannot take the position that God never intended for there to be capital punishment because God set this law in motion back here in Genesis.

Men act as if rulers were a terror to good works and among those good works is the minister that bears the sword. Change for the moment *sword* to the gas chamber or electric chair, and one can see the facts as they are further revealed here by Paul. Men on trial for capital murder should be expecting death, and they would if they had been instructed in the Word of God in this matter. It is abundantly clear that the statement of God (Gen. 9:6) is still to be carried out today, since, in particular, it is stated under the tenants of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ that was purchased with His own blood.

Thus, in Genesis 9, we have the new beginning in the first 7 verses. We have the covenant that God made.

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that *is* with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This *is* the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which *is* between me and you and every living creature of all flesh;

and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This *is* the token of the covenant, which I have established between me and all flesh that *is* upon the earth (9:8-17).

Think about this for a moment. God is the source of this covenant (9:9, 12, 15, 17). The scope of the covenant was to include animals as well as man (9:9-10). Its purpose was to insure their safety (9:11). The pledge of this covenant is the rainbow (9:12-13). The meaning of this covenant is that God is faithful (9:14-15). The duration of it is as long as the earth shall be (9:16). The guarantee of it is God's Word (9:17).

We want you to think about the rainbow. When we look at the rainbow, we ought to remember something: "And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* upon the earth" (9:16). The rainbow is made while rain is coming down and the sun is shining. It is a solemn reminder that God is in control of this universe! Notice, however, that when we look at the rainbow, God is also looking at it. He said He would do so as a reminder to Him. The rainbow is universal. Where sunshine and rain exists anywhere in the world, there is the rainbow. Not long ago my dear wife and I were driving home from worship when we saw a double rainbow. One appeared to come out of the other, but the "pot of gold" at the end of the rainbow went in two different directions. One of us remarked that God was looking at both as we also were.

With the rainbow there was a promise, purpose, and pledge. The promise is stated in that God promised no more destruction by a flood, the purpose was God's intention toward mankind, and the pledge was the rainbow. As sure as there is the bow, the promise, purpose, and pledge are repeated all over again. This is a very solemn matter for us to try to contemplate. The rainbow is seen every time when all the elements are together—rain and sunshine. Please

do not in the future look at the rainbow in some trivial way. It is not to be taken lightly.

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done (8:21).

We think that the background of this passage is back in Genesis 3:17-19 where God must have put some kind of curse on the earth. For He said:

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.

We do not pretend to know all that these verses state. With that said, we do take some pride in knowing a little about the soil. We live in the largest agriculture county in Tennessee. We were born and reared on the farm and was a farm manager for many years, overseeing more than three thousand acres, some of which needed reclaiming. Ground that freely grows broom sage is known to be sour ground and needs *sweetning* up, so to speak. On this kind of ground we put a very generous amount of lime. When lime is applied and incorporated into the soil, it will grow almost any seasonal crop.

The Lord approved the sacrifice of Noah, and after approving it, He promised that He would no longer “curse” the earth. Our concept of this is that whatever was put on the earth in Genesis 3 is now removed seeing also that man's heart is corrupt. The heart can only be changed through the Word. It is for sure that God knows the heart, and we should know our own heart and order our lives to changes that may need to be made for us to be approved before the Judge of all the earth.

Genesis 9-11 reveals God's purpose in the flood and helps us understand. It was God's purpose to save man. He purposed this in Genesis 3:15. In Genesis 6, we have sin that brought about the flood. In Genesis 7, we have the flood. In Genesis 8, we have the end of the flood. In Genesis 9, we have the developments that took place after the flood. This chapter becomes the background of civil government in Genesis 9:6.

"And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent" (9:21). This is the first time that wine and drunkenness is mentioned in the Bible. Think about the effects of wine. One of those effects is that it leads to immodesty. Noah had lived above this and had seen the whole world go down in sin, and now he sees himself as a sinner. He was righteous throughout the flood, but now he is a sinner. The flood did not destroy sin. This shows that God's purpose to save man has not reached its conclusion as yet. Sin reigns in mankind.

Ham, who was the father of Canaan, looks upon Noah's nakedness. Moses said, "Cursed *be* Canaan; A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren" (9:25). Who were the descendants of Canaan? The Canaanites! They will one day be driven out of their land because they refused to obey the Lord.

We see the same scene playing out again. Following the sin of Adam and Eve, we have two seeds: Cain and Abel. Abel is taken out of the picture, and we have Cain and Seth. These lines intermarry resulting in the flood. We then have Noah coming on the scene. The promised seed of woman (3:15) is found in Noah, Shem, Terah, Abraham, and later the Israelites. A complete list of the genealogy is in Genesis 10.

So as we look backward and gather up facts, we have the beginning and all men coming from Adam. We have had the destruction of the human race and man beginning again in Noah and his sons. Starting with Adam, the human family was a unit. They came from one source; the same thing is true with Noah. So in Acts 17:26, "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appoint-

ed, and the bounds of their habitation.” This is the background of what will be studied from hereon.

In Genesis 10 and 11, we have the following points to remember. This record is **historical**, it is a history of the origin of nations, and it is the only history that we have of the origin of nations.

This account is **political**. By this I mean that we have the background of the nations with their political operations. When you began to read of Egypt and her kings or Babylon and her kings, this is the background of them all. This is very important to our understanding where all of these nations came from on down through the Old Testament even into the New Testament.

This record is **geographical**. It shows us where people scattered and settled. It is not our purpose to go into these, but they are here. God has set the bounds for the nations, and that is seen right here, as Paul said in his sermon at Antioch (Acts 13). It is also genealogical because here we have the list of the names giving their genealogy. It is also **biographical**. All of this is found in these chapters.

“By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations” (Gen. 10:5). *Nation* will come to mean Gentiles when the Jewish nation develops. Now we have listed 70 Gentile nations. *Nations* included all that were not of Israel. All of this is intended to show that before the calling of the nation of Israel, there was only one people.

And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel (10:8-10).

This is where Babylon will come from later on. Babylon is all the way back here in Babel. Does this indicate on his part that he wants to become a world empire? What is said about the Tower of Babel and making a name for themselves (11:4)—is this said because of wanting to become a world power? I do not know, but this is worth thinking about. It seems to me that this is the case because that the people all wanted to be one and have a one-world government. How could there be freedom in a one-world government if there

were dictators? God did not intend for there to be one world power. The events of Genesis 10 and 11 show why the events happened in Genesis 11. These events need to be kept in consideration as we study the confusion of tongues. All these families belonged to the same nation and spoke one tongue. There was the unity of all the people.

In Genesis 11, there is a universal outlook over all the nations not just the house of Shem. This chapter becomes the background of idolatry. In building the Tower of Babel, they were defying God and trying to establish a social order. Up to this time there is one people, one tongue, and one purpose.

We see again how sin separates. It separated Adam and Eve from God. It separated Cain and Abel. It separated the righteous from the wicked in the flood. Now it is taking place again. Sin separates; it always has and always will. “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, That they may all call upon the name of the LORD, To serve him with one consent” (Zep. 3:9). The tongue was confused in Genesis 11, and in Acts 2 a pure tongue was given to make men one through the Gospel. We have the background of two seeds and will depend on Abraham to further the promise.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

PATRIARCHAL PERIOD

Roelf L. Ruffner, Sr.

Roelf L. Ruffner, Sr. was born in Monahans, Texas, but grew up in Jal, New Mexico. In 1976, he graduated from Abilene Christian University with a B.S. in Biology and in 1977 with a B.S.Ed. Roelf received an M.A. in history from UTPB-Odessa, Texas in 1980. He has worked as a Christian school teacher, petroleum lab technician, and for seven years with the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Division. In 1992, he graduated from the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Bedford, Texas. Roelf has served churches in Texas, New Mexico, and is currently working with the Hill Town church of Christ near Santa Fe, Tennessee. He has held Gospel meetings in Arkansas, New Mexico, Kansas, and Texas and has spoken on various lectureships.

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INTRODUCTION

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Heb. 11:13).

The Patriarchal Dispensation extended from the time of Adam to Moses. It ended for the Jews with the coming of the Old Covenant or the Law of Moses. For Gentiles, this dispensation went on until Christ's kingdom, the church, was opened up to them under the New Covenant, the Law of Christ, in Acts 10. This chapter concerns itself to one period during this dispensation: the Period of the Patriarchs. It is confined to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The Holy Spirit (the author of the Bible) used Moses as the penman of Genesis. He devoted Genesis 12-50 to this period, approximately 1921 B.C. to 1635 B.C. (according to Usher's chronology). This period begins at the call of Abram and concludes at the death of Joseph.

What can we learn from this period of Bible history?

1. The providential care of God for His people.
2. The continuing goal of God for man—salvation through Jesus Christ.

3. The trials and tribulations of ordinary men and women who strove to obey God.

THE SETTING

Geographically, this period took place in an arc of semi-moist fertile land known historically as the “Fertile Crescent.” It stretched all the way from the Persian Gulf, up the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys and then south through Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, ending in the Nile River valley in Egypt. Historically, this area saw the rise of many civilizations and empires: Sumerian, Babylonia, Hattia (Hittites), Phoenicia, Philistia, and Egypt, to name a few. This was also a thriving trade route on the edge of the great Arabian Desert, which saw the flow of peoples, languages, ideas, religion, writing, and goods. God placed the patriarchs in the middle of it all—Palestine or the cockpit of the Middle East.

ABRAHAM ESTABLISHED IN CANAAN

Terah, the father of Abram and Sarai and grandfather of Lot, had taken his family out of urbane Ur of Chaldees (modern-day southern Iraq) northwest, over 500 miles to the frontier of Haran (or Charan, southeastern Turkey). After the death of Terah, Abram was called by God to leave his home and his kin (Terah’s family) and go “unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen. 12:1). In return for his obedience seventy-five-year-old Abram received great promises.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (12:2-3).

For the next one hundred years God would elaborate upon these great promises and begin to fulfill them.

“By faith” (Heb. 11:8) Abram, Sarai, and Lot left **all** behind them, even idolatry (cf. Jos. 24:2—ASV) and moved west to Shechem and there, among all their idolatrous Canaanite neighbors, Abram built an altar and offered sacrifices to the living God, who renewed His promise (Gen. 12:6-7). Every day the faithful Christian lives, the promises of Jesus are renewed in his or her life (Mark 16:15-16;

Mat. 28:18-20; etc.)! Like Abram, Sarai, and Lot, we live in a neo-pagan, hostile land, but, by faith, we live through it, ever looking to the promises of God.

Because of famine in Palestine, Abram moved his family south to sojourn in Egypt. Here we see the weaker side of his character. He concocted a lie to tell others about his relationship with Sarai, to save his own skin (Gen. 12:11-13). Pharaoh took beautiful Sarai for his harem, believing she is only Abram's sister. "And the LORD plagued Pharaoh and his house" (12:17), and Pharaoh rebuked Abram. God used a pagan prince to rebuke His servant! This would happen again in the case of the Philistine ruler Abimelech in Genesis 20. In both cases Abram's *white lie* was exposed as a lie by Him who does not lie (cf. Tit. 1:2). "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds" (Col. 3:9).

God smiled upon Abram and his family. He was "very rich" (Gen. 13:2), as was his nephew Lot. There was a clash between their herdsmen and in an expression of love ("for we *be* brethren"—13:8), Abram offers Lot a choice of Abram's inheritance. In a classic example of bad judgment, Lot chooses the well-watered but morally-repugnant Jordan River plain containing Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot must have known of their sexually perverted ways (13:13), but he chose to live there for materialistic reasons (13:10) that he would regret. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, But the end thereof *are* the ways of death" (Pro. 14:12). God renewed His land promise to Abram near Bethel and His promise of physical and spiritual descendants or the Messianic seed promise: "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, *then* shall thy seed also be numbered" (Gen. 13:16). Abram believed, moved, and settled "by the oaks of Mamre" (13:18—ASV) which would be his headquarters for many years.

Sometime later Abram received distressing news. A group of foreign kings from the north had put down a rebellion of kings of the plains of Jordan and taken these kings along with Lot and his family captive. What happens next shows us that Abram was no illiterate wandering nomad. He assembled a strike force of 318 of

his armed, trained servants (14:14) plus his Amorite allies and their forces. Like a commando leader, Abram divided his forces in half and attacked by night, defeating the enemy, and rescuing the captives alive, including Lot and his family. He refused any offer of battle loot from the pagan king of sinful Sodom, but he gave a tithe of the spoil to King Melchizedek of Salem and “priest of the most high God”—a type of Christ (cf. Gen. 14:18-20; Heb. 5:6; 7:1-28).

After the battle, God spoke to Abram and said, “Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward” (Gen. 15:1). He reassured Abram’s fear of no heir and once again referred him to the stars of heaven as the future number of his descendents. Moses records the reaction of this devout old man: “And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (15:6). The apostle Paul would later use Abram’s faith as an example of justification by faith and not by works of merit, like circumcision, since Abram was not yet circumcised (cf. Rom 4:9-10). After sealing the covenant with animal sacrifices, God informed him that his descendents would be afflicted in a foreign land for four hundred years (Gen. 15:13). They would return to Palestine “in the fourth generation...for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full” (15:16). This land promise prophecy would be completely fulfilled by the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua (cf. Jos. 21:43-45).

THE HEIR COMES

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God renewed the covenant once again by changing his name to *Abraham* or “a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5). Sarai’s name was changed to *Sarah*. God made it an “everlasting covenant” (17:7) with Abraham and his descendents. A physical sign of that covenant was circumcision of all males in his household eight days old and older. Abraham’s reaction is amazement, “Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall *a child* be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” (17:17). He then requested that his thirteen-year-old son Ishmael, his child by his concubine Hagar, be made his heir. God refused and proclaimed that his heir would be the promised son whom He

named *Isaac* or “laughter” (17:18-19). God’s promised Son would be a direct descendant of Isaac (cf. Mat. 1:2). Isaac would be born a year later. As a sign of his obedient faith this ninety-nine-year-old, Ishmael, and Abraham’s male servants are circumcised that very day (Gen. 17:13).

Soon after, three Heavenly messengers (a theophany?) arrived to visit Abraham. They now inform Sarah that she will soon be pregnant with the promised son, and she also laughed (18:12). One messenger replied, “Is any thing too hard for the LORD?” (18:14). They also informed Abraham of the coming judgment upon Sodom, Gomorrah, and cities of the Jordan plain. “And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous” (Gen. 18:20). In the most remarkable conversation recorded in Genesis, Abraham, righteous businessman that he was, had the Lord agree not to punish Sodom if ten righteous souls were found there (18:32). That may have been the number of Lot and his family in Sodom (cf. 19:12).

Two angels went to Sodom. They were shown hospitality by righteous Lot. A licentious mob tried to rape the angels, thinking they were men but are struck blind (19:5, 11), perhaps signifying their moral blindness. (The sin of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain was not inhospitality but homosexual behavior as seen in Jude 7. At this writing, eighteen states in the U.S.A. have either voted for same-sex marriage or have been forced to accept it by licentious, ungodly judges. Thus, a nation founded upon the Biblical principles of righteousness and rights derived from the Almighty joins the moral sewer of ancient Greece, Rome, and modern Europe.) Only four souls escaped Sodom—Lot, his wife, and two daughters. “And he [Abraham] looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace” (Gen. 19:28).

The greatest test of Abraham’s faith comes in Genesis 22. God said to Abraham, “Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him

there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of” (22:2). Would Abraham’s faith in God be as great as his idolatrous neighbor’s faith in their dumb idols which they offered their children in sacrifice to? Would God ever ask something of a human being that He would not do? Here we see God reveal ever so slightly some of His plan for the salvation of man or the Scheme of Redemption (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12). In this test there are some things that Hollywood does not get right about this event.

1. Abraham was not some middle-aged man. Sarah died soon afterwards at one hundred twenty-seven years of age (Gen. 23:1-2). She was ninety and Abraham was one hundred when Isaac was born. So that would make Abraham about one hundred thirty-seven years old.
2. There is no indication that Abraham, Sarah, or Isaac resisted God’s command or had some emotional turmoil over it. At least, Abraham and perhaps all of the family believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead (cf. Heb. 11:19).
3. Isaac was not a child during this test. Some commentators have estimated he was in his thirties (Coffman), perhaps 33 years of age (the same age as Jesus when He was crucified), even though Abraham refers to him as “the lad,” a term generally used of males no older than around 20 (Gen. 22:5).
4. Isaac carried the wood for his sacrifice as Jesus carried His cross to Calvary. His sacrifice was a type of Christ’s sacrifice. Both were willing subjects to their Father’s will.

Human blood is not shed at Abraham’s testing. “The angel of the LORD” (22:11—Jesus?) stops Abraham. The sacrifice was complete when Abraham lifted his knife in anticipation of the taking of his only son’s life (22:10).

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform (Rom. 4:20-21).

God reaffirmed His promises to Abraham—both the land promise and the Messianic seed promise. “And in thy seed shall all the

nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen. 22:18). That “seed” was the coming of the Messiah Jesus, a direct descendent of Abraham, whose blood washed away all sins (cf. Gal. 3:8, 16). At Calvary, the atonement and God’s Scheme of Redemption would be completed by the shedding of the precious blood of the only begotten Son of God (cf. John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:18-20).

THE LIFE OF ISAAC AND JACOB

Abraham would continue to be a major force in his son’s life for the next forty years, after the death of Isaac’s mother, Sarah. Abraham arranged for a wife, Rebekah, for Isaac, from his own people in Mesopotamia rather than from among the Canaanites around him. Abraham would be 175 years old when he “was gathered to his people” or went to Paradise (Gen. 25:7-8; Luke 23:43).

Twin boys were born to Isaac and Rebekah when Isaac was 60 years old (Gen. 25:26). The Lord warned Rebekah that these two sons represent two nations (25:23). Through one son, Jacob, the Messiah would come. From Esau would come forth the kingdom of Edom, a persistent enemy of ancient Israel. The boys grew up to be completely different individuals: Isaac, the quiet herdsman and Esau, the flamboyant hunter. Esau revealed his worldliness when he sold his “birthright” (the promises of God to Abraham and his descendants) in a moment of hunger to his brother for “pottage of lentiles” (25:33-34; Heb. 12:15-16; 1 Cor. 15:32).

God spoke to Isaac, renewing the same promises He had made to Abraham (cf. Gen. 26:24) based on his loving obedience. Isaac became a successful herdsman like his father (26:12-14) and a farmer. Concerned about his own mortality, Isaac decided to bequeath the family blessing upon his eldest, Esau. But Rebekah and Jacob concocted a scheme to fool Isaac into thinking Jacob is Esau. Jacob lied to blind Isaac. It worked and Isaac blessed Jacob (27:26-29) in fulfillment of God’s prophecy (25:23). Esau heard of it and wanted to kill his brother, but Isaac and Rebekah sent him to her brother Laban for protection and to find a non-Canaanite wife. Before Ja-

cob left Isaac conferred upon him the blessing God gave Abraham (cf. 28:3-4).

Jacob traveled to Padanaram and bound himself in servitude to his uncle Laban. He labored for seven years to wed Laban's youngest daughter, Rachel. However, after the wedding night, he discovered he had been given her older sister Leah instead. A week later he finally wedded Rachel. Rachel, Leah, and their handmaidens, Zilpah and Bilhah, eventually produce twelve sons and one daughter. With much protest from Laban, Jacob finally left his employ with many flocks and herds and returned to Canaan where angels greeted him (32:1). Fearful of his coming meeting with his estranged brother Esau, Jacob prayed to God. "A man" (32:24, 30—an angel or Jesus?) came that night and wrestled with Jacob until morning. Jacob had him bless him: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (32:28). In one of the most touching scenes in the Bible Jacob and Esau are reconciled and embrace (33:4).

Tragedy struck as Jacob and company settle near Shalem. His only daughter, Dinah, is raped by a Hivite prince's son, Shechem. Feigning compromise, Jacob's eldest sons agreed to a marriage between Dinah and Shechem, if his people agreed to be circumcised. As the Hivite men recuperated from circumcision two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, led a raid on the family of Shechem, slaughtering them and retrieved their sister (Gen. 34). Jacob was horrified.

God told Jacob to move to Bethel where he built an altar and told his family to "Put away the strange gods that *are* among you" (35:2). God renewed His covenant with Jacob and bestowed upon him the promises He gave to Abraham and Isaac (35:9-15). However, Jacob's family life is not good. His favorite wife Rachael died. His son Rueben committed incest with Jacob's concubine Bilhah (35:22). Isaac died at one hundred eighty years of age.

JOSEPH AND THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Joseph was the apple of his father's eye. He had warned Jacob of his brother's evil deeds (37:2). He relayed to his family a dream he had in which he is given pre-eminence over his brothers. Out

of envy (cf. Acts 7:9) his brothers kidnapped him and sold him to Midianite traders for twenty pieces of silver (Gen. 37:28). They dipped his coat of many colors in goat's blood and told a heartbroken Jacob that Joseph had been killed by wild beasts.

So begins one of the most amazing examples of the providence of God. We must remember that during this difficult time in the life of Jacob and Joseph God was working to fulfilling His promises to Abraham—the land promise and the Messianic seed promise. For brevity's sake, let us look at how providence worked in the life of the patriarch Joseph.

Providence sends this seventeen-year-old slave to the house of the Egyptian Potiphar, officer of Pharaoh and captain of his guards. "And his master saw that the LORD *was* with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand" (39:3). Potiphar's wife took advantage of Joseph's status and tried to seduce him. When he refused her advances, she lied about him to Potiphar. Potiphar may have seen the ruse because he put Joseph in a special prison "a place where the king's prisoners *were* bound" (39:20). God's providence is still at work, and he soon became the warden's assistant. While there, he interpreted the dreams of two royal prisoners, the king's butler and baker, giving glory to God (40:8). As Joseph foretold, Pharaoh released the butler but hanged the baker. Joseph continued in prison for two more years until the butler remembered him.

God's hand is again with faithful Joseph when the butler heard of Pharaoh's dreams that none of his magicians and wise men could interpret (41:1-8). The butler remembered Joseph and recommended him to Pharaoh. So the thirty-year-old slave was taken out of prison and cleaned up to stand before the absolute ruler of Egypt. There Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams as meaning there would be seven years of plenty in Egypt followed by seven years of famine; he gave God the glory for the interpretation (41:15-36). Joseph recommended Pharaoh appoint someone to gather 20% of the all the crops in the years of plenty to be stored for the seven years of famine. "And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find *such a one* as this *is*, a man in whom the Spirit of God *is*?" (41:38). Joseph

became the equivalent of a prime minister or vizier of Egypt and marvelously carried out his plan to save Egypt from starvation.

The famine Joseph foretold caused Jacob to send ten of his sons to Egypt for food. His brothers did not recognize Joseph, and he put them through a series of tests to see if they had changed. He finally revealed himself in one of most moving scenes of in the Bible (45:1-15). He gained Pharaoh's approval for Jacob's family of seventy souls (46:27) to settle in Egypt. Jacob rejoiced at the news of Joseph being alive and with God's approval and reassurance (cf. 46:1-4) moved his family to Egypt.

Joseph presents his family at Pharaoh's court and warned them not to mention that they were herders of sheep as well as cattle because shepherding was an "abomination unto the Egyptians" (46:34). When interviewed by Pharaoh, Joseph's brothers said, "Thy servants *are* shepherds, both we, *and* also our fathers" (47:3). Pharaoh proceeded to grant them the best land in Lower Egypt at Goshen. They were to take care of the royal cattle herd (47:6). He then greeted 130-year-old Jacob and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Why did Pharaoh act the way he did and accept these shepherds? He may have already known this fact and ignored it because of his respect for Joseph. Yet it may be because Pharaoh was not an ethnic Egyptian but a member of a Semitic tribe (like the Hebrews) called the Hyksos. The Hyksos were foreign invaders from northern Canaan who ruled over Egypt and Canaan from 1750-1580 B.C. (Keller 98-101). Perhaps to him, Joseph was another non-Egyptian, like himself. (They also are thought to have introduced the chariot to Egypt—cf. Gen. 41:43.) Whatever the case, the providence of God was at work to save the Messianic Seed line.

When Jacob was 147, he died in Egypt. Before he died he spoke to his sons one last time. He singled out Judah and his tribe as where the Messiah would come. "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh come; And unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*" (49:10). *Shiloh* means "peace," and the Messiah would be the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). Jacob especially blest Joseph, singling out his two sons,

Ephraim and Manasseh, for a special blessing (Gen. 48). Jacob was “gathered unto his people” (49:33) like his forefathers. Joseph had him embalmed by the Egyptians and he took Jacob’s body to the Cave of Machpelah in Canaan where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were buried.

After the period of mourning for Jacob was over, Joseph’s brother feared he would take revenge upon them for selling him into slavery (50:15) and begged him to forgive them as Jacob had requested before he died. With a magnanimous heart, he forgave them and revealed an insight into the providence of God. “And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God?” (50:19). Seventeen years before Joseph had told his brethren:

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years *hath* the famine *been* in the land: and yet *there are* five years, in the which *there shall* neither *be* earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (45:5-8).

Joseph had an opportunity that few people experience—to know for certain that the hand of God has guided his life for a Divine purpose. For Joseph the shame of rejection and bondage was worth it all to save his people (and the Egyptians) from starvation and ultimately to save that precious Messianic seed line from which would ultimately come the Son of God.

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (Heb. 11:22). He died at age 110, was embalmed, and put in a coffin (Gen. 50:25-26). He believed the land promise and the Messianic seed promise that had been repeatedly promised to the patriarchs. He knew that Israel would leave Egypt when the time was fulfilled (15:13, 16). Over four hundred years later, Moses made sure his remains left Egypt in the Exodus (Exo. 13:19), and

the Israelites put them in the Cave of Machpelah after they conquered Canaan (Jos. 24:32).

CONCLUSION

It is edifying to read how God worked in the lives of the Patriarchs to save you and me. These were real people, with moments of weakness and great lives of faith. All of these faithful men and women had a realization that they were part of God's plan. What about us in the 21st Century A.D.? Are we part of God's plan, God's purpose for this world? You are **if** you are a faithful Christian. If not, please obey God's plan of salvation today!

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PERIOD OF BONDAGE

Dub Mowery

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The actual bondage of the Israelites in Egypt began after the death of Joseph (Exo. 1:5-14). A new Pharaoh came to power who did not take into account how God had blessed Egypt after Joseph had interpreted the dreams of the previous Pharaoh in that there would be seven years of bountiful crops and then seven years of famine (Gen. 41). Because God enabled Joseph to correctly reveal the dreams, he was given charge to prepare (during the years of plenty) for the years of famine. Now that Joseph had died, the new king of Egypt had the Israelites enslaved.

However, the period of bondage is generally placed at the going down into Egypt. In the chronology prepared by Ussher, he places this date at 1706 B.C. with this period of history ending with the exodus from bondage at 1491 B.C. thus covering a period of 215 years. The Bible covers this period in Exodus 1-14.

Because the Israelites were multiplying very rapidly, the new king feared they would increase in number to the extent that they would join their enemies and be delivered from bondage. He placed harsh taskmasters over the Israelites, but they continued to multiply in number. The new Pharaoh then ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill all of the male infants and save all the female infants. Instead of obeying those orders, the midwives saved the male infants and

concealed them. Pharaoh then ordered all of the Hebrews who were born as males to be cast into the river.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, according to prophecy, wise men came from the east to worship Him. They inquired: "Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him" (Mat. 2:2). This troubled Herod, who was king of Judea, and he determined to have Jesus killed. The wise men had been warned in a dream not to return unto Herod. After they had brought gifts and worshipped Jesus at Bethlehem, they departed but did not return to Herod. An angel then appeared unto Joseph saying, "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him" (2:13). He took the young child and the mother down into Egypt and remained there until Herod died. Because the wise men did not return unto Herod, he became very angry and had all the Hebrew children two years of age and under in Bethlehem and its surrounding area killed. This was what was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah saying, "in Ramah, Lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children Refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not" (Jer. 31:15). Just as Pharaoh had failed to kill baby Moses, Herod failed in his effort to have Jesus killed.

We might mistakenly conclude that a new king arose who knew not of Joseph and God blessing Egypt through him was the only reason the descendants of Jacob became enslaved in Egypt. They were enslaved according to God's divine plan. When Jacob's family went down into Egypt, they were only seventy in number (Gen. 46:27; Exo. 1:5). While there, they became a nation of slaves within the nation of Egypt. By the providence of God, when delivered from their bondage, they would come out with great wealth. God had told Abraham: "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance" (Gen. 15:13-14). They were to re-

main in Egypt for four generations. This was because the Amorites, who dwelt in Canaan, had not reached the extent of iniquity to be driven out of the land (15:16). Joseph had informed his family:

God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance [from the famine]. So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (45:7-8).

Looking unto Exodus 2, the parents of Moses were of the tribe of Levi. Because of her love for her infant son Moses, she hid him for three months. Afterward, they put him in an ark of bulrushes which had been sealed with slime and pitch. They set the ark afloat on the river. Moses' sister stood nearby to see what would become of her brother. We will see the providence of God taking place. Lo and behold, the daughter of Pharaoh came down to the river to bath. She had some maidens with her. As Moses' sister stood a little distance off, Pharaoh's daughter saw the ark among the flags, and she sent her maidens to fetch it. When it was brought to her, she opened it and saw the baby therein crying. Even though she realized the child was probably a Hebrew, she still had compassion on the infant. Moses' sister came forward and offered to find a nurse for the child among the Hebrew women. She was given permission and brought Moses' own mother to take care of him. Whether or not Moses' mother revealed unto her son who he really was, I do not know of a certainty. Either she did, or God directly communicated that truth unto him. In Hebrews we learn:

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible (11:23-27).

Moses wrote by inspiration the first five books of the Bible. Genesis covers the creation through to the time Jacob's family of seventy entered into Egypt. The beginning of Exodus speaks of a new king who knew not Joseph and enslaved the Hebrews. In attempting to hold down their population, he ordered all males born of the enslaved killed. Through the providence of God, Moses would be the deliverer to bring the Israelites out of bondage. The calling of Moses was under a very unusual manner. While attending the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro in the land of Midian, an angel appeared unto him in a burning bush which was not consumed of the flames. Moses was given the commission of the Lord to pursue the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exo. 3). Moses and his brother Aaron appeared before Pharaoh for that purpose. God provided them a sign that they had been instructed to use before the king. Aaron threw down his rod before the king, and it became a serpent. The court wise men and magicians did the same thing, but Aaron's rod, in the form of a serpent, swallowed all of the other rods in the form of serpents. This proved that God was with Moses and Aaron (Exo. 4-7).

Nevertheless, Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the children of Israel go. Because of this, ten plagues were brought upon the Egyptians before they released the Israelites from bondage. The first plague was turning the water into blood:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and *that* there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *vessels of wood*, and in *vessels of stone* (7:19).

The water became unfit to drink and the fish therein died. The Nile River was sacred and even worshipped by the Egyptians. It being turned into blood proved the one true God superior to the false gods of the Egyptians.

The second plague was infesting the land with frogs.

And if thou refuse to let *them* go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs: And the river shall bring forth frogs abundantly, which shall go up and come into thine house, and into thy bedchamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneadingtroughs: And the frogs shall come up both on thee, and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants (8:2-4).

This plague also went against the superstitions of the Egyptians. They worshipped a female deity with a frog's head in relation to their ancient worship of nature.

The third plague was causing lice to cover the land. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt" (8:16). This plague was upon the land which was worshipped by the Egyptians.

The fourth plague was bringing swarms of flies upon the land and people.

Else, if thou wilt not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of *flies* upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses: and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of *flies*, and also the ground whereon they *are* (8:21).

After the fourth plague was brought upon the Egyptians, Pharaoh attempted to compromise with Moses and Aaron.

And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land. And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, as he shall command us (8:25-27).

Thus, Moses pointed out unto Pharaoh his efforts to compromise were not adequate. The devil would have those who profess to be Christians to not separate themselves from those of the world. However, through the apostle Paul we are told to do so. Hear his words:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

A second attempt to compromise was an agreement of Pharaoh to let the Israelites go into the wilderness to sacrifice unto God if they would not go very far (Exo. 8:28). Just so in the Christian dispensation the devil does not want those in the church to be very committed unto the Lord. Yet, immediately after the plague of flies was removed, Pharaoh hardened his heart again.

The fifth plague would be a disease upon the livestock of the Egyptians.

For if thou refuse to let *them go*, and wilt hold them still, Behold, the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which *is* in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: *there shall be* a very grievous murrain (9:2-3).

Cattle and oxen were not sacrificed in Egypt, but were worshipped. The disease upon their livestock proved yet again Jehovah's power over the false gods of Egypt.

The sixth plague would be boils upon the Egyptians and their domestic animals.

And the LORD said unto Moses and unto Aaron, Take to you handfuls of ashes of the furnace, and let Moses sprinkle it toward the heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. And it shall become small dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth *with* blains upon man, and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt (9:8-9).

This plague was brought directly upon the Egyptians.

The seventh plague would be great thunder and hail throughout the land. All domestic animals in the field would die and anyone

who was out in the open. “Behold, to morrow about this time I will cause it to rain a very grievous hail, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof even until now” (9:18). After this plague was brought upon the land of Egypt, Pharaoh finally acknowledges God.

And Pharaoh sent, and called for Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, I have sinned this time: the LORD *is* righteous, and I and my people *are* wicked. Intreat the LORD (for *it is* enough) that there be no *more* mighty thunderings and hail; and I will let you go, and ye shall stay no longer (9:27-28).

The eighth plague would be locust so thick over everything that no one could actually see the ground.

Else, if thou refuse to let my people go, behold, to morrow will I bring the locusts into thy coast: And they shall cover the face of the earth, that one cannot be able to see the earth: and they shall eat the residue of that which is escaped, which remaineth unto you from the hail, and shall eat every tree which groweth for you out of the field: And they shall fill thy houses, and the houses of all thy servants, and the houses of all the Egyptians; which neither thy fathers, nor thy fathers’ fathers have seen, since the day that they were upon the earth unto this day. And he turned himself, and went out from Pharaoh (10:4-6).

The king’s servants plead with him to let Moses go. “And Pharaoh’s servants said unto him, How long shall this man be a snare unto us? let the men go, that they may serve the LORD their God: knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?” (10:7). Again, Pharaoh attempted to compromise with Moses and Aaron.

And Moses and Aaron were brought again unto Pharaoh: and he said unto them, Go, serve the LORD your God: *but* who *are* they that shall go? And Moses said, We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds will we go; for we *must hold* a feast unto the LORD. And he said unto them, Let the LORD be so with you, as I will let you go, and your little ones: look *to it*; for evil *is* before you. Not so: go now ye *that are* men, and serve the LORD; for that ye did desire. And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence (10:8-11).

The ninth plague would bring darkness throughout the land.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, even darkness *which* may be felt. And Moses stretched forth his hand toward heaven; and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings (10:21-23).

The darkness went against the Egyptians worship of their belief in a sun god. This brings a fourth attempt at compromise by Pharaoh!

And Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Go ye, serve the LORD; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed: let your little ones also go with you. And Moses said, Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt offerings, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not an hoof be left behind; for thereof must we take to serve the LORD our God; and we know not with what we must serve the LORD, until we come thither. But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go (10:24-27).

It would only be after the tenth plague that Pharaoh would let the children of Israel go. The tenth plague would be the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians and of their domestic animals.

And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that *is* behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel (11:4-7).

The Egyptians would suffer the death of the firstborn in every household. Even Pharaoh grieved because of the death of his son. He would surely recall how he had ordered the death of all male infants of the Hebrews.

In preparation for when the Lord would pass over the land and bring death of the firstborn of the Egyptians, God said unto Moses:

Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth *day* of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of *their* fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take *it* according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take *it* out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike *it* on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast *with* fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; *with* your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it *is* the LORD's passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD (12:3-12).

The Israelites were to observe the Passover annually.

The Passover of the Hebrews was a type of Christ being our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). Just as they were delivered from the bondage of slavery we, through Christ, are delivered from the bondage of our own sins (Rom. 6:16-17). Also, their deliverance through the Red Sea is typical of our being delivered from the consequences of our sins through baptism.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

PERIOD OF WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

Harrell Davidson

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INTRODUCTION

The period of wilderness wanderings begins with the exodus from Egypt and continues to the going into Canaan. According to Ussher's chronology, the exodus took place in 1491 B.C. and the going into Canaan in 1451 B.C. so covering 40 years. It is recorded in Biblical history in Exodus 15 and continues through the end of the book, then Numbers (which is about the numbering of the Israelites), Leviticus (concerning the sacrifices and offerings made by the children of Abraham), and Deuteronomy (which is about five speeches that Moses made before Joshua took over the leadership of the children of Israel).

In this lesson, we will begin in Numbers 11 and will go forward as far as space will take us. We urge all to carefully read about all the events of this 40 year period called the Wilderness Wanderings.

ISRAEL'S COMPLAINING

They had been at Mt. Sinai for about 11 months and 20 days. Leviticus took place in about one month. The first thing they did in their journey was to complain. The mixed multitude fell to lusting. Even Moses began to complain to God regarding his heavy responsibilities of leadership. On the part of the people there were

complaints about food and water eventually. God said that they could eat meat in one month! Eldad and Medad were two of the seventy elders that were appointed by Moses under God's direction to help with the responsibilities. The spirit came upon them, and they prophesied after the meat and quails came. The people gathered quail for a night and day as a result of lusting for food, and a number of them died as a result. The place was called *Kibroth-hattavah* which means "graves of those that lusted" or "graves of greed."

We need to think about the perils of faith. They were complaining, but we do not have what they specifically complained about. They were murmurers. Their inward attitude was the problem. God heard their complaining. We need to think about the ease of and problem with complaining. Complaining points to an inward problem. We must remember this! This is a part of their background. It is easy to become accustomed to a life of ease and plenty. In today's world, we cannot relate to a life of hardships associated with Godly living. As a result of their complaining, a fire came into their camp. Moses interceded in their behalf.

The second problem had its origin in mixed multitudes, according to verse four. The first time *mixed multitudes* is used is in Exodus 12:38. These people came out with the Israelites. The phrase probably means that they were "hangers on." They left Egypt with a variety of motives.

In 1 John 2:18 people went out because they were not "of us," meaning the same as faithful brethren. Some left Egypt without counting the cost. The background of 1 John 2:18 perhaps are the Jews who denied Christ. They were never of us John says. We think this explains how they were "hangers on" who are not willing to accept just what is in the Bible. In John's and Paul's time they were not willing to accept what was being preached. We need to think very seriously about this matter as they murmured. What did they think about? Leeks, garlic, fish, onions, cucumbers, and melons! What had they forgotten? Bricks! They had forgotten taskmasters with whips, and they forgot the miracles that God had wrought. Notice that when the mixed multitude complained, it affected the

whole multitude. There should be an application of this to us today. It is so easy to complain and throw off track great and good works.

Let us think about the perils of faith from Number 12. The first peril was complaining. The real difficulty is to be walking by faith and not by sight. It is hard to walk with what the eye cannot see. However, the Lord commanded such in Matthew 6:33 when He said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness..." Chapter 11 closes with graves of lust or graves of greed. Paul said that covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5). These people had seen the power of God, they had been delivered, they had been taken care of for over a year and 11 months, but had a lack of faith, perhaps because of the mixed multitude. The philosophy of the "hangers on" permeated the encampment. No wonder that the chapter closes with graves of greed. Graves today are literally filled because of greed.

The next peril involves Miriam and Aaron. What they bring to Moses is a serious thing. We recognize this because of God's reaction to this complaint. Remember that men are to walk by faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17). When God speaks, it is the end of the matter. Miriam and Aaron failed to recognize this. They fail to realize that Moses was God's chosen vessel. Miriam appears to be the leader of this movement. She was stricken by leprosy. Was Aaron stricken? No! So apparently she was the leader and thinker behind this situation. It should be remembered that Moses was the chosen one and Aaron was given to him to be a spokesman. Moses is pictured as being very meek. How meek? Above all the men! It appears that they wanted to share the responsibility with Moses, and she appears to be jealous. Their complaint should be studied.

Miriam had an attitude toward Moses that she should not have had. We let bad attitudes develop in the heart, and they manifest themselves in works. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Mat. 12:34). This is why Solomon said to guard our hearts. Aaron's problem appears to be one of weakness. He let the people lead him in the golden calf situation, and now Miriam

leads him. Sooner or later, weakness will become wickedness. It is evident to us that they wanted to share with Moses this leadership. However, God told Moses to select 70 elders to share the responsibility. At any rate God wants Moses, Miriam, and Aaron to come to the door of the tabernacle. God completely justifies Moses. Because of sin, Miriam is stricken with leprosy. One who is in a position of authority would not want to have been in this position. Could not God heal her immediately? Yes! Why did He not? Because of the law concerning lepers! This shows the folly of thinking that God does not mean what He says. God does not set aside His law. Suppose God forgave alien sinners in answer to their prayers? He would have to set aside His law. Therefore, the love of God and the justice of God must be met. Jealousy seems to be the problem of both Miriam and Aaron. Let us learn: (1) to see the importance of respecting God, (2) to see the danger of the spirit of jealousy, (3) that our interest should be in serving, (4) that when we are interested in serving we will have no problems over who is the greatest, (5) that we need to seek to grow spiritually, and (6) weakness will finally turn to wickedness.

THE TWELVE SPIES

The next great event on this journey in the wilderness is the selection and report of the 12 spies, which presents another peril of faith. According to Deuteronomy 1:12-23, after a request to send spies out, Moses agreed to do so. This might be like the Israelites having a king: it was not God's will, but He permitted it. God made the promise, and He would take care of them. Though there would be enemies, as long as God was in their midst, all is well. God said that an angel would go before them and that he would drive those people out of the land. Numbers 13, along with Deuteronomy 1, indicates that the people did not take God at His Word. With these things in mind, why send out spies? Lack of faith! We must realize that Numbers 13 and Deuteronomy 1 must harmonize. So, the expression that the Lord spoke to Moses and told him to send men out evidently came about after the men came to Moses with such a request. God had told them to go and take the land, but they

refused to do it. We need to take time each day to build our faith so when a crisis comes we will be able to withstand whatever comes our way.

The spies had a grasshopper complex. Ten tribes believed that it was impossible for God to deliver them as He had promised. The majority said that it was a good land and that it did flow with milk and honey. A statement may be basically true, but be false in spirit and attitude. Their attitude was wrong in this matter. The spies were going by appearances.

Joshua and Caleb were looking through eyes of faith and saw something entirely different. The majority report was exaggerated. They said the land eats up the inhabitants. Ten spies had a problem with self-image while Joshua and Caleb believed that the land could be taken. Ten spies discouraged the entire nation of over six hundred thousand men who were over 20 years old not counting the infirm. It is amazing what ten can do to tear down a work or otherwise ruin it. "And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them?" (Num. 32:7).

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! (14:2).

In the next verse (14:3) they make a charge against God. It is hard for us to comprehend such today, but this is what some upset folks can do when their emotions run ahead of their faith. It was their idea that what God has given them was not as good as what they had down in Egypt. They appoint to themselves captains to lead them back into Egypt. What an arresting thought? They defied the authority of God, and men do the same today and cause much havoc in the kingdom of God. Moses and Aaron were only interested in the people. They fell on their faces before them and begged them to reconsider and not to rebel (14:9).

"And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the

signs which I have shewed among them?” (14:11). God is not going to keep on giving them evidence. God’s patience has reached its end. Moses demonstrated his love for the people in that he prayed earnestly for them. Moses’ appeal is based upon the honor and glory of God. His glory had been demonstrated in bringing Israel out of bondage. Moses reasoned that everyone knew of God’s goodness and power. What is going to happen to God’s good name if He killed them all? The nations had heard of God’s goodness and mercy, and this is what Moses is appealing to. God said that He would pardon them, but they would die in the wilderness. Even though one may be forgiven, he may have consequences to bear.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you” (15:1-2). The announcement had already been made that the present generation would die. However, the faithful will enter the land. God wants them to remember these 38 years. The importance of obedience is stressed. For 38 years you will wander, but remember when you come into the land.

KORAH REBELLED

Jude 11 tells us something about Korah. “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.” This is placed in the same category with Balaam, and we know what the problem was—it was material gain. All of this is a rejection of Moses, the priesthood, and finally rebellion against God. It was God’s order for Aaron to be His priest. What Korah did was bad enough within itself, but that was not enough. Influence was involved, as was the numbers game. He had convinced 250 princes to go along with him in the rebellion. Numbers with God means nothing, as He will always win the battle. We learn their accusation:

And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, *Ye take* too much upon you, seeing all the congregation *are* holy, every one of them, and the LORD *is*

among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? (Num. 16:3).

A test was provided for all of them. God again selected Moses before them, and they all died because of their rebellion. It also started a plague that destroyed 14,700 of the congregation before the plague was stayed. Here we learn how serious it is to go against God and His delegated authority. When we read Numbers 16:45-48 we know how God looks at rebellion. We must learn the lesson.

The head of each tribe was to bring a rod. Each man's name was written on the rod. This was a test to see which rod would bud. It would settle the question whether they could be priests or not. It is important to see the language that is used in Numbers 17 because we see the priesthood involved also in chapter 18. Therefore, we have a supernatural act as a means of confirming that Aaron was a God-appointed priest. Others said they were holy, apparently indicating they were just as holy as Aaron and that he was self-appointed. Look at what God states: "And it shall come to pass, *that* the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you" (17:5). When they murmured against Moses and Aaron, it was also against God. We do not know a great deal about the rod whether it was one that they could read or sticks they cut out off a tree. Evidently it had no life in it because by the power of God it would bud, bloom, and bear almonds.

There are some obvious lessons that we need to ponder. Keep in mind the three essentials of priesthood: (1) There had to be a sacrifice; (2) There had to be a priesthood, which God must appoint; (3) The tabernacle was the place that the sacrifice was offered.

Consequently, the way to approach God was with sacrifice. Priests did this for the people, and they did so at the proper place. However, the people misunderstood the nature of redemption and the problem of sin. This was God's appointed way; so they need not argue about it or murmur. The organization of the church is set by God and not left to man. God's will must be done, or we perish. All of this was God's design. God was mediating the redemption

through Aaron. Aaron was the one chosen by God. The principle is evidently in mind in John 15:1-6:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

Apart from God the Israelites cannot bear fruit. Without the priesthood of Christ and our obedience to His will, we cannot bear fruit (be saved). The way we can bear fruit is through Christ. Isaiah and Zechariah wrote of the priesthood of Christ:

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots (Isa. 11:1).

And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name *is* The BRANCH; And he shall grow up out of his place, And he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; And he shall bear the glory, And shall sit and rule upon his throne; And he shall be a priest upon his throne: And the counsel of peace shall be between them both (Zec. 6:12-13).

Aaron had no inheritance in the land.

And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I *am* thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel (Num. 18:20).

Their physical needs were arranged in what way? There is a deeper thought out of this. It is not what is given us, but that we have fellowship with God. If we go back in our studies to Genesis 2, we know that Adam and Eve had fellowship with God. This is the greatest blessing they had. They sinned, and now then they had not God. What else could they want? What more did they need?

They thought they needed more; so they transgressed. We have here in our studies the priest and Levites. They enjoyed God's fellowship. They enjoyed this more than the other tribes because of their priestly functions. Having that, everything else is secondary. God says you have Me and My fellowship. This may be the background of Matthew 6:33—we are to seek God and His righteousness first. This is having God and His fellowship. Man who fails to have fellowship with God is a failure. Let us look at some passages. We are doing this because we do not think we are as mindful of the fellowship of God as we should.

My flesh and my heart faileth: *But God is* the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever (Psa. 73:26).

I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my refuge *And* my portion in the land of the living (142:5).

I believe that these things become the background of Romans 8. Paul, in Romans, points out the problem of sin and what sin has caused. In Romans 8, he shows blessings that come by being in fellowship with God and having retained redemption in Christ. Look at verse 31 and note that the only way for God to be for us is to have fellowship with Him. Did not Adam and Eve have everything they needed in the garden before they sinned? Paul in verse 32 shows that God gives us freely all things as long as we are in His fellowship. In verses 33 and 34 Christ makes intercession for us. This needs to be understood in the light of the fact that this is for those in fellowship with God. Now watch this in verses 35-39: Being a Christian has with it the primary blessing of having fellowship with God. Secondary blessings will be given as needed. Man without fellowship with God is lost, poor, wretched, and blind. Having fellowship with God is life's greatest blessing. We wanted to point these things out that we may understand that the greatest need for man was that redemption could come about so we might have this fellowship with God.

DEATH OF MOSES, AARON, AND MIRIAM

Miriam dies, as does Aaron. Aaron can have no part of Canaan. Moses could not go into Canaan either. "And Moses and Aaron

gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20:10). Evidently there is something in that statement that fails to sanctify. God had said for Moses to speak to the rock before their eyes in Numbers 20:8. God wanted that generation to see something about Him. What Moses did was to misrepresent God, which is what Psalm 106 means. Moses was impatient, leaving the impression that God was also impatient. He therefore misrepresents God. God wanted them to learn that He could get them into Canaan. When we look at Ezekiel 20:10-14, we know that God intended the bringing out of the people from Egypt and delivering them to Canaan in a way that the whole world could see that God hath done all of this. Moses failed to glorify God. Therefore, he failed to sanctify God.

Peter says, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Do we know what this passage is talking about? When Peter says for us to sanctify God in our hearts, he is asking us to do that which Moses failed to do. What is the basis of our hope? Peter said to be ready to give an answer. We always thought that it meant to turn to the Scriptures. This is true, but it is deeper than that. What is the reason for my hope? My answer is, "God Almighty." God, out of His love for man, promised to save man. He provided the redemption, the plan, and the accomplishment of these tasks. The reason for God doing this is because of His love for men.

The only way I can stand in fellowship with God is because of what God has done to make this possible. If there is anything that this world needs to learn today, it is that all we are and all that we enjoy is because of what God has done for us. This is why Peter adds, "with meekness and fear."

Water coming from that rock was to show the glory and power of God. Did this represent the power of God correctly? God said to speak to the rock. Was not God's Word sufficient? Moses failed to understand the nature and character of God. Many of the false

ideas of redemption have grown out of this kind of thinking. For instance, the impossibility of apostasy fails to understand the nature and character of God. Some Gospel preachers have taken the position that all sins from adultery to murder will not cause a man to be lost. Can you imagine how this misrepresents God? In Romans 1:5, Paul talks about the obedience of faith. In Romans 16:26, he again talks about the obedience of faith. Any teaching that leaves the impression that God is not careful about our obedience to His Will misrepresents God. The only way that redemption could be wrought for man was for one to live a sinless life and thus become the perfect offering for man. This is what Christ did.

When Numbers comes to a close and Deuteronomy begins, Joshua is ready to take charge of the journey into Canaan. Deuteronomy is series of speeches that Moses made that covers among other things, the wilderness wanderings.

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

PERIOD OF CONQUEST

Ken Chumbley

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INTRODUCTION

Joshua continues the sacred history of Israel begun by Moses. It plays a significant role in salvation history and shows us that God is well able to perform whatever He promises His people (Jos. 21:45). We will note a number of events as recorded in the book. God selected Joshua to lead the Israelites after the death of Moses.

As for the date of the book, we have some information that helps draw a conclusion. If the human penman is Joshua, as we believe, it is dated in his lifetime. Joshua was 110 years old when he died (24:29) and he governed Israel (depending on whose chronology one goes by) from anywhere from 25 to 40 years. The exodus from Egypt is dated by Ussher at 1491 B.C. while conservative scholars today date it at 1451 B.C. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for 40 years; thus Ussher places the beginning of this Period of Conquest at 1451 B.C. and places the end at 1443 B.C.

It was written for the Israelites for their learning, additionally, as part of the Old Testament, it is part of the "schoolmaster" (Gal. 3:24) to teach us. Why was it written? It is the sequel to the first five books of the Bible, showing the fulfilling of the promises God had made to Moses. It also shows God accomplished what He

had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Several references to the book are found in the New Testament: faithful Rahab (Heb. 11:31; Jam. 2:24-26), Jericho's fall as an example of victory by faith (Heb. 11:30), the penalty for sin (Acts 7:42), and the assurance of God's help (Heb. 13:5).

JOSHUA, THE MAN

Joshua is the dominant figure in the book who had early been recognized as a military leader (Exo. 17:8-16); he was closely associated with Moses in Exodus (24:13; 32:17; 33:11). He and Caleb were the only adults that came out of Egypt to enter Canaan having earned that privilege as they were totally faithful to the Lord. Joshua was appointed by God to succeed Moses and to lead Israel in the conquest of Canaan. Joshua was an Ephraimite (Num. 13:8). In Canaan he settled in Timnath-serah (Jos. 19:50). When he died, he was buried in the hill country of Ephraim (24:30).

Let us now look at the book.

The Call of Joshua (1)

Following 30 days of mourning after Moses died (Deu. 34:8), Joshua is charged to cross Jordan with the people, and he accepted the charge. The land God had promised to His people, like heaven, was worth all the effort necessary to obtain it (Heb. 4:1). The boundaries of the land God had promised are detailed. God's assurances were given for a successful conquest of the land, but victory was conditional on their faithfulness and obedience to God. The borders of the land are described. Joshua and the people are assured by God that they would not have enemies that would have greater strength. The conditional nature of God's rewards is taught throughout Scripture. God's law must be obeyed completely for those who desire to receive His blessings. Four times in this chapter Joshua is commanded to "be strong and of good courage" (1:6, 7, 9, 18). Courage is not the absence of fear but the presence of faith! They were to "observe to do all according to the law." As the leader of the people, Joshua knew that he was not to turn from the commandments of God "to the right hand or to the left" (1:7); so he

would prosper wherever he went. The “book of the law” was not to depart from his mouth and he was to meditate on it “day and night” (Psa. 1:2).

The command is given to prepare food since it was uncertain when they might have more, as in three days they would cross Jordan. The tribes of Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh who had taken possession of land on the east of the Jordan promised to keep their vows. The stage is now set for the conquest and victory.

Spies Sent to Jericho (2)

Before taking Jericho, two spies were secretly sent out to take careful note of what they found. They lodged at the house of Rahab, the harlot, not entering for any evil intent as they had been chosen because of their character. Probably it is the only place they could find and would attract less attention. However, their presence became known to the king of Jericho, and he sought for Rahab to hand them over. Instead, she hid them and told the king’s men they were gone before the city gates had closed. She suggested that they go quickly to overtake the men. Rahab had hid the spies on the roof. After the king’s men left, she told them the people were afraid of the Israelites, and she arranged for the spies escape after pleading for herself and her family to be spared. She asked a “true token” as a guarantee, and the spies put up their own lives. However, this guarantee was conditional; she was not to utter a word about the spies’ business. A cord or rope was placed out of the window of her house located on the city wall, and they were let down outside the city. They told her that the “scarlet thread” used to let them down from the window had to be placed in the window, and the family had to be in the house for them to be spared. After three days the spies returned to camp. They reported that the Lord had given them the land, and the children of the land were “faint” because of the Israelites as if all of the fight had gone out of them.

Israel Crosses Jordan (3-4)

The day the Israelites moved forward, Joshua arose early, and the people moved to the banks of the Jordan. They did not cross im-

mediately; preparations had to be made as they were to move into enemy territory. Specific instructions were given that they wait for the signal to move—that being the Ark of the Covenant being born by the priests. They would follow it, keeping their allotted distance, so they could find their way as they had not passed that way before. God was going to make them a way across the river. Joshua commands them to sanctify (set apart) themselves as God was going to do wonders among the people. The miraculous crossing of the Jordan would magnify Joshua and confirm his leadership, demonstrating that, as God had been with Moses, He would be with Joshua. It also demonstrated and gave assurance God would drive out their enemies from before them and would be with them.

The Ark of the Covenant was to pass over before the people into the river. As soon as the soles of the priests' feet reached the water's edge, God would perform the miracle. At this time of year the Jordan was a wide, fast-flowing body of water. The waters were stopped by God from flowing downstream, and they would "stand upon an heap" (3:13). Only a miracle could explain what happened. The priests holding the ark stood in the midst of the river bed as Israel passed over. The waters stayed back until all were safely across. Once the people were over, God gave command to Joshua that the twelve previously chosen men take a stone out of the midst of the river bed, carry it to the bank and leave them all there, each stone to represent a tribe. A mound was built with the stones to be a remembrance of what God had done. It would remind future generations and all people of God's mighty hand and their need to fear Him. It was the tenth day of the first month when they crossed the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the eastern side of Jericho.

Israel Circumcised and Kept the Passover (5)

Now Joshua is commanded to circumcise the Israelites the "second time." The males who came out of Egypt had all been circumcised, but during the 40 years in the wilderness circumcision had not been done. Now that they were to enter the Promised Land, it must be done. By this act, God said that He had "rolled away the reproach of Egypt" (5:9) from them. They then observed the

Passover. The next day they ate of the old crop of the land, and the following day the manna God had provided ceased; since it was no longer needed, they would eat of the fruit of the land.

Joshua now received encouragement when a man with a drawn sword appeared to him. Joshua asked him whether he was for Israel or their enemies. He was the “captain of the LORD’s host” (5:15). Joshua fell on his face to the earth and asked: “What saith my lord unto his servant?” (5:14). As with Moses and the burning bush (Exo. 3:4-5), Joshua was commanded to remove his shoes because the place was holy. We must conclude Joshua was in the presence of the Lord Himself.

The Fall of Jericho (6)

The conquest now began. The gates of Jericho had been closed; none were allowed in or out. Jericho was to be a gift from God to the Israelites. This would remove fear and give them courage to respond precisely to the instructions they received. However, the walls of Jericho needed to be taken down. God would remove the last obstacle separating the children of Israel from victory. The Israelites could not possibly entertain any fear of failure.

Jericho was God’s gift, but when did Israel receive it? The Bible resoundingly tells us that the walls fell by faith (Heb. 11:30). God’s plan was for Israel was to march around Jericho once a day for six days and on the seventh day, seven times. Until the seventh time on the seventh day the people were silent. When the priests blew their ram’s horns on the seventh day, the people shouted with a great shout. Then the walls collapsed, and the city was taken. The walls fell down “flat,” and the people went straight into the city and took it.

Jericho, along with its inhabitants, was to be “accursed” (devoted) as it was set aside for the Lord. Only Rahab and her family gathered with her were to remain alive. The Israelites were clearly warned to keep themselves from that which the Lord had set aside for Himself. If they disobeyed, they would be accursed, and any who took anything would make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it. The spoils of war were consecrated to the Lord to be placed in His trea-

sure. All living things in the city were destroyed, because their sins would have contaminated God's people. Joshua's fame spread as it became known that the Israelites had taken Jericho.

Defeat at Ai, Achan's Sin, Victory at Ai (7-8)

Joshua sent men to "go up and view the country" (Jos. 7:2) in and around Ai. They reported back that the people were "few" and only "about three thousand men" (7:4) were needed to take the city. However, they were put to flight and defeated, thirty-six being killed in the retreat. Israel suffered its first and only defeat at Ai. As a result, "the hearts of the people melted" (7:5)! Why the defeat? The covenant had been violated, God was not with them because there was sin in the camp (Deu. 23:14). Joshua and the elders considered the defeat a sign of Divine rebuke.

They had set out without consulting God and while there was sin in the camp. Joshua poses a number of questions. God tells him to get up; it was a time for action, not complaining. He needed to find out what had caused the defeat, where the sin was and remove it. The text describes how Achan was shown to be the sinner. They found the spoils in his tent. His family and possessions were brought to the valley of Achor (troubling) where they were stoned and burned. Now the people were again right with God and ready to go forward in faith, without fear.

God instructed Joshua, telling him He had given them the city, the land, and the people; yet He said to take "all the people of war" (Jos. 8:1) into battle. Unlike Jericho, they were to be allowed to take the spoil and the cattle for themselves. God's instructions involved an ambush. Some men went by night behind the city and hid. The rest came at the city as before; the citizens came out after them; the Israelites fled as they had done before. The citizens of Ai pursued them. When they turned, they saw that the city was burning as the ambush came into the city. Israel then turned, trapping the men of Ai between the two parts of the army. The king of Ai was killed with the sword, and his body was hanged until the close of the day. Another heap of stones was made as this time as a reminder of the victory of faithfulness.

The waging of war and conquest comes to a complete halt. Joshua now builds an altar of stone on Mount Ebal, according to the instructions of Moses (Deu. 27:2, 5) and wrote on the stones a copy of the law in the presence of Israel. The people were separated with the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin on Mount Gerizim (the mount of blessing), and the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali on Mount Ebal (the mount of cursing). The blessings and cursings were read and the people agreed to its conditions.

The Deceit of Gibeon (9)

With the successes of Israel some inhabitants of the land prepared to make terms with them. The Gibeonites determined to save themselves. According to the Law (Deu. 20:10-18), the Israelites might make peace with distant cities, but those nearby were to be conquered and occupied. The craft and deceit of the Gibeonites is seen in that they claimed they were from far away. The men came wearing old, tattered clothing with old provisions giving the appearance they traveled a long way. Joshua made inquiry regarding their intentions, the kind of treaty they desired, their ethnicity, and where they were from. Their response was pure unadulterated deceit—lies. Joshua and Israel were unwise in failing to consult the Lord, so they made a treaty with them.

Three days later the Israelites found out that the Gibeonites were their neighbors. Although they had been deceived, Israel viewed the treaty as binding. Justice, however, would be exercised by making them “hewers of wood and drawers of water” (Jos. 9:21). When questioned about their deceit, the Gibeonites said that they feared the God of Israel whose army was conquering the land, and they willingly accepted their sentence of service to work among the Israelites.

Subjugation of Southern Canaan (10)

The deceit of the Gibeonites brought about a conspiracy against them. A confederation of five kings wanted to make them an example; if they were unpunished, it would set a precedent. The Gibeon-

ites sent to Joshua, entreating him to help repel the confederacy. Israel quickly responded marching all night toward Gibeon. They pursued the enemy through the pass controlled by Beth-horon. The Lord intervened and caused a great hailstorm that accounted for more casualties than from hand to hand combat. Another miracle is wrought by God as a result of Joshua's petition, in which the "sun stood still, and the moon stayed" (10:13), commonly referred to as the "Long Day of Joshua." Numerous possible interpretations have been offered. Charles Pfeiffer has noted:

The Biblical writers frequently describe miracles in terms of the intensification of natural phenomena. The God of Israel is the God of nature, and all natural phenomena are at His disposal. As God of Israel He brought His people from Egypt, protected them, and met their needs during the time of the wilderness wandering and, in Joshua, brought them into Canaan and gave them victory over their enemies.... As God of nature He brought about the plagues on Egypt, hardened Pharaoh's heart, opened the waters of the Red Sea by a strong east wind, opened the Jordan,...and now was giving victory to Israel....

To the Biblical writer there can be no question that God performed a miracle in answer to Joshua's prayer (206-207).

The Israelites won a decisive victory, but the five kings were still on the loose. They had set up camp in a cave at Makkedah. The mouth of the cave was sealed and guards posted. Israel is ordered to advance and slay the retreating army, then they return to the cave, its mouth is opened, and the five kings brought out. The captains were instructed to put their feet on the kings' necks (symbolizing their complete subjection), they were then slain; the bodies hanged on a tree until evening and then buried in the cave.

The next assault was on the well-fortified city of Lachish. On the second day, the stronghold is overthrown. During the battle Horam, king of Gezer, arrives with his army to help defend the city but is defeated and killed. Joshua moves on with his army and is victorious at Eglon. They next moved east into the hill country, taking Hebron, and then to the southwest and taking Debir.

In the last three verses, the conquest is summarized, and although the strong city states of Gezer and Jerusalem had not yet been conquered, they had been isolated by the military campaign. Thus, the whole southern area from Gibeon to Kadesh-barnea and Gaza was under the control of Israel when Joshua led his battle-hardened army back to the main camp at Gilgal.

Northern Canaan Subdued and a Summary of the Conquests (11, 12)

With southern Canaan conquered, it is not surprising that the kings of northern Canaan were fearful. They band together to oppose Israel. Jabin, king of Hazor, is so distressed he seeks help from other kings. These kings were probably from cities that lay close to Hazor. Jabin sent word to all the cities around about to join him. They numbered “as the sand that *is* upon the sea shore in multitude” (11:4) and had horses and chariots “very many” (11:4). This is significant since the children of Israel had none of the machines of war; they just had the power of Almighty God.

There was a singular purpose for confederacy. They “pitched together” (11:5) in an effort to seek their goal. There was harmony among the kings because of their purpose to fight Israel. The “waters of Merom” (11:5) were chosen as the place of assembly, the army was numerically the greatest Israel had faced. God promised to fight with Israel; thus the victory was a forgone conclusion.

The account of the war between the Israelites and the confederacy of kings is short. Israel “came against them suddenly” (11:7—NKJV) not waiting for the enemy to attack. The action was swift with the element of surprise having a profound effect. The enemy was routed, and Joshua gave God the glory. Those who initially escaped slaughter fled some westward toward Sidon on the Mediterranean coast while others fled eastward toward Mizpah, but they were pursued, and those who were captured were slain according to God’s instructions. Hazor, the prominent city of the area and its king fell to the sword. The other kings involved were also destroyed as were their cities. He “burnt Hazor with fire” (11:11), but the other cities were spared; just the people were destroyed. The Hivites,

part of the confederacy, made peace with Israel and were spared. The spoils of war belonged to the victors.

Joshua now gives a summation of all that occurred during the conquest. All the land from the south by the Dead Sea to Mount Herman in the north was conquered, and all the kings were slain. We cannot infer from this that all the Canaanites were slain, as in later years they caused problems for Israel. It took seven years to accomplish the conquest, for God had hardened the hearts of the heathen cities so they would not sue for peace. The Anakim were driven out and cut off from the mountains, their cities were utterly destroyed, and none were left in the land promised to Israel.

Joshua succeeded because of his integrity in holding fast the commands God had given, and because of God's power in giving into Joshua's hand all that opposed the people of God.

Chapter 12 tells of the division of the land east of Jordan that was conquered under Moses which was divided among the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. The remaining verses of the chapter list all of the kings conquered by the Israelites as they took Canaan to settle it. Each one is mentioned together with the cities over which they had reigned.

The Allotment of the Land by Tribes (13-19)

This section deals with the allotment of the land among the tribes of Israel. It is very important as it determines the boundaries of the inheritance for each tribe. It begins with God's directive to divide the land. Joshua's earthly sojourn was rapidly drawing to a close; thus the division had to be done before all of Canaan was literally in Israel's hands. God had given all the land of Canaan to Israel, but they had to possess it. The boundaries of the land for the two-and-a-half tribes are given first. Levi would receive no land as an inheritance. The remaining chapters in this section show the division of the land among the remaining tribes. The division was done by lot, but the size of the tribes was taken into consideration. At this time Caleb came, requesting he receive the mountains of Hebron for his inheritance, reminding the people that Moses had promised him

these lands because of his faithfulness. His request being granted, he took possession of the land.

Jerusalem, though part of Judah's inheritance, was not taken because of a lack of faith and courage. This was true for the rest of the cities that remained in the hands of the enemies of God's people. Ephraim was glad to let the Canaanites live in Gezer as long as they paid tribute to the tribe, this being easier, safer, and more profitable than utterly destroying them from the land. Nevertheless, God's will was not obeyed. These, along with other Canaanites, would trouble Israel from that point forward.

After Ephraim and Manasseh received their inheritance, Joshua brought the whole nation together at Shiloh. The tabernacle was set up in the place God had chosen. It remained there until the time of the Judges. Following the setting up of the tabernacle the remaining seven tribes began to receive their inheritance by lot. At the conclusion of the division of the land among the tribes, they gave Joshua an inheritance in the middle of them, Timnath-serah, in the mountains of Ephraim where he lived until his death.

The Cities of Refuge and the Return Home of the Tribes across Jordan (20-22)

Before his death, Moses had appointed three cities of Refuge east of Jordan. Now Joshua is called upon to appoint three more. The additional cities appointed were Kadesh in Galilee in mount Naph-tali, Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba (Hebron) in the mountain of Judah.

Next, the Levitical cities were distributed according to God's command. These cities would enable the Levites to provide for themselves (in addition to the tithes they would receive). With the priests dispersed in their cities, they would always be readily available to serve Israel. Six of the cities were cities of refuge.

Joshua 21:43-45 show that God's promises were fulfilled. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation and inherit Canaan and the extent of the land. Moses had told them to go in and possess the land that God had promised them, and just before he died, Joshua told Israel: "not one thing

hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, *and* not one thing hath failed thereof” (23:14). These statements refute the doctrine of premillennialism as it concerns the Promised Land for **nothing** had failed concerning God’s promise.

With the war being over the army was disbanded. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, having performed their part of the agreement, return to their possessions east of Jordan. When they reached the Jordan, they built an altar there. Upon hearing this, the remaining tribes gathered at Shiloh to prepare for war against them. However, they first send Phineas and the princes of Israel to see what had happened. They made accusations against the two-and-a-half tribes, accusing them of rebellion that would bring God’s wrath against them. The two-and-a-half tribes responded in their own defense. The altar had not been built for religious purposes but was to be a witness that they were one with the remaining tribes on the west side of the Jordan. This response was accepted, and they returned to Shiloh and reported to the people who were pleased and resolved not to go up to battle against them.

The Closing Chapter of Joshua’s Life (23-24)

The war was over; Joshua was “waxed old *and* stricken in age” (23:1) and had withdrawn to his inheritance to enjoy his last days of life. However, when the time of his death drew near, he gathered the representatives of the people together to warn them concerning apostasy. There was much piety and modesty in this address as he knew the glory for Israel’s victories belonged to God. Joshua had made sure that all of the land had been divided by lot and was possessed by the Israelites but makes it clear that God could not be taken for granted. He encouraged them to continue to be faithful, and He would continue to be with them. He also warned them what would be the result of turning their backs upon the Lord.

The book closes with Joshua’s final challenge to Israel; he warned and admonished them regarding their faithfulness to God. He rehearsed all God had done for the children of Israel. Then Joshua sets two choices before the people but made it clear where he and his

family stood. The people declared that they would remain faithful. However, Joshua pressed his point that they could not serve God if they forsook Him and started serving other gods. He stressed that God would not tolerate or sanction such behavior but would fight against them as He had done against those pagans who had been in Canaan before the conquest. Joshua had done all he could; he had said all he knew to say; it was now up to the people to live up to that to which they had committed themselves. Joshua then dismissed them to their own inheritance.

The final verses of the book deal with the death and burial of Joshua. The important words in these verses are “the servant of the LORD” (24:29). The place of Joshua’s burial is insignificant, and his lineage does not matter. What was important is that he served the Lord God with all of his heart, mind, strength, and soul. We are told of the burial of the bones of Joseph that had been brought out of Egypt, and the death of Eleazar the son of Aaron is recorded. Now with the death of the high priest, the days and times of Joshua come to a close. Note what Adam Clarke states concerning the conclusion of the book and the history of Israel:

Thus nearly all the persons who had witnessed the miracles of God in the wilderness were gathered to their fathers, and their descendants left in possession of the great inheritance, with the Law of God in their hands, and the bright example of their illustrious ancestors before their eyes. It must be added that they possessed every advantage necessary to make them a great, a wise, and a holy people. How they used, or rather how they abused, these advantages, their subsequent history, given in the sacred books, amply testifies (95).

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PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

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INTRODUCTION

The period of Judges covers a dark time in the history of Israel. Throughout her history, Israel continually disobeyed God and was punished for it. After the death of Joshua, there was no leader in Israel to help defeat her enemies and help her remain faithful to God. It was during these dark ages of disobedience that the “judges” were appointed to save the people. These judges were fifteen individuals who, at different times, fought to save God’s people from her enemies. However, disobedience continued throughout Israel, and God showed that He was still in control. Cate said that Judges “clearly has a Deuteronomic outlook: God is in sovereign control and Israel’s sinful rebellion will be punished. The theme acknowledges that God’s purposes cannot ultimately be thwarted” (223). God’s warnings have always been true, and the children of Israel faced God’s wrath several times because they failed to heed those warnings.

Judges is marked by the attitude of most during that period: “In those days *there was* no king in Israel, *but* every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes” (Jud. 17:6). Because of this attitude, moral and spiritual decline continued in Israel. This decline was attributed to three things. (1) The failure of the people to drive the heathens

out of the land. The Israelites chose to let the heathens stay and it affected them like worldliness affects many today. (2) The idolatry of the people. Since they did not drive out the heathens, they began to adopt their idolatrous practices. (3) Inter-marriage with the heathens. Because the Israelites inter-married with the heathens, it led to much of the idolatry.

God raised up judges to intervene and deliver His people from her enemies. These were not judges as we think of them today. Very few of them actually *judged* Israel. They were military leaders sent to deliver them from their enemies, both inside and outside Canaan. There were three types of judges who led: (1) warriors (e.g., Gideon), (2) priests (e.g., Eli), and (3) prophets (e.g., Samuel, who was also a priest). Each time a judge would be raised up and deliver them, the Israelites would once again fall back into sin. This pattern is seen throughout Judges. It seemed that God's people would not learn their lesson. Lockyer stated:

What a sad book of sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting. Once settled in Canaan, Israel was not long in giving way to unbelief and ungodliness, and through all their departure from God one can hear the sob of divine disappointment from the divine heart. Yet over against the backsliding of the people is set God's amazing grace in restoring them to fellowship with Himself. The four key words summarize the 300 years covered by this book—*sin, sorrow, suffering, salvation*. Because of their *sin*, God permitted the people to go into *servitude*. Repentant, or *sorry* for their sin, and crying to Him for deliverance, He heard their cry and raised them up *saviours* or judges (62).

It is against this backdrop, that we study the Period of the Judges.

DATE AND AUTHOR

The date and time covered by the judges has been widely discussed and debated. Biblical scholars cannot agree when the book was written and the time covered. It is generally believed to cover from the death of Joshua to the beginning of the reign of Saul. In 1 Kings 6:1, it is recorded:

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the

fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

Acts records:

The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave *unto them* judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet (13:17-20).

When we look at the numbers in 1 Kings 6, we must subtract the 40 years in the wilderness, approximately 20 years to conquer the land and approximately 84 years of the reign of Saul, David, and the first four years of Solomon's reign. Most scholars state that the numbers were probably rounded numbers based on the events that happened and their time frame. Most will give the time frame of the Period of Judges between 300-400 years. The more conservative estimates have the Period of Judges between 300-350 years. The biggest problem comes in trying to determine the length of time each judge led Israel.

Unfortunately, there are several gaps in the records and it is difficult to detect if the reigns of some of the judges might have overlapped. Each of the judges ruled over a portion of Israel's territory, so one judge could have been reigning in one region while another judge reigned in a different region. This is seen by adding all the years of oppression with the years of peace recorded in Judges up to Jephthah's reign. Even with no information of the length of Shamgar's rule, we come up with a total of 319 years and this does not include the time it took to conquer Canaan nor the three generations of peace after Joshua. Obviously, some overlap must have occurred.... This is the reason most translations use the 450 years as a summation of Acts 13:17-19 and not as the length of the period of the judges in Acts 13:20 (Hamilton).

The time frame, therefore, covered by the book is estimated between 1400 B.C. and 1000 B.C.

Judges and the first part of 1 Samuel covers the entire Period of the Judges. It appears that Judges was written after Israel had a king based on certain passages within the book. For instance, Judges 17:6 and Judges 21:25 say essentially the same thing: “In those days *there was* no king in Israel, *but* every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes” (17:6). Judges 18:1 states:

In those days *there was* no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day *all their* inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

These verses all start with, *In those days* indicating that the events were in the past.

If the book was written after Saul was anointed king, then the logical assumption for the author is Samuel. There is no internal evidence to prove that Samuel is the author; however, Jewish tradition attributes the book to him. Modern liberal scholars try to date the book in the 700s to deny the authorship of Samuel. The date many ascribe to Judges does not fit the rest of the time period. Most conservative scholars attribute the book to Samuel.

THE JUDGES

God raised up these judges to deliver His people from her enemies. We will look at each judge individually and study the time each one ruled. It appears that some judges were contemporaries, ruling during a time when more than one enemy nation was harassing Israel across different parts of the nation.

Othniel

He is the first judge God raised up to deliver His people. Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and He delivered her into the hands of the Mesopotamians. Israel was subject unto them for eight years. When Israel cried unto the Lord for deliverance, He heard her cries and sent Othniel to deliver her from bondage. Othniel led Israel to battle against the Mesopotamians and defeated them. There was peace in the land for forty years under the leadership of Othniel (3:7-11).

Ehud

After the death of Othniel, the children of Israel once again went back into sin. As a result, God allowed the Moabites to oppress Israel. Israel was subject to Eglon, king of Moab, for eighteen years (3:14). Israel once again cried unto the Lord for deliverance and He raised up Ehud to deliver them. Ehud, a left-handed man, made a double-edged sword approximately eighteen inches long and strapped it to his right thigh. Ehud took a tribute to King Eglon, who was a very fat man (3:17). After he presented the tribute, he told Eglon that he had a secret message for him (3:19). The king's servants left Ehud and Eglon alone in an upper room of his palace. Ehud drew out the sword and thrust it into Eglon's belly so he could not pull it out (3:21). When Ehud saw Eglon dead, he locked the door to the room and left. Ehud then rallied the Israelites together and said unto them:

Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man (3:28-29).

Israel had peace for eighty years under the leadership of Ehud.

Shamgar

Very little is known about Shamgar or how long he led the people. Judges 3:31 states: "And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel." This verse states all that is known about him. Shamgar slew 600 Philistines with an ox goad and saved Israel. A *goad* is defined as:

(Heb. *malmad*, only in Judg. 3:31), an instrument used by ploughmen for guiding their oxen. Shamgar slew six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad. "The goad is a formidable weapon. It is sometimes ten feet long, and has a sharp point. We could now see that the feat of Shamgar was not so very wonderful as some have been accustomed to think." In 1 Sam. 13:21, a different Hebrew word is used, *dorban*, meaning something pointed. The expression (Acts

9:5, omitted in the R.V.), “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks”, i.e., against the goad, was proverbial for unavailing resistance to superior power (“Goad”).

Since there is only one verse mentioning this event, the attack by the Philistines was probably a minor attack instead of a takeover of Israel.

Deborah

There was eighty years of peace under Ehud. However, Israel once again went back into sin and God delivered her into the hands of the Canaanites under the rule of Jabin. God then raised up Deborah to save His people.

Deborah was a prophetess and the only woman judge in Israel (4:4). She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel. Israelites would come to her for her to settle disputes (4:5). It was during this time that Deborah sent for Barak, son of Abinoam to raise up an army to defeat the Canaanites (4:6). Barak only agreed to go against the Canaanites if Deborah went with him. After Deborah agreed to go, Barak gathered ten thousand men and went to Mt. Tabor (4:8-12). Barak and his army went against Sisera and his army, and “all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; *and* there was not a man left” (4:16). Sisera, however, fled on foot before the slaughter and hid himself in the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite (4:17). While Sisera lay fast asleep, Jael got a tent peg and a hammer and drove it through Sisera’s temple into the ground, and he died (4:21). When Barak came, Jael showed him the body of Sisera.

So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan (4:23-24).

Judges 5 is the song of Deborah and Barak. It gives praise and glory to God for leading them to victory over their enemy. It also deals with man’s relationship with God and his duty to God. Deborah judged for forty years, and there was peace in the land.

Gideon

After the death of Deborah, Israel once again turned to sin and was delivered to the Midianites for seven years. The Midianites came into the land, drove the Israelites into caves, took their sheep and cattle, and Israel became impoverished. The Lord raised up Gideon, a mighty man of valor to save His people. Gideon requested confirmation of God three times before he accepted his task. Gideon was not questioning God, but making sure that God would be with him to defeat the Midianites.

Gideon did as God commanded and raised an army to fight the Midianites.

And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that *are* with thee *are* too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me (7:2).

God told Gideon to send those who were fearful and afraid away from the mountain. There were twenty-two thousand men who left and went home. Gideon was left with ten thousand soldiers. God said there were still too many to fight against Midian; so he sent them to the water.

So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. And the number of them that lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water (7:5-6).

Gideon took his three hundred men and prepared to fight the Midianites and Amalekites. Under the leadership of Gideon, there was great victory in Israel. “Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon” (8:28).

Abimelech

“And Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives. And his concubine that *was* in Shechem, she

also bare him a son, whose name he called Abimelech” (8:30-31). Abimelech wanted to rule over Israel so badly that he conspired with evil men and murdered all of his brothers except Jotham who hid himself (9:5). Jotham went to the top of Mount Gerizim and cried out to the men of Shechem. Jotham told a parable of the trees and made application to them (9:7-21). After finishing his parable, Jotham fled for his life and dwelt in Beer. God sent an evil spirit to cause division between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. In the end, all involved in Abimelech’s sins perished, including Abimelech.

Tola

There is very little known about Tola. Judges 10:1-2 tells the extent of his life and leadership.

And after Abimelech there arose to defend Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.

Jair

There is also very little know about Jair. He had thirty sons who each ruled over a city. Jair judged Israel for twenty-two years and died. He was buried in Camon.

The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and He allowed the Philistines to oppress and vex Israel for eighteen years. The children of Israel once again cried unto the Lord for help. They put away the strange gods and they served the Lord (10:16). The Lord heard their cry and sent to them the next judge.

Jephthah

He is called a mighty man of valor through inspiration. It is also said of Jephthah that he was born of a harlot (11:1). His step-brothers threw Jephthah out and told him that he would not inherit anything from his father’s house. Jephthah fled and dwelt in the land of Tob. After a period of time, the Ammonites made war with Israel. The elders in Gilead went to Jephthah and asked him to return as their leader to fight against the Ammonites. Jephthah agreed to lead them if they made him “head” (11:9). “Then Jephthah went

with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh” (11:11). Jephthah tried to negotiate with the king of Ammon, but to no avail (11:12-28). Jephthah marched against the children of Ammon to fight against them. In the process, Jephthah made a rash vow unto the Lord. He said if the Lord would deliver the Ammonites into his hand, that whatever came from the door of his house to greet him would be offered up as a burnt offering (11:30-31). Upon their defeat, Jephthah went home and his daughter (and only child) came out to greet him. He rent his clothes and cried out and said, “I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back” (11:35). He sent his daughter away for two months to mourn and when she returned, he fulfilled his vow and offered his daughter as a sacrifice. Jephthah judged Israel for six years and died.

Ibzan

The only thing recorded in sacred Scripture about Ibzan is that he was from Bethlehem and had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He found mates for his sons and judged Israel for seven years and died (12:8-10). Since nothing is mentioned about wars with other nations, it appears that peace reigned in Israel during this time.

Elon

Elon was from the tribe of Zebulun and judged Israel for ten years and died (12:11-12).

Abdon

Abdon had forty sons and thirty nephews, and he judged Israel eight years and died (12:13-15).

The Israelites did evil in the sight of the Lord, and He delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years (13:1).

Samson

The exploits of Samson are recorded in Judges 13-16. Samson was known as the strong man. He was the strongest man in the Bible. His strength however was his ultimate downfall. Samson did many great things for God, but he also committed several sins. His

life as a whole is not one that a Christian today would want to emulate. He broke his Nazarite vow on several occasions and thought God would still be with him. This is what ultimately led to his demise.

An angel appeared to Manoah's wife and told her she would have a child, Samson. The angel gave the strict instructions that he would be a Nazarite from the womb to the tomb. The angel also pointed out that he would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

After Samson was born, he grew, and the spirit of the Lord began to move him (13:25). Samson went down to Timnath and found a woman of the Philistines. Samson asked his father to get her for him. His parents urged him to find an Israelite among his people instead of a woman of the uncircumcised Philistines. They did not know it was God at work, Who was using this occasion to punish the Philistines for what they had done to His people (14:1-4). While travelling to Timnath with his parents, Samson was alone in the vineyards when a young lion roared against him. Samson killed the lion with his bare hands and tore him. Later, on his way to the marriage, Samson saw a beehive in the carcass of the lion he had killed. He reached down and took the honey and ate it; he later gave some to his parents. He was careful not to tell his parents where he got the honey. He violated his Nazarite vow because part of it was that he could not eat anything unclean. By eating the honey from a dead animal, he was eating that which was unclean.

Samson had a wedding feast, as was the custom during that time. Thirty young men came and he gave them a riddle. He told them if they could solve the riddle within the seven days of the feast, then he would give them thirty sheets and thirty changes of clothes (14:12-14). The young men could not solve the riddle; so they threatened Samson's new wife. They said they would burn the house down with her and her father in it if she did not reveal the riddle to them. She cried to Samson to reveal the riddle, but he did not until the seventh day. When Samson gave in and told her the answer, she revealed it to the young men, and they told Samson the correct answer. In anger, Samson first went to his father's house, and

then he took vengeance by slaying thirty Philistines and taking their garments to give to the young men. When Samson returned to his wife, her father had given her to Samson's friend as a wife. Again in anger, Samson caught three hundred foxes and tied firebrands to the tails of each pair of foxes, lit them, and turned them loose. The fire destroyed the Philistines wheat fields, vineyards, and olive trees. The Philistines, in turn, killed Samson's wife and her father, just as they had told her earlier. To avenge his wife's death, he slaughtered a large number of Philistines. Later, they bound Samson with ropes and he broke free. Samson

found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand, and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith. And Samson said, With the jawbone of an ass, heaps upon heaps, With the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men (15:15-16).

After other exploits, Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah. The lords of the Philistines bribed Delilah with eleven hundred pieces of silver each to find out the secret of Samson's strength. She begged Samson on three occasions to tell her his strength, and each time he deceived her. Delilah continued to harass Samson and begged him for the truth. Samson gave in and told her the secret of his strength (16:16-17). Delilah, in turn, revealed it unto the Philistines. While Samson was asleep, Delilah had men come in and cut his hair (16:19). When Samson woke up, he thought he would go out as he had in the past and fight the Philistines. He did not know that his strength was taken from him. The Philistines took him and gouged out his eyes and put him in prison grinding wheat. After a period of time, Samson's hair began to grow back. It was during this time that the Philistines gathered together to offer sacrifice to their god, Dagon. They believed that Dagon had delivered Samson unto them (16:23). Samson was brought into the feast for them so they could make sport of him. They set Samson between two pillars. Samson asked a young boy to help him feel the pillars upon which the house stood. Samson called on God to restore his strength that he could avenge himself for the Philistines gouging out his eyes. Samson took hold on the pillars and said:

Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with *all his* might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that *were* therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than *they* which he slew in his life (16:30).

Samson's family came and took his body for burial. Samson judged Israel for twenty years (16:31).

Eli

The life of Eli is recorded in 1 Samuel 1-4. He served as both a judge and the high priest over Israel. Eli is known for rearing Samuel in the service of the Lord, but also for failing to restrain his own sinful sons, who were priests. In chapter two, Eli confronts his sons about their sins, but they did not listen to him. Sadly, Eli did nothing else to stop his son's sinful behavior. An unnamed prophet came to Eli and told him that God will punish his house. "Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house" (2:31). He also told Eli that both of his sons would die in one day (2:34).

Chapter three reveals the first time Samuel heard the voice of God. When he thought it was Eli, he went to him and asked what Eli wanted. The third time Samuel did this, Eli told him to answer the Lord. When Samuel answered, God told him what He planned to do to Eli and his house. When Eli asked Samuel what God said, Samuel told him everything. Eli resigned himself to the will of God.

The Philistines once again came against Israel to do battle. The people, in fear of the Philistines, went to Shiloh to bring the Ark of the Covenant. Hophni and Phinehas brought the ark to the battle, thinking it would help them win, but that was not the case.

And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain (4:10-11).

When word got back to Eli that the ark was taken and his sons were dead, he fell backward from his chair and broke his neck. Eli

was ninety-eight years old when he died. He judged Israel for forty years.

Samuel

Samuel was a prophet, priest, and judge in Israel. His parents were faithful to God and made sure he was reared in the service of the Lord. Hannah, Samuel's mother, made a vow that if the Lord allowed her to bear a child, she would give him to the Lord as His servant. Hannah kept her word, and Samuel was raised up in the house of the Lord by Eli. As Samuel grew in stature, his faith and dedication to God also grew. He proved himself to be a faithful servant of God throughout his life.

There is very little given about Samuel's role as a judge. In 1 Samuel 7, the Israelites lamented that they lost the ark of God.

And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, *then* put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines (7:3).

The children of Israel put away their strange gods and once again served Jehovah God. It is recorded in verse six that "Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh." After offering a burnt offering unto God, He delivered them from the hands of the Philistines so they did not come back into the coast of Israel for the duration of the life of Samuel (7:13). "And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life" (7:15).

When Samuel was an old man, he appointed his sons as judges over Israel. They did evil in the sight of the Lord by taking bribes and perverting judgment (8:3). The people then came to Samuel and asked for a king. This was a low point in the life of Samuel, because he thought the children of Israel were rejecting him as their judge (8:6-7). God told Samuel, that it was Him they were rejecting, not Samuel. Samuel did as God told him, and a king was selected. During the lifetime of Samuel, he saw two kings appointed over Israel (Saul and David). When Samuel was very old, he died and was buried in his house at Ramah (25:1).

CONCLUSION

The Period of the Judges was a very dark time in the history of Israel. The people as a whole rejected the teaching of God and did what was right in their own eyes. The vicious cycle continued for many years to come with the people sinning and repenting, sinning, and repenting. God would deliver them to their enemies and, upon their repentance, He would deliver them from their enemies. The judges, as God's instruments, would lead the people back to Him. God has always kept His promises to reward His people for good and punish His people for evil. Let us always do the will of God to enjoy the ultimate blessing of heaven in the end.

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PERIOD OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most powerful prophecies in the Old Testament was given by Jacob just before his death. It is written, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people" (Gen. 49:10). This prophecy is accepted by conservative students of the Bible as Messianic, pointing to the "King of kings," Christ Jesus.

Judah was selected out of the twelve patriarchs to be recipients of the Seed promised to Adam and Eve: "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel" (3:15). He was also the recipient of the promise to Abraham: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (22:18).

In his blessing to Judah, Jacob did not use *king* in describing the blessing of the coming Messiah or the line of kings from which the Christ would descend. Yet a kingship is implied with the words, "The scepter shall not depart from." *Scepter* was pointing to David as the ruler through whom the Seed would be fulfilled. It is written,

“While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?’ They said to Him, ‘*The Son of David.*’” (22:42).

The United Kingdom covers a period of time from 1095-975 B.C. The history of the United Kingdom is chronicled beginning in 1 Samuel 11:31–1 Kings 12:1 and 1 Chronicles 5:10–2 Chronicles 9:31. It was filled with examples of great men seeking to please God and yet it is disheartening to see the failures of some of those same men as they chose a path traveled by most of the world. In this period, three kings ruled over God’s people: Saul, David, and Solomon.

GOD’S WARNING TO EARTHLY KINGS

The word of extreme importance is “Theocracy,” God ruled! Before Saul was anointed as the first king, the Israelites were a people living under a theocracy. Yet God plainly declared that one day they would choose an earthy king over Him. God gave Moses instructions concerning an earthy king over His people.

When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, “I will set a king over me like all the nations that *are* around me,” you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; *one* from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who *is* not your brother. But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, “You shall not return that way again.” Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from *the one* before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment *to* the right hand or *to* the left, and that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel (Deu. 17:14-20).

A study of the United Kingdom will show that Saul, David, and Solomon did not heed the warning.

SAUL: THE BEGINNING OF THE MONARCHY

During the period of the Judges the Israelites lived very faithfully, at times, to God. However, contamination of sin soon surfaced, leading God's people into wickedness until the hand of God brought just retribution. At the rebuke of God they would repent and God set up a judge to lead the people toward God.

Samuel was the last faithful judge before the establishment of the monarchy. He served as both judge and prophet for God's people. One of the characteristics that plagued Eli was also a characteristic of Samuel. He did not discipline his children and this caused a problem among the people. Samuel's son refused to walk the lighted path toward God.

Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; *they were* judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice (1 Sam. 8:1-3).

The dishonesty of Samuel's sons was one of the influences that lead God's people to ask for an earthly king.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (8:4-5).

In asking for a king they were rejecting God. "And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them'" (8:7). Samuel anointed Saul the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin as the first king of the Jews (9:1-10:27).

When Saul fought the Philistines, he sinned against God by making an unauthorized sacrifice (13:1-15). Saul was never a strong religious leader, though at times he would use religion to advance his cause. He was a good military leader but failed in leading the people toward God. When Saul offered an unauthorized sacrifice, Samuel announced that Saul's kingdom would not continue.

And Samuel said, "What have you done?" Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and *that* you did not come within the days appointed, and *that* the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, 'The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.' Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering." And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you" (13:11-14).

This was the beginning of Saul's troubles. Saul is rejected as king when he refused to obey the commands of God in completely destroying the Amalekites (15:1-26). It was from this point that Saul's reign as king develops within the history of David. Saul and his sons are killed by the Philistines at a battle on Mount Gilboa. Perhaps as an assessment on Saul's life, his final act was suicide (31:1-6).

DAVID

David was born in Bethlehem, the youngest of eight brothers. *David* means "beloved." It was not given to anyone in the Old Testament except the man after God's "own heart" (13:14), whom He chose to be King of Israel.

David was chosen as the man through whose seed He would bring Christ to save the world: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

David's Love for God

David was a man with great faith and love for God. His love for God is seen in his writing of Psalms. David wrote, "The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD *is* the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psa. 27:1). "O my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me" (25:2). One of the best known psalms in humanity is the twenty-third; in it David declares that the Lord is his shepherd, the One in whom he gives complete trust. It is written:

The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake (23:1-3).

David's love for God is seen in his attitude toward worshipping God. "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD'" (122:1). How encouraging it would be today if every Christian had this attitude for worship.

David's Relationship with Saul

The victory over Goliath was the turning point in the life of David (1 Sam. 17:1-55). Yet Saul soon became jealous over the victories of David. Hatred was growing in Saul's heart when "the women sang as they danced, and said: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands'" (18:7).

The attitude of Saul was the impetus that kept him pursuing David, seeking to kill him. David never returned this disposition of animosity toward Saul. David had the opportunity to kill Saul twice but never sought to do him harm (24:1-18; 26:1-25). After the death of Saul and his son, Jonathan, David's "*Song of the Bow*" (2 Sam. 1:17-27) is evidence of his genuine love and feelings for Saul when he heard of his death.

David the King

David was thirty when he became king. At Saul's death the tribe of Judah chose David as king and placed him on the throne at Hebron. The remaining tribes of Israel chose Ishbosheth, Saul's son, as king. During a two-year period the house of David and the house of Saul were at war (2:12-3:1). The death of Ishosheth brought sorrow to the heart of David; he killed the assassins of Ishbosheth (4:1-12).

David was a man who made a lot of mistakes; at times he truly lived a life of sin and shame. Yet he had a heart willing to humble himself and repent, and he became the connecting link to God and the nation of Israel. There is more information about the innermost thoughts of David than any other man in the Old Testament.

Prophecies during the Period of the United Kingdom

David was known as a great king and warrior, but perhaps the greatest blessings during his life were prophecies of the coming Christ. Prophecies are evidence of the inspiration of the Bible. The prophecies of the coming Messiah should build our faith in the all-powerful, all-knowing God.

David spoke of the death of Jesus on the cross in Psalm 22. In this psalm, David foretold the suffering and death of Jesus using words of an eyewitness looking a thousand years into the future. Jesus quoted David's words on the cross. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? *Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?*" (Psa. 22:1; Mat. 27:46). David also foretold the words and actions of the enemies of Christ while He was on the cross. "All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, *saying*, 'He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!'" (Psa. 22:7-8; Mat 27:43). David spoke of the nails driven into the hands and feet of Jesus. "For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet" (Psa. 22:16; Mat. 27:35).

Perhaps one of the greatest prophecies from David's pen was the one he wrote of the resurrection of the Messiah from the dead. "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. 16:10). Peter quoted these words and applied them to Christ in the first Gospel sermon (Acts 2:27).

There are many of the prophecies of the coming Messiah that space in this chapter is not available to examine completely. Books have been written on the prophecies of the Old Testament and a study of the Messiah through the eyes of the prophets is both encouraging and rewarding. David announced that the coming Messiah would be a king and priest. Peter confirmed this at the beginning of the church (Psa. 110; Acts 2:30-35).

One could picture David as a giant killer, great warrior, distinguished poet, and a mighty king. However, it would be best, in this writer's opinion, to remember him as the anointed of God and that

Christ our Savior came through his seed and was raised from the dead. “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Tim. 2:8).

The Tragedy of Sin

A study of the United Kingdom and the greatest King, David, would be incomplete without looking at His decline into the ugliness of sin. David’s sin with Bathsheba is recorded in 2 Samuel 11:1–12:23. David was a man who sought to please God. Yet when he sinned it was not hidden from the eyes of generations to come; this is one of the evidences for the inspiration of the Bible. In the event that took place with Bathsheba the only one with godly character that stood above the tragedy was Uriah the Hittite. David had his faithful servant, Uriah, murdered to hide his sins. David wrote a prayer of repentance for the wickedness of his actions in Psalm 51.

David learned a hard lesson when he sinned with Bathsheba. Psalm 139 records words of David that teach everyone that there is nothing hidden from God. David wrote:

O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. For *there is* not a word on my tongue, *But* behold, O LORD, You know it altogether. You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. *Such* knowledge *is* too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot *attain* it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? (9:1-7).

The Death of David

Before his death, David proclaimed Solomon as king and gave him instructions as the leader of God’s people (1 Kin. 1:28-2:9). So, David rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David. The period that David reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years he reigned in Hebron, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years. Then Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his kingdom was firmly established (2:10-12).

KING SOLOMON

The written record of Solomon's life is recorded in 1 Kings 1–11:43 and 1 Chronicles 29:21–2 Chronicles 9:31. Solomon was not the greatest spiritual leader and king in the United Kingdom. That belonged to his father, David. He was the greatest in material wealth and in multiplying wives and concubines. They helped to turn him from God. Solomon multiplied wives in direct rejection of God's instructions to the kings of Israel. "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself" (Deu. 17:17). He did not heed the warning and the Lord became very angry with him. It is written:

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites—from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as *did* his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that *is* east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods (1 Kin. 11:1-8).

Trouble at the Beginning for Solomon

Solomon started out as king with a humble attitude, desiring to please God. Solomon, like many great men, walked on ground that someone else prepared. The beginning of Solomon's reign is described as the "golden years" of Israel. He received a kingdom which his father David fought many battles to establish. This does not mean that Solomon had no battles to fight himself. Adonijah, Solomon's brother, sought to usurp the throne. In the beginning of

his reign Solomon had Adonijah killed. He also executed Joab, the commander of David's army. David warned Solomon of the evil that Joab did as general of the army and that he should die for his actions (2:5-6). Solomon also executed Shimei. Shimei was bitter because David was king, and he helped Absalom when he sought to kill David. After David's victory, Shimei repented and David accepted it. At the beginning of Solomon's reign he did not allow Shimei to go beyond the walls of Jerusalem. Shimei soon went beyond the walls and Solomon had him executed (2:36-46). Solomon's actions at the beginning helped to establish his kingdom.

Seeking Wisdom

Solomon soon made a treaty with Pharaoh, King of Egypt, and married his daughter (3:1). Solomon had a love for God and sought to follow the statutes of David. "And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places" (3:3).

It was at that time that Solomon went to Gibeon to sacrifice and the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream. God asked, "What shall I give you?" (3:5). Solomon said, "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" (3:9). It must be said that only a wise king would ask God for wisdom to rule the kingdom. It would be a great encouragement if the presidents of the United States would seek wisdom from God and faithfully follow it (2 Tim. 3:16-17)!

God blessed Solomon with wisdom. While seeing to the needs of the kingdom Solomon was able to write Psalms 72 and 127. He also wrote many of the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

Solomon Builds the Temple

It was David's desire to build a temple (1 Chr. 28:1-3). The blessing to build the temple was given to Solomon. The words of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, was another example of Solomon's wisdom. "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold,

heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (1 Kin. 8:27).

Solomon was a wise king for a portion of his reign. One can only wonder how great the kingdom could have been, and the example to his son, Rehoboam, if he had only remained faithful to God.

CONCLUSION

The United Kingdom would have never come about if the people had been content to have God as their Ruler. However, Israel rejected the theocracy of God for an earthly king. Perhaps this was not the only reason for an earthly king. It is easily perceived from the history of God's people during the Divided Kingdom that they desired to be freed from any moral and spiritual binding hindering them from moral depravity through idolatry.

This same attitude can be seen in many churches of Christ today as they seek to be freed from the spiritual bindings of the New Testament. Godly leadership at the time of David kept the people close to God. After his death it took one generation for the people to lose all moral restraint, and the coldness of apostasy soon took control. This history is all too common today.

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All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

PERIOD OF THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

David P. Brown

David P. Brown was born in 1946 in Camden, Arkansas. He is married to Joann (Anglin) of Jackson, Tennessee. They have four children and sixteen grandchildren.

In his formal education he holds the B.A., M.Ed., and PhD. David has preached for 46 years doing local work in AR, OK, and TX. He is active in Gospel meeting work, lectureships in and out of the United States, and has engaged in several oral debates. He has written for several religious journals, served for seven years as Associate Editor for the *Christian Worker*, and is co-owner and editor of *Contending For The Faith*. David has served as Assistant Director of Turley Children's Home, Tulsa, Oklahoma and Director of the Southwest School of Bible Studies, Austin, Texas.

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INTRODUCTION

When Israel entered and occupied Canaan, they were loosely organized and united by their common ancestry found in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the Law of Moses under which they had lived for almost 40 years. First governed by Joshua and the elders of Israel, they were then governed by judges. In time, the tribes, for the wrong reason (to be like the nations around them), united into a monarchy. From the tribe of Benjamin, God chose Saul who was anointed king by Samuel, the prophet, priest, and judge.

Saul disobeyed God, and, thus, He chose David, a shepherd boy from the tribe of Judah to rule the kingdom following Saul's death. David was a poet and musician, the sweet singer of Israel (2 Sam. 23:1), an author, a warrior, and an able administrator who organized the religious worship and founded a political dynasty. He expanded the borders of Israel and developed a society of farmers, herdsman, and shop keepers into a nation. Not allowed to build the temple because he was a man of war, God permitted him to prepare the materials for the temple that Solomon used to build it.

When Solomon came to the throne of the united Kingdom of Israel, he ruled over an extensive empire, from the Euphrates River in the north to the River of Egypt in the south (1 Kin. 4:21). Because of his father's successful rule, Solomon enjoyed peace and prosperity. Thus, he was able to engage in extensive building projects, his greatest accomplishment being the building of the temple.

At the beginning of his reign, Solomon asked God for wisdom to rule the kingdom. God blessed him with that wisdom as well as great riches. His wisdom and fame spread far beyond the borders of Israel and his riches were greater than of all the kings of the earth (2 Chr. 9:22). However, in his old age Solomon turned to worshipping idols and was influenced to sin by his many foreign wives. Thus, God decided to take the kingdom away from Solomon's son. The United Kingdom of Israel existed for 120 years.

In general and fundamentally, the Kingdom of Israel divided because of disobedience to God; however, other things worked to bring about the division of the Kingdom of Israel. Let us study some of the other constituent elements that God in His providential care worked together to divide the nation.

1. Jealousy had existed between the northern and southern tribes going back to the time of the Judges.

2. Over the 40 years of Solomon's reign, the populace had apostatized. They became idolatrous, specifically worshipping the gods of the Zidonians and Moabites. The prophet, Ahijah, had predicted the division of the nation (1 Kin. 11:29-39). Because of the great number of people who were unfaithful to God, the old jealousy between the northern and southern tribes revealed itself again.

3. Solomon had greatly taxed the people to fund all of his projects, and the nation was greatly strained. He also carried out a policy of forced labor and reduced the people's liberties to the extreme. The flames of jealousy were further fanned in the northern tribes toward their southern brethren by Solomon's previously noted policies. The Divine record makes it clear that the northern tribes were ready to rebel and form a new nation rather than continue, not only under Solomon's old policies, but as Rehoboam declared, his

new policies would bring greater burdens for the people to bear than had Solomon's.

4. As an astute politician Jeroboam, from the tribe of Ephraim, could well read the signs of great discontent in the ten northern tribes. Thus, with the death of Solomon, Jeroboam saw that the time for him to accomplish his goals had come. Indeed, the prophet Ahijah had revealed to him that, following the death of Solomon, he should return to Israel to lead the ten northern tribes. Therefore, he returned from exile in Egypt to capitalize on the northern tribes' strong discontent with the policies of Solomon and Rehoboam's promises that things were going to get worse under his reign.

5. The final straw that broke the proverbial camel's back was Rehoboam's adamant refusal to listen to the council of the older men in lifting the burdens from the people. Instead he foolishly chose to follow the young men's advice, bluntly declaring to the northern tribes that his policies would be far more burdensome for the people to bear than his father's policies had been. Incensed by Rehoboam's foolish threats, the ten northern tribes rebelled against him and established the northern Kingdom of Israel, making Jeroboam their king.

Thus, the division of the Kingdom of Israel was accomplished, and 120 years of a unified Israel was destroyed. The Northern and Southern Kingdoms continued as separate kingdoms from approximately 924 B.C. (Ussher gives the date as 975 B.C.) until 722 B.C., with the Assyrian destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel ("Divided Kingdom"). The books of the Bible that pertain to the period of the divided kingdom are 1 Kings 12-2 Kings 17, 2 Chronicles 10-26, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah.

Rehoboam remained king of the southern Kingdom of Judah with his capital in Jerusalem. Judah and the small tribe of Benjamin were the tribes of the southern kingdom. The northern tribes were Reuben, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, Dan, Asher, Gad, and Naphtali. Jeroboam ruled from his capital city of Samaria. The tribe of Levi was not listed with the other tribes because the Levites did not inherit land, but it looks as if many, if not most,

of the Levites moved with their families into the southern kingdom under Rehoboam.

We learn from 2 Chronicles 11:1-17 that when Rehoboam arrived at Jerusalem, he assembled the people of Judah and Benjamin. They numbered a hundred and eighty thousand choice able-bodied men who could go to war. Rehoboam's intention was to fight against the rebellious children of Israel to bring them back under his rule.

And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen *men*, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam. But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren: return every man to his house: for this thing is done of me. And they obeyed the words of the LORD, and returned from going against Jeroboam. And Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah. He built even Beth-lehem, and Etam, and Tekoa, And Beth-zur, and Shoco, and Adullam, And Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph, And Adoraim, and Lachish, and Azekah, And Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which *are* in Judah and in Benjamin fenced cities. And he fortified the strong holds, and put captains in them, and store of victual, and of oil and wine. And in every several city *he put* shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong, having Judah and Benjamin on his side. And the priests and the Levites that *were* in all Israel resorted to him out of all their coasts. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the LORD God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the LORD God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon.

From its beginning, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was an idolatrous nation. Out of the 20 kings that reigned in Israel, not one good king came to her throne. Israel was evil from her founda-

tions and wicked through and through. However, God bore with her, striving through His faithful prophets to bring her to repentance (2 Kin. 17:7-13, 22-23).

HISTORY OF THE DIVIDED KINGDOM— 1 KINGS 1-12, 2 CHRONICLES 1-12

A Period of War

We begin this section with the division of the Kingdom of Israel and end it with an alliance between King Ahab of the northern kingdom and King Jehoshaphat of the southern kingdom. This period lasted about 78 years. It began with Jeroboam setting up golden calves at Bethel and Dan for Israel to worship and appointing a yearly feast at the former place. Jeroboam then made it illegal for the citizens of the northern kingdom to visit Jerusalem to worship at the temple as required by the Law of Moses. The writer of the book of Kings is particular in tracing the continuation of this unlawful worship by the subsequent kings of Israel. There is a constant reference to the evil consequences of it. Often the following comment or something similar to it is made, “Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.”

Within about half a century four different dynasties came to rule the northern kingdom, each liquidating the male descendants of his predecessor, and each was more wicked than those who came before. Finally, religion in the northern kingdom became so corrupt that Baal worship was accepted along with calf worship. It is at this time that the peerless and fearless prophet Elijah, the Tishbite, who was not a writing prophet, arose like a great storm. With great vehemence and zeal for God, he attacked the terrible worship of Baal. The great contest of Elijah with the 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel is ever an example of facing error and opposing those who practice, defend, and propagate error. It is also a comforting message, teaching us that God will never forsake His faithful servants (1 Kin. 18:19-39).

During the same time, the Kingdom of Judah continued to serve God according to the Law of Moses. Only four kings came to the

throne by the time that the seventh king began his reign in Israel. Because of certain sins committed by Rehoboam, God permitted the country to be invaded by an Egyptian army, and Rehoboam paid much tribute to Pharaoh for them to leave the southern kingdom. Rehoboam's return to the Lord brought a return to prosperity, and when Jehoshaphat came to the throne, he reigned in righteousness over Judah. However, at the same time the sinful King Ahab was in the middle of the wickedest reign that had been known in Israel.

The Period that the Southern and Northern Kingdoms Reconciled

This reconciliation came about because of an arranged marriage. King Ahab's daughter Athaliah was married to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son and heir to the throne of the kingdom of Judah. The alliance encouraged Ahab to go to war because Jehoshaphat was now allied with him. However, this alliance did not stop his and his army's defeat and Ahab's death.

The whole record of Jehoshaphat's reign is full of teaching and warning. He was rebuked by God's messenger because he helped God's enemies, but these warnings were to no avail, and the two kingdom's friendly relations continued until the Kingdom of Judah's sowing to the wind caused her to reap the whirlwind. Athaliah proved to be an abomination to Judah. Indeed, in the third generation of Jehoshaphat's descendants, she attempted the extermination of the whole royal family, and she almost succeeded. Only one infant was left to perpetuate King David's family, thereby making it possible for the Divine promise that he should never lack a son to sit upon his throne. This infant was saved by the death of Athaliah. This ended the alliance between Israel and Judah, a partnership that proved to be nothing less than a great disaster to the Kingdom of Judah. Without fail, godly people allying with wicked people always ends with God's people being hurt.

As aforementioned things were transpiring in Judah, Israel was going through a mess of her own making. Ahaziah, Ahab's son and successor, reigned for only two years. He made a weak move to revive Baal worship, and he also sent messengers to Baal-zebub, the god of

Ekron to learn about the result of an injury he received from a fall. This proved his undoing. He died with no son to succeed him. Thus, his brother, Jehoram, came to the throne of the northern kingdom. It was during his reign that God transported the faithful Elijah to glory in a chariot of fire. With Elijah's departure from earth to glory without experiencing death, the great work for God fell on the faithful Elisha. He was able to keep alive some of the fear of God among the people. On more than one occasion Elisha saved the kingdom from Syria's powerful king Ben-hadad.

Jehoram's reign ended with the annihilation of all the offspring of Ahab by Jehu. These two great prophets of God, Elijah and Elisha, were sent to rebuke sin, and where sin most abounded was their proper field for them to accomplish their task. At that time, the place where sin abounded was the Northern Kingdom of Israel. By confronting and overcoming Baal worship in the larger northern kingdom (its place of origin among the Israelites at that time) the work against Baal worship in the Kingdom of Judah was more easily accomplished. This should serve as instruction to all that to destroy error we must get to the origin of it and root it out (Rom. 15:4).

A Second Period of War

After the house of Ahab was destroyed in Israel and Athaliah was put to death in Judah, the alliance between the northern and southern kingdoms ceased. In the place of the former alliance, wars once again developed between the two kingdoms. The house of Jehu kept the throne in the northern kingdom longer than any other. It was under Jeroboam II that the Kingdom of Israel reached its greatest power and prosperity since the reign of Solomon over the United Kingdom.

For a long time Syria had troubled Israel. However, this king, through the guidance of the prophet Jonah, subdued the kingdom of Syria. He also extended his domain all the way to the Euphrates. This was the northern boundary of David's kingdom. The episodes reported in Jonah belong to this reign.

This was a lengthy reign, and it was therein that the prophets Hosea and Amos did their work. Through a study of these books

we can get a better understanding of the conditions of the populace at that time. This is the case, because the historical accounts in the Kings and Chronicles basically, and then only slightly, deal with matters of state and military activities. Each prophet preached to the people about their sins, and they did not mince words in doing it. With preaching that “afflicted the comfortable and comforted the afflicted,” they shed light on the state of irreligion and immorality existing in the midst of a prosperous secular society. It tells us of the actual experiences through which the ten tribes had passed since the division of the kingdom, as well as the sinful state of affairs in which they actually lived, although they did not recognize their sad condition, and did not want anyone to point their sins out to them. It reminds us of our Western culture and many in the Lord’s church today. It is tremendously important to emphasize that when things appear to be going well from most people’s measure, and we are successful in all our pursuits, as man defines success, it does not mean that God sees those things as we do. God does not measure success as we measure it. God looks on a person’s heart and judges his actions on the basis of His revealed Word given to man to govern his moral and spiritual conduct. We may think we are doing well when, in reality, God is about to bring down judgment on us because we have ignored and mocked His standard for living life (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jam. 1:25; John 12:48). In the case of the northern Kingdom of Israel, disaster was just around the corner.

Following the fall of Jehu’s house, occurring within six months after Jeroboam II’s death, the kingdom rushed toward the doom predicted for it by Hosea and Amos. Five kings came to the throne within the space of 32 years. Their successors assassinated each one of them. Because of their rivalries, three successive kings of Assyria were hired to interfere in their affairs. Thus, whether realizing it or not, they were encouraging the rulers of the great Assyrian Empire to take the whole northern kingdom into captivity. Finally, the end came to the northern Kingdom as described in 2 Kings 17.

As Israel was rushing toward destruction, the Kingdom of Judah had recovered somewhat from her injuries received in her alliance

with Ahab's house. Her times were somewhat happier, although she had received some severe and deserved rebukes from the two prophets who were sent specifically to Israel. Six kings reigned over the southern kingdom while over the same period ten kings reigned over Israel. Only two of the six were faithful to God and His law, and three were unfaithful to God in many things. However, they were far less evil than were the kings of Israel. Hezekiah, the last of these good kings, was in the sixth year of his reign when Assyria carried Israel away captive.

The Message of the Hebrew Prophets

The words of the prophets are based on the teaching of the Law of Moses. It was their foundation and life. The prophet was one who dared to point out where people (particularly leaders) had departed from God's original plan and purposes.

The Hebrew prophets of old were fundamentally forth-tellers—the mouthpieces of God. The predictive element of their prophecies had to do with the future of the children of Israel, the rise and fall of nations, as those matters directly or indirectly had to do with the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. Otherwise his work was to sound out the Word of God as revealed in the Law of Moses, without fear or favor, to rebuke the sins of the people, and call them to repentance.

The faithful prophets declared the Word of God (“Thus saith the Lord”) to the immediate situations and circumstances of the time. They delivered blunt and sharp messages of the terrible judgment of God on those who were determined to persist in sin; they exhorted the people to repent, but then they delivered words of hope because God was not finished with Israel, and to those who repented God stood ready to forgive and bless them.

When Israel asked for and received a king, the prophet became a person who delivered messages directly to the king—strong messages that reproved, rebuked, and exhorted him in his duty to keep the kingdom faithful to God. As is the case with Elijah's and Elisha's sermons, they were not welcome in the king's court. However, earlier prophets such as Samuel and Nathan were trusted counselors to the

king. At times the prophets addressed the policies of a nation, and at other times they directly addressed the people and the lifestyle they had chosen.

People have always desired to have the power to control their lives so they could erase any uncertainties in them. As is the case with political leaders, the kings of antiquity desired the same. Thus, they did not enjoy bad news. When religion and the state are closely linked with each other (the state depending on whatever gods were theirs to bless them in their activities), the rise of “yes” men and prophets who were anxious to please their rulers was to be expected. Thus, the false prophets said to the ruler whatever it was that he wanted to hear.

The true and faithful prophets of God were not “yes” men to their rulers or anyone else. Often they suffered because they would not edit, compromise, or *soft soap* their message to please those who were in leadership. Consider the following examples involving King Ahab regarding the previous remarks.

Prior to the great contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel mentioned previously, God sent Elijah to confront King Ahab. The following describes that meeting of a righteous prophet and a wicked king.

And it came to pass *after* many days, that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, shew thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to shew himself unto Ahab. And *there was* a sore famine in Samaria. And Ahab called Obadiah, which *was* the governor of *his* house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly: For it was *so*, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) And Ahab said unto Obadiah, Go into the land, unto all fountains of water, and unto all brooks: peradventure we may find grass to save the horses and mules alive, that we lose not all the beasts. So they divided the land between them to pass throughout it: Ahab went one way by himself, and Obadiah went another way by himself. And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, *Art* thou that my lord Elijah? And he answered him, I *am*: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah *is here*. And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? *As* the LORD thy God

liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, *He is not there*; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah *is here*. And it shall come to pass, *as soon as* I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and *so* when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me: but I thy servant fear the LORD from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, how I hid an hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah *is here*: and he shall slay me. And Elijah said, *As* the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, I will surely shew myself unto him to day. So Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him: and Ahab went to meet Elijah. And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, *Art* thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kin. 18:1-18).

Following King Ahab's defeat of Benhadad, the Syrian King, upon the latter king's invasion of the northern kingdom of Israel, Ahab permitted the Syrian King to go free. That event brought forth the following episode and God's declaration through an unnamed prophet to Ahab.

And a certain man of the sons of the prophets said unto his neighbour in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man refused to smite him. Then said he unto him, Because thou hast not obeyed the voice of the LORD, behold, as soon as thou art departed from me, a lion shall slay thee. And as soon as he was departed from him, a lion found him, and slew him. Then he found another man, and said, Smite me, I pray thee. And the man smote him, so that in smiting he wounded *him*. So the prophet departed, and waited for the king by the way, and disguised himself with ashes upon his face. And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king: and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So *shall* thy judgment *be*; thyself hast decided *it*. And he hastened, and

took the ashes away from his face; and the king of Israel discerned him that he *was* of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Because thou hast let go out of *thy* hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria (20:35-43).

Some time had passed from the time of the previous events before the following episode transpired. During this time Ahab and Jehoshaphat were allied. Ahab therefore approached Jehoshaphat with the following proposal.

And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I *am* as thou *art*, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, *There is* yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten *hither* Micaiah the son of Imlah. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets prophesied before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the LORD, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the king's hand. And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets *declare* good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak *that which is* good. And Micaiah said, *As* the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak. So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper:

for the LORD shall deliver *it* into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but *that which is* true in the name of the LORD? And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade *him*, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee. But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the LORD from me to speak unto thee? And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself. And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; And say, Thus saith the king, Put this *fellow* in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the LORD hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you (22:4-28).

The Prophets Sent to the Northern Kingdom

The writing prophets that God sent to the Kingdom of Israel were Jonah, Amos, and Micah. In addition, God sent to the northern kingdom non-writing prophets, Elijah, Elisha, Ahijah, Jehu, Micaiah, and Oded. God assigned each prophet his own special work. For example, Elijah and Elisha worked many miracles (1 Kin. 17 and 2 Kin. 4). Jonah was sent to a foreign city (Nineveh, Assyria) to warn its citizens of the coming judgment unless they repented.

The following briefly covers the messages God gave the northern kingdom through the writing prophets.

Jonah

Jonah is the son of Amittai. He appears in 2 Kings 14:25 as a prophet from Gath-hepher. He was active during the reign of Jeroboam II. Jonah predicted to him that Jeroboam would recover certain lost lands. Of course it is the book of Jonah for which we know the great prophet. The mission of Jonah to Nineveh, Assyria was during the time of Jeroboam II. Among other things it teaches that God loved all men, not only the Jew.

Hosea

God directed Hosea to marry a wife of whoredoms. His wife was unfaithful to him. Hosea's love for and restoration of his own sinful, adulterous wife was a picture of God's forgiving love for sinful Israel.

Amos

Amos was charged to preach that a nation is responsible for its national sins. God's justice is also seen in condemning the Gentile nations around God's people for the same sins, but because Israel had a greater spiritual light, they were condemned more severely for their sins.

Micah

Micah's work carried him into the northern and southern kingdoms to preach to them of the coming judgment and future restoration and blessing.

The Prophets Sent to the Southern Kingdom

The writing prophets to the southern kingdom during this time were Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Nahum, and Micah. In addition, non-writing prophets were also sent as well. They were Shemaiah, Iddo, Azariah, Hanani, Eliezer, and Huldah. They delivered God's messages to the people. The following is a brief summary of the messages of the writing prophets.

Joel

Because of devastating swarms of locusts and an extreme drought, the country had been threatened with destruction. Through fasting and prayer the plague was removed. However Joel's prophecy

employed it to picture the awful day of the final judgment for all nations. Faithful servants of God will be rewarded and the workers of evil punished.

Isaiah

Isaiah was a prophet during the time of King Hezekiah, who possibly was a nobleman in view of the ready access he had to the royal court. He warned, comforted, and advised his rulers. Although he prophesied of the captivity of the Kingdom of Judah, he also foretold the dawn of the new kingdom. He prophesied of the sufferings and the glory of the coming Messiah and God's house to be established in the "last days" (Isa. 2:2-3).

Micah

As previously noted in this chapter, Micah prophesied to both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Nahum

The foreign nation of Assyria was the subject of Nahum's prophecy. Assyria had oppressed Judah for a century: the doom of Nineveh, Assyria's capital, was pronounced, explained, and described by Nahum.

Obadiah

Because they had mistreated God's people, the land of Edom would be judged and Israel blessed.

CONCLUSION

Preachers of God's Word today would do well to drink deeply from the prophets when it comes to learning how to oppose error and teach the truth. We may also learn how to love God, His Word, and His people by studying how His faithful prophets loved the same. Their view of proving to God that they loved Him and all the things that are of God was a simple one—do what God said do, in the way He said do it, and for the reason or reasons He said to do it. They well knew that the whole of man was to keep God's commandments, that God knew all there was to know about them, and that He would bring all of it into judgment (Ecc. 12:13-14). They

knew too that God would bless their faithfulness to Him and punish their sins. Moreover, they knew He was not a respecter of persons in any form or fashion. No flattery was found in them. Thus, they approached their work with those realities in mind as they determined at all costs to speak whatever God told them to say to the people He told them to say it.

Today, the Lord's church is filled with people who think that the more you love God and man, the more you will tolerate and overlook sin in the lives of sinners, as well as withhold the much-needed truth from those who need to hear it the most. This, the faithful prophets of old did not believe nor do. When our Lord walked the earth, He proved His love for God, His Word, and all men in the same way the faithful prophets listed herein did.

It was a very sad thing for God's fleshly kingdom of old to be divided. However, that division brought forth mighty men of God—the great prophets who set for us wonderful examples of what it is and how to preach the truth and oppose error and its teachers. Even though they suffered greatly while so doing, they did not fail in their duty to God and man. We must remember that these things were written so we might learn how to be faithful to God in carrying out His will for our lives. May we teach the same to others before the sun sets on life's little and brief day (Rom. 15:4; Jam. 4:14).

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PERIOD OF JUDAH ALONE

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INTRODUCTION

According to Ussher, the time period of Judah alone is from 722 B.C. to 586 B.C. It corresponds to the fall of Israel to the fall of Judah, which time period is recorded in 2 Kings 18-25 and 2 Chronicles 29-36. This time period covers the reigns of Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehohaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoichin, Zedekiah, and Gedaliah. Judah alone covers a period of 136 years from the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in 586 B.C. The reigns of Asa and Ahaz lays the foundation for what is going to take place in the period of Judah alone.

The early years of Judah were a period of spiritual decline. Things seemed to get better during the reign of Asa. The early years were devoted to reforming Judah, but Asa's faith seemed to suffer a decline when he entered into a league with Syria against Israel. Judah's history was like a roller-coaster—some ups and downs. In the end, the roller-coaster hit bottom and did not rise again. Judah had run her course. Following the reign of Josiah, it speedily met its doom. Judah took the final plunge in attempting to make alliances with other nations in hopes of saving itself from destruction. By this time, Assyria was no more, and Egypt was reduced to nearly nothing. There was nowhere to turn. The waves of mighty forces were quickly approaching from the east. Babylon, acting as an agent of God, was the final ruin of Judah, bringing an end to the monarchy.

EVENTS AND LEADERS

Ahaz (Ruled 16 Years)

As soon as he came to the throne, he began to follow the Canaanite religious practices. He even sacrificed his own children to the false gods. Because of his sins, the Lord allowed the Philistines, the Edomites, and the Syrians to invade and conquer the border cities of Judah. It was during this time that Judah lost the port of Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba.

Because of these military threats, Ahaz made an alliance with the Assyrians robbing the Temple to send money to bribe Tiglath-Pileser. In return, the Assyrians offered to attack Aram and Israel. Isaiah confronted Ahaz and advised him to trust in the Lord instead of Assyria. He even offered to give Ahaz a sign from the Lord to prove the truth of his words. When Ahaz refused to choose the sign, the Lord Himself chose one, promising a child would be born and that, before the child had reached a certain age, the kings of Aram and Israel would be overthrown. That child would be Immanuel, literally “God with us” (Isa. 7:14).

Tiglath-Pileser III died in 727 B.C., and Israel took this opportunity to revolt, stopping payment of the annual tribute. Ahaz wisely continued to pay the required tribute as the Assyrians swept down from the north, laying siege to the capital city of Samaria. For three years, Samaria held out under the siege until famine and disease had decimated the population. When the city fell in 722 B.C., the surviving population was deported. The Northern Kingdom of Israel had ceased to exist. The Jews of the Southern Kingdom were terrified as they watched the inhumane cruelties that the Assyrians inflicted upon their captives. Now, the Assyrians began to eye the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was only a matter of time before they attacked.

Hezekiah (Ruled 29 Years)

Hezekiah was 25 years old when he came to the throne (2 Kings 18:2). The prophet Isaiah had already been ministering for 35 years. The northern kingdom of Samaria fell in the sixth year of his reign

(18:9-10). With the reign of Hezekiah, a great revival had begun. Hezekiah had begun his reign by destroying all of the Canaanite idols and then repairing the Temple of God. Merodach-baladan had managed to snatch Babylon and hold it from the Assyrians. Looking for allies against Assyria, he sent envoys to Hezekiah, king of Judah. In a moment of pride, Hezekiah foolishly showed these envoys all of the treasures of the temple. As a result, the word got out of the great wealth that was stored up in Jerusalem.

Philistia, Egypt, and Ethiopia sent envoys to Hezekiah. They urged him to join in the rebellion. Isaiah warned him not to put his trust in Egypt (Isa. 20). Hezekiah listened to the warning of Isaiah and continued to pay homage to Assyria. When Assyria was drawn into an extended conflict with Merodach-baladan, Hezekiah was persuaded to join Egypt in a revolt. The cities of Philistia also joined in along with Tyre and Sidon. In 701 B.C. Sennacherib conducted a massive campaign against this western alliance. The Phoenician cities each submitted or were destroyed. The Egyptians were routed and Judah was left to face Sennacherib alone. Hezekiah offered to pay any tribute in return for peace. Sennacherib set the price at 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold (2 Kin. 18:15-16). Instead of keeping his agreement, Sennacherib changed his mind and decided to try and take Jerusalem.

Hezekiah ordered a tunnel to be cut through the mountains on which Jerusalem rests (20:20; 2 Chr. 32:2-3, 30). This tunnel served to bring water from the Gihon Spring down into the city. The tunnel can still be seen today. It winds its way 1,900 feet under the city of Jerusalem. This time, Hezekiah turned to the Lord for help and was promised deliverance. In a single night, the Assyrian army was overthrown (2 Kin. 19:35-36). The remaining years of Hezekiah's life were peaceful and prosperous as the Lord continued to bless him.

Manasseh (Ruled 55 Years)

Manasseh has the distinction of being one of the worst kings that Judah ever had. According to tradition (the Jewish Mishna), Manasseh had the prophet Isaiah sawn asunder. This is possibly

what Hebrews 11:37 has reference to when great men of faith “were sawn asunder.” Manasseh was involved in all of the practices of the Canaanite people. He had worship of false gods, child sacrifice, sorcery, and idols in the Temple of God.

Because of Manasseh’s sin, God allowed the Assyrians to invade Judah. The Scriptures tell how Manasseh was captured and taken into chains to Babylon. At this time in history, Babylon was a part of the Assyrian Empire. In Babylon, Manasseh repented and turned back to God. Soon after this, he was released and allowed to return to Jerusalem. He now led Judah back to the Lord, tearing down the false idols in the land.

Amon (Ruled 2 Years)

Amon was 22 years old when he came to the throne (2 Kin. 21:18). He quickly undid much of what his father had accomplished, leading the Jews back into idolatry. He was murdered by his own servants after a short reign of only two years.

Josiah (Ruled 31 Years)

Josiah was only an 8-year-old boy when he came to the throne (22:1). Even as a boy, he served God and began to bring a revival to Judah. As he grew older, Josiah began a program of reforms. He broke down the idols and had the Canaanite priests executed. Then he began the work of rebuilding the Temple.

While the Temple was being restored, a copy of the Scriptures was found. It was brought to Josiah and read to him (22:10-11). When Josiah heard the terms of the covenant of God read, he was struck with the realization that Judah had transgressed that covenant. Because of this realization, he now led the nation in a prayer of repentance. For this, he was informed by the prophetess Huldah that the nation would not be judged in his lifetime.

The final years of Josiah’s reign saw a great number of changes on the international scene. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell to the combined assault of the Medes and Chaldeans in 612 B.C. A remnant of Assyrians escaped to Carchemish where they allied them-

selves to the Egyptians in an attempt to hold off the Medes and the Chaldeans.

When Pharaoh Necho, the king of Egypt, began to march through Palestine toward Carchemish, Josiah tried to intercept him at Megiddo (2 Chr. 35:20-22). In spite of the warning of Necho that he had been sent by God, Josiah met him in battle in the Valley of Megiddo. In the heat of the battle, Josiah was shot by a stray arrow and he ultimately died from his injury. Josiah had left three sons and a grandson. Each one of them would sit for a time upon the throne of Judah. With Josiah dead, the people of Judah placed Joahaz upon the throne.

Jehoahaz (Ruled 3 Months)

Jehoahaz remained on the throne for three months (2 Kin. 23:31). At the end of that time, Pharaoh Necho came to Jerusalem and deposed Jehoahaz, placing a tribute on the land of Judah of 100 talents of silver and a talent of gold. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt for the remainder of his life.

Jehoiakim (Ruled 11 Years)

Necho now placed Eliakim upon the throne of Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim (23:34, 36). Jeremiah had been prophesying for nearly 20 years when Jehoiakim became king. The prophet denounced the wickedness of Judah and warned that Jehoiakim would die and, instead of a royal burial, would be given that accorded to a beast of burden.

Necho met Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish on the Euphrates in 605 B.C. The Egyptians were defeated with enormous losses. They retreated south with Nebuchadnezzar hot on their heels. Nebuchadnezzar pursued the Egyptian forces all the way down to Palestine, encountering no serious resistance along the way. As Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Canaan, he called for Jehoiakim, king of Judah, to swear allegiance to him and pay a tribute. Jehoiakim complied and was permitted to retain his throne. Nebuchadnezzar also took hostages from among the Hebrew nobility at this time. Among these hostages was Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar mounted an invasion into Egypt in 601 B.C. The outcome of this campaign was indecisive with each side inflicting heavy casualties upon each other. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to regroup and strengthen his forces. Jehoiakim saw this and interpreted it as a defeat for Nebuchadnezzar. He promptly rebelled and allied himself with the Egyptians. Retribution from Babylon was quick in coming. Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and threw Jehoiakim into chains, and placed his 18-year-old son, Jehoiachin, on the throne.

Jehoiachin (Ruled 3 Months)

Jehoiachin, also known as Coniah, was only 18 years old when he became the king of Judah (24:8). Nebuchadnezzar set him upon the throne and then moved down against Egypt. While he was in Egypt, young Jehoiachin foolishly rebelled, contrary to the advice of Jeremiah.

Nebuchadnezzar returned, recaptured Jerusalem, and took Jehoiachin, his family, servants, and princes, threw them into chains, and marched them away to Babylon. This second deportation was made up of over 10,000 of the nobles of Judah. Among them was the prophet Ezekiel.

Zedekiah (Ruled 11 Years)

Having deposed Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar now placed Zedekiah, uncle to Jehoiachin, upon the throne of Judah (24:18). Zedekiah was constantly vacillating between Egypt and Babylon. In 593 B.C. when Necho died, representatives from the city-states of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Tyre met in Jerusalem, hoping that the new Egyptian ruler would join them in a new rebellion against Babylon. However, the new pharaoh, Psammetichus II, adopted a policy of non-interference. The plot against Babylon left Zedekiah on the spot, and he had to travel to Babylon where he swore allegiance once again to Nebuchadnezzar.

In 588 B.C. Psammetichus II died and Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) came to the throne of Egypt. He immediately persuaded the countries of Palestine to join him in a revolt against Babylon. Nebu-

chadnezzar assembled his army and invaded Palestine, setting up his headquarters at Riblah on the Orontes River. From there he launched simultaneous invasions of Judah, Ammon, Edom, and Tyre with a small reconnaissance patrol to the Egyptian border.

Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah, asking for help from the Lord. Jeremiah's response was that Jerusalem was doomed (Jer. 21:8-10). Judah was quickly overrun except for Jerusalem, Lachish, and Eziakah. The siege of Jerusalem began on January 588 B.C. It would be another year and a half before the city was taken.

The siege of Jerusalem was temporarily interrupted when Pharaoh Hophra led the Egyptian army up into Palestine in an attempt to relieve Tyre and Sidon. Meanwhile, Pharaoh's army had set out from Egypt. When the Chaldeans, who had been besieging Jerusalem, heard the report about them, they lifted the siege from Jerusalem (37:5). Many of the inhabitants of the city were relieved by this, thinking that it indicated a turn in their fortunes. Instead of heeding the warnings of Jeremiah, they strengthened their resolve to hold out against Nebuchadnezzar.

As Pharaoh Hophra marched up along the Way of the Philistines, the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem pulled out and hit the Egyptians, driving them back into Egypt. Having defeated the Egyptian threat, they returned to Jerusalem. Upon returning, the siege continued for many long months; as the food ran out disease and starvation spread through the city.

On July 10, 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's forces broke through the northern wall of Jerusalem. It would be another month before the southern wall could be taken. Zedekiah was forced to watch as his sons were executed, and then his own eyes were put out. He was thrown into chains to be dragged back to Babylon where he would die in prison. The Jewish survivors were hauled across the Syrian Desert to Babylon, many of them dying en route. The Southern Kingdom of Judah had ceased to exist.

Jerusalem was burned, and the walls of the city were torn down. All military, civil, and religious leaders were either executed or car-

ried away into captivity. Only the poorest peasants of Judah were allowed to remain in the land that was by now completely desolate.

Gedaliah (Ruled Possibly 2-3 Years)

After Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C., to maintain order over the desolate country, Nebuchadnezzar appointed a Jewish noble named Gedaliah. A seal which had been discovered at Lachish indicates that he had served as the chief minister on Zedekiah's cabinet. His family had evidently been pro-Caldean and friendly to Jeremiah (26:24). He was given command of a Babylonian garrison at Mizpah.

Nebuchadnezzar had underestimated the poor of Judah. Once again they rose up, killing Gedaliah and wiping out the Babylonian garrison. In 582 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar made another march to Palestine and another deportation left the land almost unpopulated. Refugees from this incident fled to Egypt.

THE PROPHETS OF JUDAH

Micah (735-700 B.C.)

Micah's ministry spanned the rule of three kings of Judah. He began his prophesying before the destruction of Samaria in 722 B.C. and continued into the reign of Hezekiah. He was a prophet to the common people. Micah was the last of the prophets to be sent to announce the doom of Israel, and of Judah—if she did not repent. Amos and Hosea were prophets of Israel, and Isaiah and Micah were prophets of Judah.

Micah denounced the same things in Judah that Amos and Hosea had condemned in Israel. The wealthy were corrupt and robbed the poor (Mic. 2:1-2, 8-9; 6:11), religious leaders were corrupt (2:11; 3:6, 11), rulers and judges were corrupt (3:1-3, 9; 7:3), and the people were idolatrous (6:16). Micah lamented the full-scale wickedness of Jerusalem (7:1-7), followed by a picture of the latter days when God's people repented and were restored to favor (7:8-17). Micah concluded by praising God, rejoicing in the abundance of His mercy, and uttering a tribute to Jehovah (7:18-20).

Zephaniah (641-609 B.C.)

Zephaniah's ministry spanned the rule of the reign of Josiah. Zephaniah gives emphasis on "the day of Jehovah." The day is "at hand," "near," a day of darkness and of terror (Zep. 1:7, 14-16). It comes as a judgment against sin, accompanied by great convulsions of nature (1:17, 15). It falls upon all creation, man, beast, Hebrews, and nations (1:2, 3; 2:1-15; 3:8). The prophet sees it as a day of terror, imminent, and falling upon all creation as a judgment for sin. Only the remnant will escape, but it is a day of deliverance for the faithful.

Nahum (663-612 B.C.)

Nahum prophesied the doom that was to befall Nineveh, and offered hope for Judah that the nation threatening them would fall. He assured Nineveh that God is slow to wrath, but that He avenges sin and unrighteousness (Nah. 1:2-3). He spared them once, but they had finally reached a point where He could no longer show them mercy.

The prophet says nothing of the internal conditions of Judah and Jerusalem; he leaves this to his contemporaries: Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. He is a prophet with a single theme: the fall and destruction of Nineveh, that city of great and dreadful people. The prophet reveals the eternal principle of the omnipotent God that for a nation to survive it must be established upon and directed by principles of righteousness and truth. Wickedness will eventually cause the nation to be destroyed when it makes wickedness and cruelty its standard by which it lives.

Jeremiah (627-586 B.C.)

The world situation was in an uproar as Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon were vying for world domination. Judah was greatly affected by their lust for power and the ambition of these three nations. Assyria's power and domination was waning. She had been weakened by numerous rebellions throughout the empire. Babylon was emerging as the dominant world power. She collected tribute and

royal hostages from King Jehoiakim. She also deported Jews from Jerusalem in two more waves.

In her pride, Judah had turned away from God and vacillated between alliances with Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. They had forsaken God and turned to idols (Jer. 2:13). They had degenerated to such a point that even God forbade Jeremiah from praying for them (7:16; 11:14; 14:11-12). There was still hope, if they would repent (18:7-10). Knowing they would not repent, God decreed that they would go into captivity for 70 years (25:8-11).

A remnant would return to their homeland after 70 years (25:11; 29:10). Cyrus, king of Persia, made a decree that allowed them to return to their homeland in 536 B.C. The ultimate hope was that a spiritual remnant would be brought back to God under a new covenant to inhabit Zion under David and the Messiah (22-23; 31:31-34).

Habakkuk (612-606 B.C.)

Habakkuk's prophecy came after Assyria had fallen and Babylon had arisen as the dominant world power (Hab. 1:6). Yet the Babylonians had not yet invaded Judah (3:16). This would place the prophecy between 612 and 606 B.C., which would coincide with the period of Jehoiakim's reign (609-597 B.C.) (2 Kin. 23:35-24:7).

The people of Judah had transgressed God's law and turned to idols. Habakkuk was one of the last prophets sent to Judah to address her sins before God's judgment at the hands of the Babylonians (2 Chr. 36:14-16). He expected God's judgment to come upon Judah (Hab. 1:2-4) but was not quite prepared for how God was going to do it (1:5-13). Babylon was the new world power sweeping across the breadth of the earth. Within a period of 20 years, beginning in 606 B.C., Babylon swept over Judah in waves, taking three groups into captivity and finally destroying the Temple in 586 B.C.

Daniel (606-536 B.C.)

The events and prophecies of this book cover at least the full length of the 70-year exile in Babylon; from the first deportation of Hebrew captives to the first return of the captives to their homeland

(Dan. 1:1-2; 2 Chr. 35:5-8; Ezra 1-2). Through God's intervention, he obtained a prominent place in the Babylonian government (Dan. 2:48-49; 5:11, 29; 1:21). During the early years of the Medo-Persian Empire he was one of the three governors over the entire realm (6:1-3).

Returning to Babylon to assume the throne of his father, Nebuchadnezzar took many captives, including Daniel and his three friends (606 B.C.). A second group, including Ezekiel, also went into exile (597 B.C.) The third group was carried away at the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.). The Jewish exiles were placed in a rich plane on the river Chebar, which connected Babylon with Nippur (Eze. 1:1-3). They apparently enjoyed freedom to govern their own affairs and worship as they wanted—as long as they were loyal to Babylon and conformed to the religious practice of their captors also.

Ezekiel (592-570 B.C.)

Ezekiel was deported during the second wave which included Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. (Eze. 1:1-2; 2 Kin. 24:10-16). There he prophesied to the remnants of a shattered nation. He showed them that Jerusalem would be destroyed for her sins (Eze. 4-24), but offered them comfort and hope that they would eventually be restored to their homeland (Eze. 33-48).

The Jewish people lived as captives in Babylon, but were treated as colonists, not slaves. They increased in numbers and accumulated great wealth. Some of them (Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) rose to the highest offices. In Babylon, they actually had religious freedom, but the future of Jehovah worship was in crisis. The prosperity of Babylon and the gods of the nation that had conquered them could easily draw them away from God. Daniel and Ezekiel helped influence a remnant to remain faithful during this period.

CONCLUSION

Much more can be said, but this gives a general overview of the history of Judah Alone. Many lessons can be learned, but the greatest lesson is still one we need to learn today: If a nation wants the

blessings and favor of Jehovah, it **must** humble itself and seek righteousness, or it too will reach a point with God that His longsuffering is past, and He can allow it to be destroyed by outside nations. None of us should think that the USA in all its greatness and glory, like Israel, cannot become weakest and overtaken by other nations.

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

PERIOD OF EXILE

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God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever—
Thomas Jefferson.

BACKGROUND OF THE EXILIC PERIOD

Before reaching the Promised Land, Moses gave Israel a warning, one which they refused to heed. Bringing together the elders of the twelve tribes of Israel, Moses foretold they would become corrupt, forgetting the commandments of God and provoking Him to wrath (Deu. 31:28-29; cf. 31:16-17). The Southern Kingdom of Judah witnessed this prophecy unfold, first hand. They saw their estranged brethren of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) get swept away into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (2 Kin. 17:5-6). Israel (the Northern Kingdom) quickly learned that sin separates people from God (Isa. 59:1-2), ultimately experiencing this fact for themselves. Continuing in their sin and rebellion (2 Kin. 17:7-23), God removed them from His sight, afflicting and delivering them into the hands of the Assyrians.

God, as it were, *tore* them away from the house of David, the Kingdom of Judah (17:18-21), all of which was the result of a people willingly following in the sins of Jeroboam (17:21-22). This was significant, because Jeroboam is referred to twenty-one times as the one “**who made Israel to sin**” (1 Kin. 14:16; 15:30, 34; 16:2, 19,

26; 21:22; 22:52; 2 Kin. 3:3; 10:29, 31; 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:21; 23:15).

Several theories concerning the ten tribes of Israel (Northern Kingdom) have arisen over the years. Since there is no explicit information concerning the fate of these tribes, some have imagined that they had migrated from Israel to England. Another claim is that remnants of the ten tribes of Israel sailed to America, being restored as a Great Nation upon the American Continent, and it is claimed that they are the descendants of the American Indian. To these false theories, one author correctly objects:

That tribal distinctions had not disappeared is evident from the following facts.

When the Jews settled in their own land, they began to rebuild the temple—which project took about six years. When completed, it was formally dedicated. At the dedication, sacrifices were offered “according to the number of the [twelve] tribes of Israel” (Ezra 6:17). It thus is clear that the ten tribes **were never lost**; some of these either remained in Babylon, or else returned with their kinsmen of the southern kingdom. As with many other Jews, eventually they were scattered far and wide (see: Deuteronomy 28:64ff).

When Christ was born, and was brought to Jerusalem to fulfill certain requirements of the law, there was a Hebrew woman, a prophetess of the tribe of **Asher** (one of the supposedly “lost” tribes), who was praising God in the temple. See also James 1:1 (Jackson).

As noted above, Judah was by no means innocent. They, too, “played the harlot” (Deu. 31:16), violating God’s commandments (2 Kin. 17:19), although God did spare them from being taken by the Assyrians. When Hezekiah came to power, serving as king over Judah for twenty-nine years, he fell deathly ill. The prophet Isaiah told him he would die from his illness, but with a contrite heart, Hezekiah prayed to God, asking forgiveness and to be spared from death (20:1-9). This beautiful prayer was recorded by Isaiah (Isa. 38:10-20). Hearing his prayer, God extended his life another fifteen years. However, Hezekiah then made an imprudent alliance with Babylon, fighting against Sargon II and the Assyrians. Hezekiah was duped into revealing all of Judah’s wealth and strength to Babylon.

Displeased, God sent Isaiah to rebuke Hezekiah, telling him that due to his unwise actions, Judah would now go into Babylonian captivity.

CAPTURE AND DEPORTATION OF JUDAH

In 612 B.C., Babylon destroyed the city of Nineveh, defeating Assyria. This set the stage for their invasion of the Southern Kingdom (Judah). In 606-605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, and thus begins the *Exilic Period* or *Period of Exile*. This also marked the beginning process of a three staged deportation process (2 Chr. 36:5-8; Dan. 1:1-6). Nebuchadnezzar took certain children of Judah, including Daniel and those seemingly of “good stock,” or “royal blood,” to begin grooming them to become wise men for Babylon (1:1-6). In 603 B.C., Jehoiakim, king of Judah at this time, led a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar and lost. He was captured and taken prisoner back to Babylon (2 Chr. 36:6). The vessels of the temple were also removed and taken back to Babylon, being placed in their pagan temple (2 Chr. 36:7; Dan. 1:2). Judah had become a subject state of Babylon, having to pay taxes to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kin. 24:1).

The second stage of deportation began approximately 597 B.C. (24:8-16), and Jehoiachin was reigning as king of Judah at this time (24:8). After besieging Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar captured Jehoiachin and all of Jerusalem, including all the treasures of the temple and the king’s house, and brought them all back to Babylon (24:13-16). Many of Judah’s leaders, laborers, and craftsmen, including the prophet Ezekiel, were taken to Babylon in exile (24:10-16).

The third and final stage of deportation began approximately 587-586 B.C. (2 Chr. 36:11-21), during the reign of Judah’s next king, Zedekiah (36:11), whose real name was “Mattaniah,” the uncle of Jehoiachin (2 Kin. 24:17). One would think Judah, after going through all of this turmoil with Babylon, would have repented and turned back to God, but such was not to be the case. Instead, they continued in their rebellion against God (2 Chr. 36:12-21). This third and final stage of deportation is most significant because it was at this time that the house of God—the temple—was burned

and destroyed, along with the walls of the city of Jerusalem (2 Kin. 20-25:1; 2 Chr. 36:15-21; Jer. 39:1-10; 52:1-23). Jewish people today still commemorate this tragic event known as “Tisha B’Av” (Rich). We also learn that the Babylonians “put out the eyes” of Zedekiah, blinding him (2 Kin. 25:7) after slaying his sons. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple occurred in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign as king. The person responsible for burning the house of God down was Nebuzaradan, captain and servant to Nebuchadnezzar (25:8-9).

The chief priests were carried away to the city of Riblah in Syria, approximately 175 miles away, and it is here that Nebuchadnezzar put them to death (25:18-21). Over the people who still remained in the land, Nebuchadnezzar placed a governor named Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan. His providential headquarters was at the city of Mizpah (25:22-30; Jer. 40:5-41:18). Additionally, the prophet Jeremiah (who began writing under the reign of Josiah [1:2; 25:3] and continued serving under Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah, and under the governorship of Gedaliah), along with his secretary Baruch, remained in Mizpah after declining an invitation to go to Babylon (40:1-13; 43:3, 6).

Gedaliah was eventually assassinated by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, a member of the Judean royal family, who had been sent by Baalis king of the Ammonites (40:14-41:3; 2 Kin. 25:25). Although occurring in the seventh month, no year is specified. Ishmael also killed seventy of some eighty pilgrims from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria who were coming to present grain offerings and incense at the temple. Those who were spared, including several army officers, fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them, out of fear that the Babylonians might consider them responsible for the assassination (25:25-26; Jer. 41:1ff.). This temple may have been at or near Mizpah or the neighboring town of Bethel. When Ishmael was later confronted by troops led by Johanan at Gibeon, many of his followers deserted him, and he fled to the Ammonites (41:11-15).

The Bible records various figures for the deportations. For the 597 B.C. deportation the Bible records ten thousand and eight thou-

sand (2 Kin. 24:14-16), but it is not clear whether these numbers are to be taken as alternate amounts or whether they should be totaled together. In Jeremiah we find the following figures: 3,023 Judeans, 832 Jerusalemites, and 745 Judeans, which would be a total of 4,600 (Jer. 52:28-30). However, it seems most conservative estimates put the total number of Jews taken into captivity at a much higher number:

We have already noted that there were three different importations (605, 597, 587-86 B.C.). The total number of these cannot be finally determined with accuracy. The most frequent estimate of 50,000 is not far wrong. They represented the leading people from every point of view (Hester 251).

Whatever the number, the Bible surely indicates the final result: **Thus Judah was carried away captive out of his own land** (2 Kin. 25:21).

CONDITION OF JEWS IN JUDAH AND THOSE EXILED IN BABYLON

At the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, there were a number of Jews who were not taken to Babylon, being left behind. The author of 2 Chronicles suggests that the land lay empty during the exile, enjoying its Sabbaths (2 Chr. 36:20-21), which is further corroborated by other passages (Jer. 13:19; 2 Kin. 25:21; cf. 17:23). It does not mean there was no one there, but that there were far fewer inhabitants in the land. Second Kings indicates that only the poorest people of the land were left after the first deportation (2 Kin. 24:14). It seems king Nebuchadnezzar desired the produce of the land, such as olives and grapes, having vinedressers and tillers to remain behind for the purpose of working the land (25:12). Some of the refugees from Moab, Ammon, and Edom returned after they heard about Gedaliah being appointed as governor (Jer. 40:11-12). Hester observes:

As stated in the preceding chapter, a group of Jews was left in and around Jerusalem after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. We have seen also that these were mostly the undesirable and irresponsible ones who would not be of any profit for Nebuchadnezzar in Baby-

lon. After the rebellion of Ishmael, which resulted in the death of Gedaliah, most of the better class of those remaining fled to Egypt, probably to escape the wrath of the Babylonian king. This would leave a doubly undesirable group in Palestine (249).

The Jews who fled to Egypt prospered, although it seems some of them renounced Jehovah God and began serving the pagan gods of Egypt. Most of these Jews remained there even after the exile period came to an end and the exiled Jews had returned to Jerusalem. Many of these Jews lived in Alexandria, which is where the great Septuagint (LXX) was produced in 285 B.C. Of course, the Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible—the Old Testament—and was the translation which was quoted often by Jesus and His apostles.

The Jews exiled in Babylon also enjoyed some relative freedom of their own.

They were colonists with freedom to do practically as they chose, provided of course, that they remain loyal to the Babylonian government. Generally speaking they were allowed to govern themselves and manage their own affairs. In religious matters also they appear to have had reasonable freedom. Their leading men were expected to conform to the religious practices of the kingdom as in the case of Daniel and his companions. But there is no record of the whole group being persecuted on religious grounds (Hester 253).

Although they enjoyed some measure of freedom and prosperity, the exiles, nonetheless, suffered from their displacement as the Psalmist depicts:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, When we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps Upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; And they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *Saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song In a strange land? If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, Let my right hand forget *her cunning*. If I do not remember thee, Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy. Remember, O LORD, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; Who said, *Rase it, rase it, even* to the foundation thereof. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; Happy *shall he be*,

that rewardeth thee As thou hast served us. Happy *shall he be*, that taketh And dasheth thy little ones against the stones (Psa. 137:1-9).

These exiles settled in the vicinity of Nippur, on the river Chebar (Eze. 1:1-3). While in Exile, the elders played a major role in the exilic community (Jer. 29:1; Eze. 8:1; 14:1; 20:1, 3; Ezra 5:5, 9; 6:7-8). The custom of praying toward Jerusalem seems to have begun at this time (1 Kin. 8:30, 35; Dan. 6:10). Issues like circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and many of the dietary laws became marks of Jewish identity during the exile, particularly for those who lived outside the land.

SUMMARY OF THE EXILIC PROPHETS AND THEIR WRITINGS

There are three primary prophets associated with the exilic period: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. We will briefly summarize their writings, capturing the thrust of each of their messages. Although much of Jeremiah's ministry preceded the period of captivity, he does write to the exiles in Babylon offering them both hope and strength. He taught them to continue in courage and in faith to God. For this reason he is included here as an "exilic prophet."

Jeremiah

Jeremiah served in Judah prophesying prior to the exile, during the time of deportations, and at the time of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. After witnessing the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, where he laments over the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and captivity of his people. He denounced Israel's leaders as "professional prophets" in particular with whom he has many encounters. These "professionals" were liars, because they prophesied peace: "and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt *of the daughter* of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when *there is* no peace" (Jer. 6:13-14). His message of "doom and gloom" caused him to be hated. He was both flogged and imprisoned for his preaching. Because of their rebellion and the abuse he took, he became troubled, often living in hiding. For this

reason he is called the “weeping prophet.” We get some insight into his emotional state in Jeremiah 8-20. In this section we come across what has been called the “Confessions of Jeremiah.” For instance, he writes: “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (9:1). It is within this section that we also find Jeremiah cursing the day he was born and accusing God for “deceiving” him—of enticing him to act as God’s messenger only to be met with humiliation and shame. It is here we learn that God’s words were raging inside of him knowing he must preach them. It is here we find God, through Jeremiah, pleading for His people to return to Him: “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*” (6:16). No wonder Jeremiah wept! However, Jeremiah would balance his hard but needed message with some needed consolation. These passages are found particularly in chapters 30 to 33 where he envisages a restoration; the exile will come to an end and they would have a new Davidic king to rule over them, having a new covenant as well (31:31-34).

Daniel

The prophet Daniel was taken captive to Babylon during the first deportation (606 B.C.), where he would prophesy from the palace of Babylon. Daniel spent his entire prophetic career in captivity, estranged from the land of Judah. He refused to bow down to any other god. He observed the dietary laws and often prayed facing Jerusalem. He seems to occupy a position of honor in the court and with Nebuchadnezzar. As a prophet of God (one who both “forth-tells” and “foretells”), Daniel had the power to interpret dreams, predicting the future. It was at this time that he was severely tested but remained faithful to God.

In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream of a huge statue, having a head of gold, a torso and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and the feet mixed of iron and clay. He then has another dream where animals represent the aforementioned metals.

Daniel then decodes the dream. Each metal represents a kingdom that ruled the Ancient Near East. Daniel explicitly mentions that the gold represented Babylon (Dan. 2:38), while the silver represented the Medo-Persian empire, which would eventually conquer Babylon in 539 B.C. (5:28). The bronze represented Alexander's Greece (11:2-3), and the iron the Roman Empire, which eventually divided into western and eastern empires (iron and clay). The stone that grew into a mountain represented the kingdom of God, which would be established during the days and the rule of the kingdom of iron, the Roman Empire (2:44-45). Daniel writes:

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (2:44).

In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. Daniel began his interpretation of the dream by telling Nebuchadnezzar that God revealed what would take place in the latter days (2:28; cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Joel 2:28-32; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5-8; 2:1-4, 16-36). Daniel was referring to the church of Christ, which is the kingdom that was set up or established while Rome was in power in the first century.

Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel was taken captive during the second deportation (597 B.C.). He was exiled in Babylon during the final destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The prophecies in Ezekiel follow a fairly chronological order. The first twenty-four chapters are the prophecies delivered in Babylon, before the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Within this section there is a depiction of the *kavod* (the glory of God) departing Jerusalem. This *kavod* was like a "cloud" containing God's presence or glory. This is also the term used in Exodus 24 where we read of the *kavod* settling on Mount Sinai, and which represented God's presence and or glory. In Exodus 40, this same cloud covers the tent of meeting,

filling the tabernacle. Ezekiel described it as “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake” (1:28). It was a semblance or a likeness of the “glory” or “presence” of the Lord.

This *kavod* contained the *figure* or the *representation* of God’s glory or presence. This is similar to how Solomon described the immanence of God’s presence or glory on earth and in the temple. After building the temple, Solomon asked a rhetorical question: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kin. 8:27). Here *indeed* is simply used to mean “literally.” Concerning the metaphysical nature of Deity, Solomon was asking if God would **literally** dwell on the earth and in the temple. The implied answer is a resounding, “**No**,” for God does not so immanently dwell. Therefore, like the dwelling of God on the earth and in Solomon’s temple, God’s **immanence** in the *kavod* was said to be figurative. Perhaps this serves in showing how a transcendent God participates in the world? Isaiah writes:

For as the rain cometh down, And the snow from heaven, And returneth not thither, But watereth the earth, And maketh it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: It shall not return unto me void, But it shall accomplish that which I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

Isaiah intimates that the Word of God is the means by which God acts or participates in the world. After all, it is the Word of His power that upholds “all things” (Heb. 1:3). Moreover, to say something is accomplished by His Word is synonymous with saying that God performed the action, Himself. God speaking and God acting is the thing, so declared the Psalmist:

The voice of the LORD *is* powerful; The voice of the LORD *is* full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; Yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shaketh the

wilderness; The LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, And discovereth the forests: And in his temple doth every one speak of *his* glory (Psa. 29:4-9).

This parallelism, so prominent among the Hebrews, equates the action of His voice with the action of God, Himself. It is the same reality—God and His voice, or Word, share the same ability. To say God performs an action is to say His Word performs the same action and vice versa—a concept that which teaches that God's immanence (active presence) is accomplished through His Word.

Later, while in a vision, Ezekiel was transported to the temple in Jerusalem to witness the atrocities and abominations, which explain why the temple and city were destroyed. While viewing the slaughter and destruction, Ezekiel sees the *kavod* arise from the Temple and move to the east (Eze. 10:18-19). He then sees the *kavod* ascending from the midst of Jerusalem to a hill east of the city. Then in another vision, the Spirit takes him to Chaldea (Babylon), to those who were in captivity (11:23-25). This image demonstrates a vital principle worthy of consideration. God will abandon those who continue in sin and rebellion, but He will maintain a spiritual relationship with those who continue to trust and obey Him. God fellowships righteousness and forsakes unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9). In this case, God left the unrighteous in Jerusalem to be with the righteous in Babylon. Ezekiel and the captives now understand that God does not have a relationship with a particular place but with a particular people—those who practice righteousness (3:7; Mat. 7:21; Luke 6:46; cf. Deu. 30:1-3). Ezekiel makes it clear to all generations that those who ignore God, His Word, and the warnings therein will be eternally doomed. However, those heeding God's Word will be spared, enjoying life eternal with their Creator. We learn that individual responsibility was necessary then and is equally necessary today. God's children would do well to remember this point, preached by the prophet Ezekiel:

As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, spoiled his brother by violence, and did that which is not good among his people, lo, even he shall die in his iniquity. Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son

bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, *and* hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: *and* not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die. Yet ye say, The way of the Lord is not equal. Hear now, O house of Israel; Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal? When a righteous *man* turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die. Again, when the wicked *man* turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die (Eze. 18:18-28).

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PERIOD OF RESTORATION

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INTRODUCTION

The restoration of the Jews to their land took place about 450 years before Jesus Christ came into the world. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, Israel had filled its cup of iniquity to such a point that God removed them from their land. First, it was the ten northern tribes who rebelled after the death of Solomon and had a succession of wicked kings. Their first king, Jereboam, quickened their departure from God with his changes in the priesthood, the place and object of their worship, and their feast days (1 Kin. 12:25-33). He was followed by others—some as wicked as he and others more so. At last, God's longsuffering came to an end and they were invaded, conquered, and carried away by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.

Because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed his covenant, *and* all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear *them*, nor do *them* (2 Kin. 18:12).

That left only the two southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin who constituted the kingdom of Judah. Judah had a number of good kings, but iniquity overtook that kingdom too, and God sent Nebuchadnezzar's Chaldean armies against them. He destroyed the city, razed the temple Solomon had built, and carried Judah into

Babylonian captivity. The northern kingdom of Israel was gone forever and Judah ceased to exist as a kingdom. The land was desolate, yet God did not forget His people, He had punished for their iniquities. The time would come when Judah would be restored to the land and once again serve Him.

THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISES

Abraham was the recipient of three basic promises from God, and growing out of those promises were the prophecies of the Old Testament.

There are three sections to these Old Testament promises concerning Israel. The promises and prophecies of the Old Testament will classify under one of three heads—the land promise to Abraham and his seed after him; the restoration promise; and the spiritual promise.

First: the land promise was fulfilled in Joshua. Gen. 15:18 shows the extent of possession; Deut. 1:7-8 says that they possessed it; Josh. 21:43 says that they possessed all of it; 2 Sam. 8:3 says they later recovered it; 1 Kings 14:21 says Solomon reigned over it; Neh. 9:7-8 says God performed all of his promise. *That Settles Number One.*

Second: the restoration promise was fulfilled in the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia. I have given you the references in Jer. 25:11-13; 2 Chron. 36:20-23 and Ezra 1:1-4, several times, showing the blanket fulfillment of all the restoration promises when Cyrus released the exiles from their Babylonian captivity, according to all that Jeremiah had spoken concerning it. But Ezekiel did not say anything on the subject that Jeremiah did not say. And Isaiah did not say anything on the subject that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel did not say. Since Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all spoke the same thing on the same subject it follows that all prophecy on the restoration of national Israel was fulfilled in the proclamation of Cyrus. *That Settles Number Two.*

Third: the spiritual promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God said to Abraham: “I will make of thee a great nation...and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Turn to Gal. 3:8: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In, thee shall all nations be blessed.” When God told Abraham that in his

seed he would bless all nations, Paul said the seed in that passage meant Christ and the promise meant the gospel. *That Settles Number Three* (Wallace 125).

Growing out of the land promise were the prophecies assuring them of their restoration to that land, following their captivity in Babylon and Persia. One of those prophets was Jeremiah, who witnessed Jerusalem's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. He prophesied:

And this whole land shall be a desolation, *and* an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, *that* I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, *even* all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations (Jer. 25:11-13).

Ezekiel, who prophesied during the captivity, offered the hope of restoration to the Jews while they languished in Babylon and his vision in the valley of dry bones was prophetic of their resurrection from captivity.

For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.... And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God (Eze. 36:24-28).

Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken *it*, and performed *it*, saith the LORD (37:11-14).

The third, and last, prophet that we will consider who prophesied of the Jews restoration to their land is Isaiah. He foretold Israel's restoration to their land more than a century before the temple was destroyed and they were taken captive by the Chaldeans in 586 B.C. He even named the Persian king Cyrus as the one who would facilitate Israel's return two centuries before it occurred in 536 B.C.

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, And he that formed thee from the womb,...That saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; And to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, And I will raise up the decayed places thereof: That saith to the deep, Be dry, And I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, *He is* my shepherd, And shall perform all my pleasure: Even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; And to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid (Isa. 44:24-28).

Every promise that God made to Abraham concerning their land has been fulfilled. Israel, which came from the loins of Abraham, was a great nation, nurtured in the womb of Egypt, delivered from that land by God's mighty hand, and led into Canaan under Joshua where they conquered and occupied the land God had promised to Abraham. There they dwelt until they were carried away captive and finally restored to their land as God had promised through His prophets. Their restoration to the land of Judah is the focus of our study in this treatise.

JUDAH RESTORED TO THEIR LAND

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther chronicle the return of the Jews from captivity during the time of their restoration. The restoration was accomplished over a period of about 100 years with three waves of returnees who were led by Zerubabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Each of these leaders represented a component of the Jews' existence as the people of God. Zerubabel led the first group, with the purpose of restoring the temple. Nehemiah led a group to restore the walls of their holy city, Jerusalem, and Ezra led in the restoration of the Law of Moses to Israel's life. This century-long migration back to their homeland was begun with the decree of Cyrus,

as Isaiah had prophesied. That decree is found in the last chapter of 2 Chronicles and in the first chapter of Ezra.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD *spoken* by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. Who *is there* among you of all his people? The LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up (2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-2).

The following time line is by Gary Summers and traces the return of the Jews over nearly a century:

TIME CHART

- 536 — Cyrus released Israel; Zerubbabel and Jeshua led the fallen nation back to their homeland
- 535 — Work began on the reconstruction of the temple, but they were “troubled” in building (Ezra 4:4)
- 529 — The work on the temple (such as it was) ceased (Ezra 4:24)
- 520 — Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the people to rebuild the temple. They were again “troubled” but received Darius’ permission to continue
- 516 — The people completed the reconstruction of the temple (Ezra 6:15) [Ezra 1-6, Haggai, Zechariah]
- 485 — Ahasuerus became king
- 483 — Vashti was deposed
- 479 — Ahasuerus was defeated at Thermopylae and Salamis
- 479 — Esther became queen
- 474 — Esther saved her nation [Esther]
- 457 — Ezra returned [Ezra 7-10]
- 444 — Nehemiah returned to build the wall
- 432 — The marriage problem was resolved [Nehemiah and Malachi] (17).

The Return under Zerubbabel and Jeshua

About 50,000 Jews returned in the first wave under Zerubbabel and Jeshua (Ezra 1:5–2:64), for the purpose of rebuilding the temple that had been reduced to rubble by the Chaldean invaders almost a century earlier. Before them lay a formidable task, but they

undertook it. They first restored their worship and offered sacrifices as the Law of Moses required (3:1-6) and then laid the temple's foundation (3:8-13). The laying of the foundation brought a mixture of emotional outbursts from the people—shouts of joy from the younger generation and tears from the older ones who knew that this foundation was not of the magnitude and glory of Solomon's temple that they remembered.

God's people—then as now—had adversaries who were determined to stop the work of the Lord. These were the mongrel race of Samaritans who carried on a form of worship borrowed in part from the Law of Moses. Like denominations and apostate churches of Christ today, they took God's law, changed it, amended it, adapted it to suit their own tastes, and intoned today's denominational mantra that is as ancient as they, saying, "Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye *do*" (4:2). Zerubbabel and Jeshua knew they could "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11).

Zerubbabel and Jeshua rebuked the Samaritans, saying, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel" (Ezra 4:3). Their refusal to enter into fellowship with them angered the Samaritans and resulted in a letter of false accusations against the Jews from them to King Artaxerxes. As a result of that letter, the king halted the rebuilding of the temple and it languished unfinished for the next three years until the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, stirred the people again to action. This brought more opposition, but Darius, who was now king, searched his archives, found the decree of Cyrus and gave his permission for the work to proceed; it was, at last, finished (Ezra 5-6).

The Book of Esther

In a chronological study of the Jews' restoration to their land, it is at this point, at the end of Ezra 6, that the story of Esther takes place. When Queen Vashti refused to obey her husband's command to expose herself to his nobles at a drunken feast, he removed her as queen (Est. 1:19-21). Thus begins Esther, in which the name of

God is not found, but which has His hand on every page. Esther is probably the greatest example in all the Bible of the providence of God at work. One may **think** a thing is a result of God's providence, but that can never be known for certain until and unless God reveals it to him.

When Esther became Queen of Persia, following Vashti's removal (2:17), her guardian and cousin, Mordecai, pleaded with her to use her influence with the king to save the Jews from the extermination that Haman the Agagite had planned for them. When she hesitated in answering his request, he asked, "who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?" (4:14). He did not confidently assert that God placed her on the throne for that purpose, but merely inquired whether this could be the working of providence. One example from the New Testament indicates the providence of God can be known for a certainty, only if God reveals it to man. That was the storm which carried Paul and the others across the Mediterranean Sea on the way to Rome. That was providential and Paul so stated because God told him it was (Acts 27:18-25). So it is with Esther. The providence of God was working to save His people through natural and political means, though He never explicitly revealed that to man. That He still rules in the kingdoms of men through His providence could not be made any clearer than in Esther, the story of the Persian queen who was a Jew and who saved her people.

At this point, one may wonder what Esther and her family were doing in Persia when other Jews had returned to Judah. The answer is that not all Jews returned. Cyrus understood that in his decree when he said, "And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him" (Ezra 1:4).

The Return under Ezra

After the events chronicled in Esther, Ezra the scribe led a contingent of Jews back to Judah. Their journey took four months (7:8), and when Ezra arrived, he learned that the previous returnees had not completely separated themselves from the heathen inhabitants. Instead, they had done as their fathers who were carried away by in-

termarrying with the heathen of the land. Dismayed and astonished at this news, Ezra rent his garment and his mantle, plucked the hair from his head and beard, and sat down until the evening sacrifice when the people had gathered (9:4-6). Then he stood, spread his hands unto God, and prayed a fervent prayer of confession, enumerating Israel's sins (9:6-15). In the wake of his prayer, the people demonstrated true repentance and put away their foreign wives and children.

No one argued that obedience to God's law would "place the children in an untenable position," as some argue today, or that, "You can't break up a home." Ezra said:

Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives (10:10-11).

The people did not protest Ezra's command, which was given on the twentieth day of the ninth month (10:9). They requested only that the matter to be done in an orderly fashion. Ezra agreed and the process of separation took place immediately. It began on the first day of the tenth month and was completed on the first day of the first month (10:16-17).

While God does not demand that Christians marry only Christians today, He **does** have a law of marriage that says one man and one woman are to marry for life, and the only God-ordained reason for breaking that marriage is fornication (Mat. 19:4-5, 9). The principle laid down in Ezra 10 is as valid today as when it was practiced in Ezra's day. Marriages that are not approved by God must be dissolved if those who are in them want to please God and go to heaven. There is no other alternative. Gospel preachers today cannot ignore unlawful marriages, saying, "They are just too widespread," or, "So many in the church are in that situation," or, "We cannot ask people to break up their homes." What Ezra said of the Jews in unlawful marriages is just as valid today. If the marriage is unlawful in the eyes of God, it must be dissolved and that is the message preachers ought to convey.

The Return under Nehemiah

Nearly a century after Zerubbabel and Jeshua returned to Judah to rebuild the temple, Nehemiah was serving as a cupbearer to the Persian king when he learned some disturbing news from a man named Hanani and some of his friends. They reported that the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down and the gates of the city burned (Neh. 1:1-3). This probably referred

to the walls, which had been *rebuilt* after the people returned from their captivity: for it could not refer to the walls which were broken down and levelled with the dust by *Nebuchadnezzar*; for to hear of this could be no *news* to Nehemiah (Clarke 763).

Heartsick at the news, Nehemiah prayed for favor in the king's eyes. He would ask him for permission to return to Judah and repair the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 1-2). His prayer was answered and he set out for his homeland with materials supplied by the king for rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. He also carried letters from the king to convey him on his journey and, at last, came to Jerusalem (2:1-11).

Like any good leader, Nehemiah's first act was to accurately assess the task before him, so he set out by night to inspect the damaged walls (2:12-16). Zerubbabel and Jeshua had restored the temple—the house where, in a figure, God dwelt among His people. Ezra had restored the law and the people's obedience to its precepts. Now, Nehemiah would restore the walls of the city where the temple stood—the city of David, Zion, their holy city. Alone, Nehemiah made a circuit around the city by night to assess the damage. Only after he had gained sufficient knowledge of the enormous task before him, did he approach the nobles and others with his plan and enlisted their aid in rebuilding the walls (2:12-18).

Satan does not rest in opposing God's people. No matter what the people of God undertake, Satan is always there to oppose them (Job 2:1), and Nehemiah's work was no exception. Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian got wind of Nehemiah's plans. They laughed with scorn and asked if the Jews intended to rebel against the king (Neh. 2:19). Nehemiah answered them, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore

we his servants will arise and build” (2:20a). He then added the same kind of rebuke given by Zerubbabel, saying, “but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem” (2:20b).

This was only the first wave of opposition that would confront Nehemiah in his work. The work was divided among the people, and they set to work rebuilding the walls. Then the second wave of opposition came from the same source. Sanballat and Tobiah mocked the Jews, saying their work was in vain and would fall (4:1-3), but Nehemiah and his brethren were undeterred and prayed for God’s protection (4:4-5).

As the work continued, the anger of the adversaries—Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites—was aroused to a fever pitch, and they determined to attack the Jews and stop the work (4:7-8). Again, Nehemiah prayed and continued to work (4:9). The idea of “Let go, and let God” was not in Nehemiah’s mind. He knew that one should pray as though everything depended upon God and to work as though everything depended upon him. God grants us strength and courage, but expects us to keep doing His work on earth. He gives us our daily bread, but does not put it into our mouths. We are enjoined to pray and work and that is precisely what Nehemiah did. He set the men to work with tools for building in one hand and weapons in the other for protection from their enemies. Too many in the church today think they can just “love” people into the church, forgetting that it takes a weapon—the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17)—as well as love to convert men and do God’s will. It is not love that is God’s power to save, but the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17). Love should motivate us, but the Gospel is what motivates and saves the lost.

Finally, Nehemiah’s enemies saw they could not prevail with scorn, mockery, or threats of violence, so they did as denominations in our day have done. They shifted gears from overt opposition to a proposal for compromise on the plains of Ono. Four times the Jews’ enemies extended a “loving” hand of compromise, and four times Nehemiah refused (Neh. 6:1-4). The fifth time they came to Nehemiah with an open letter accusing them of rebellion against the king

and claiming Nehemiah wanted to be king. The letter, of course, was as authoritative as whispers across the back fence. “It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith *it*.” Again, Nehemiah prayed for strength (6:5-9).

The wall was finished in 52 days (6:15), but that did not stop the opposition. Like a virus, those who oppose God are ever changing. That was true then and it is true today. Scorn, ridicule, threats of violence, and finally compromise had not moved Nehemiah and his brethren from their task; so their enemies moved underground to infiltrate the Jews. Tobiah was the son-in-law of the Jew, Shechaniah, whose son, Johanan, had married the daughter of Meshullah, the son of Berechiah (6:18). Into this mix of intermarriage with the enemies of God, entered some nobles of Judah who exchanged friendly letters with Tobiah, extolling his “good deeds” to Nehemiah and receiving letters from Tobiah to strike fear into Nehemiah (6:17, 19).

Family ties are often the undoing of the faithful, as was the case of the mother of a lesbian in a Tennessee congregation who supported her daughter when the church withdrew its fellowship from her. That scenario could probably be repeated in various forms throughout this land. A man who was once an elder in the church told me his daughter had married a Baptist and attended a Baptist Church with her husband. He concluded, “Well, at least she goes to church.” That is compromise of the truth because of family ties, and that is taking place in the church across the length and breadth of this land. But Jesus said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mat. 10:37).

Nehemiah’s Final Reforms

After the wall was finished, Nehemiah appointed rulers for Jerusalem to set the city in order (Neh. 7:1-4). Ezra read the law to the people (Neh. 8), they observed the proper feasts, and Ezra confessed the sins of the people while they stood in sackcloth and ashes (Neh. 9). Then, while Nehemiah was absent from Jerusalem, the unthinkable took place. Eliashib the priest prepared a chamber for

Tobiah in the house of the Lord (13:4-5). Returning to Jerusalem, Nehemiah learned of this abomination and cast out Tobiah and all of his goods; he cleansed the chambers so the vessels of the house of God could again be stored in there. He rebuked the rulers because the house of God was forsaken. He saw that the proper tithes were given to the Levites.

Learning that many of the Jews, along with men of Tyre, were selling goods on the Sabbath day, Nehemiah rebuked them for profaning it and commanded that the gates of the city be closed at dark before the Sabbath and not be opened until the next day. He also told those who lodged outside the walls on the Sabbath that if they did so again, “I will lay hands on you” (13:21).

His next action involved Jews who had married women of Ashdod and whose children, “spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people” (13:23-24). His reaction was swift and decisive. He cursed and smote them and plucked off their hair and made them swear to not give their daughters to foreign sons nor take foreign wives for themselves, reminding them of Solomon’s folly in taking strange women to be his wives (13:15-27).

The language of Ashdod is used in the church today by those who refer to “Our Minister,” a plurality of “Ministries” in the church, “Our church,” and other terms foreign to the New Testament. Christians must “*speak* as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), not as the Ashdodic denominational world.

CONCLUSION

The Jews returned and were restored to their homeland over a period of about a century. With the close of Nehemiah, the Old Testament historical record came to an end. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi uttered their prophecies during this period of restoration, but no prophetic voice would again be heard in Israel until four centuries later when one would come into the wilderness of Judea, crying, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mat. 3:1).

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INTER-TESTAMENT PERIOD

Dub McClish

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INTRODUCTION

From the ending of Old Testament history and prophecy to the opening words of Matthew's account in the New Testament spans about four centuries. Historians have described this period by various terms besides those in the title of this chapter. It is depicted as "the four-hundred silent years," "the period of silence," "the interval between the Old and New Testaments," "interbiblical history," "from Malachi to Christ," and likely others.

The period is referred to as a period of silence, not because no one was speaking or nothing significant was occurring in world history. Quite the contrary, earth-changing events occurred in this interval—events that greatly affected Israel, God's covenant people. Circumstances and developments of this era served as providential preparation for the insertion of the Incarnate Word into the stream of human history. Some of the institutions that appear in the four

accounts of Christ's life arose during this period. This span simply represents an information gap as far as inspiration is concerned.

With the books of Nehemiah and Malachi, completed (circa 432 B.C.), the inspired pen of the historians, the voice of the prophets, and miraculous activity were inoperative. They did not resume until Gabriel's announcement to Zacharias of the coming of John, the Lord's forerunner (Luke 1:13-19). Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, was born only a few months after His cousin, John, becoming the central figure of all history. Hence, thereafter, time is reckoned as beginning with A.D. 1, from which dating system we derive the four centuries between the Testaments.¹

The Bible does not satisfy the human curiosity that naturally seeks a cause for this silence of inspiration and miraculous activity. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that the silence occurred because God, at that time, had said all He needed to say and all that men needed to hear until "the fullness of the time came" for Him to send forth His Son (Gal. 4:4). Perhaps God needed to say no more because of the numerous details He revealed to Daniel in advance and that the prophet preserved for us in the book that bears his name.

In the sixth-century before Christ, God, through Daniel, the statesman-prophet of the Exile, revealed the geo-political outline that would (and did) characterize the period between the Testaments more than a century before the time of Nehemiah and Malachi. Daniel's inspired interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's first dream (Dan. 2) applied the respective parts of the dream's colossal image to four great world empires stretching from the sixth to the end of the first century B.C. The interpretation foretold that Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon would be subdued by the Persian Empire.² In turn, Alexander's Grecian Empire would conquer Persia, and finally, he foresaw the rise of Rome (2:7-43). During this last empire, God would establish His kingdom, which would subdue all others and have no end (2:44; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12-14; Luke 1:31-33).³

God commissioned Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 25:8-11; cf. Deu. 28:48-50; Isa. 39:7) to conquer Judah and take her to Babylon. Likewise, two centuries in advance, He called Cyrus the Persian by

name and raised him up to subdue Babylon, to allow the Jews to return to Judea, and to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem (2 Chr. 36:22-23; Isa. 44:28-45:1-5; Jer. 25:12; 29:10; cf. Ezra 6:3-5).

Two centuries before it would occur, Daniel specified repeatedly that the Greek empire of Alexander the Great (specifying Greece by name, no less) would conquer Persia and much more (Dan. 2:39; 7:6; 8:3-8, 20-21; 10:20). Per Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, as noted previously, the empire seated on the Tiber in Italy would eventually conquer and/or absorb the geographical remnants of Alexander's vast domain. There is no Biblical evidence that God directly exalted Alexander to make his sweeping conquests or the Roman emperors to rise to power, as in the cases of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. However, as we shall subsequently observe, it is difficult to discount God's providence at work in both cases.

Besides Daniel's broad vista of the successive empires in chapter 2 of his prophecy, he provides much greater detail relating to the empire and influence of Alexander and his successors in chapter 8. In a vision, he saw the figure of a ram with two horns, one of which was higher than the other, and the ram pushed in every direction (8:3-4). Then he saw a "he-goat" with a "notable horn" that came from the west, attacking the ram furiously, smiting him, and breaking his two horns (8:5-7). However, at the apex of his strength, the horn of the mighty he-goat was broken, and in its place arose four "notable horns" (8:8). Moreover, out of one of the four, came a "little horn" that came to have great power and that opposed God's people in "the glorious *land*" (8:9-12). After a long period (2,300 days), the sanctuary this ruler had trodden under foot would be cleansed, signaling the end of the oppression (8:13-14).

The angel Gabriel was ordered to "make this man to understand the vision" (8:16). Gabriel explained to Daniel: the ram with two horns was the Medo-Persian empire (8:20). The one-horned he-goat was the Greek empire and the "notable horn" was its first king (i.e., Alexander) (8:21). Alexander died at 33 years (323 B.C.), leaving no declared successor, so the four horns (8:22) foretell the four-way di-

vision of his empire. Another powerful “horn” (ruler), a “destroyer” of “the holy people,” was to arise from one of the four (8:23-25).

Daniel’s inspired prophetic panorama of the 400-year “inspiration gap” will help to organize our study of this era, as follows:

- Two Centuries under the Persians
- Power and Influence of the Greeks and Hellenism
- Jewish Independence—The Maccabean Era
- The Jews Under Rome
- Miscellaneous Notable Developments of the Period

Now let us turn our attention to world events that transpired between the Testaments, particularly in terms of their impact on the people of God.

TWO CENTURIES UNDER THE PERSIANS

A Century Recorded by Inspiration (536-432 B.C.)

The books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi furnish the record of the first one hundred years of the Jews under Persian rule. Under Cyrus, Persia conquered the Babylonian Empire in 536 B.C. He and his successors generally proved to be benevolent dictators, as the Old Testament books referenced above indicate. We see this attitude not only in the decree of Cyrus but also in the great esteem in which “Darius the Mede,” the city of Babylon’s Persian ruler, held Daniel (Dan. 6:3, 14-15; 18-20), in which Ahasuerus (Xerxes) later held Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jews (Est. 2:15-23; 5:1-8; 6:1-10; 7:1-10:3), and in which Artaxerxes still later held Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7:1-26; Neh. 2:1-8; 13:6-7).

Cyrus immediately issued an unprecedented decree that the Jews were to be allowed to return to their homeland, as B. S. Dean notes: “This return of a captive nation is a unique fact; there is nothing like it in history” (98). Cyrus further ordered that the temple the Babylonians razed fifty years earlier was to be rebuilt with his personal funds (Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5).

So after seventy years from the first deportation of the Jewish captives to Babylon (606-536 B.C.), as Jeremiah had promised,

those who chose to do so were allowed to make their way back home. Some (e.g., Daniel, Mordecai, Esther, et al.) elected to remain permanently in the land of their captivity where they had prospered. Some (e.g., Ezra and Nehemiah) delayed their return by several years. Three waves of return matched the three waves of deportation under Nebuchadnezzar. The first was under Zerubbabel, who led in beginning the rebuilding of the temple (536 B.C.—Ezra 1-6). Ezra led the second contingency (458 B.C.—7:10). Nehemiah conducted the third group and distinguished himself by leading the work of completing the rebuilding of the city walls and calling the people to repentance (445 B.C.—Neh. 1-13).⁴ The Jews were allowed to observe their traditions, practice their religion, and even govern themselves to a degree. While the Persian monarchs did not interfere with the resumption of life in their homeland, Samaritans—remnants of the Ten Tribes who had intermarried with those imported by the Assyrians following their conquest in 722 B.C.—continually harassed and opposed the rebuilding efforts.

A Century Not Recorded by Inspiration (432-331 B.C.)

With the close of the inspired record in the books written by Nehemiah and Malachi, students of this final century of Persian rule must turn to uninspired history sources of the time. These consist chiefly of the works of the pro-Roman Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus (A.D. 37, c. 100), some of the apocryphal books (particularly I Maccabees), Greek and Roman historians, and various archaeological sources (e.g., inscriptions, monuments, etc.).

The Samaritans continued to be a thorn in the side of the Jews in Judea, until they finally broke with them altogether. In Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman, she said "our fathers worshipped in this mountain," referring to the Samaritan temple on nearby Mt. Gerizim (John 4:20). This temple was built in about 400 B.C. by Manasseh, a Jewish priest who had been cut off from the Jerusalem priesthood because he married the daughter of Sanballat, the Samaritan chieftain who strongly opposed Nehemiah's effort to rebuild Jerusalem's walls (Neh. 4:7; 6:2; 13:28). When, upon his expulsion, he fled to Samaria, Sanballat appointed him

High Priest in the new temple. “Here a rival cult was established to that in Jerusalem...based on the same law-book as that recognized by the Jews” (Bruce 115). The Jews of Jesus’ day may have despised the Samaritans as much for their having a mongrel temple and religion within twenty miles of Jerusalem as for their mongrel race.

For the most part the Jews living in the post-Biblical period of the Persian Empire were allowed to live their lives without interference by imperial policy, both in their homeland and in the various areas of the empire where they chose to live. “Naturally they were not free, but so long as they recognized the supremacy of Persia and observed the laws governing them they were not molested or abused” (Hester 316). Judea was part of the province of Syria in the Persian Empire, and “Under the Persians, the Jews were usually governed by their own High Priest, subject to the Syrian Satrap, or Governor” (Dean 103).

THE POWER AND INFLUENCE OF THE GREEKS AND HELLENISM

In the middle part of the fourth century B.C., while the power of the Persian Empire was waning because of challenges from within and without and from lack of forceful leadership, a new power was rising in the West. King Philip of Macedon had mastered the city-states of Greece and Thrace; he then intended to move against Persia (which had been attacking this area for half a century). When he was assassinated in 336 B.C., his son, Alexander succeeded him at the age of 20 years, bent on carrying out his father’s plan.

Alexander’s Military and Cultural Conquests (333-323 B.C.)

Only two years after ascending the Greco-Macedonian throne, Alexander crossed the Hellespont into Asia Minor (modern Turkey), beginning his astonishingly successful and rapid triumph over the once invincible Empire of Persia. He showed himself to be every bit the “notable horn” of the mighty “he-goat” from the west that Daniel saw in his prophetic vision two centuries before (Dan. 8:5-7, 21). With his defeat of Darius III at Issus in 333, Syria, which included the homeland of the Jews, was his. He then turned south-

ward to Egypt, which brought him through Palestine. Josephus tells that Jaddua, the High Priest, led a procession to meet him, which mightily impressed the young warrior-king (244). *The New Analytical Bible* reports:

His favorable treatment of the Jews has been accounted for on the supposition that his attention was called to the predictions of Daniel that two hundred years before set forth his brilliant conquests (1079).

In 331, while in Egypt (which accepted Alexander as a deliverer from the hated Persians), he founded his famous namesake city, Alexandria. He then retraced his steps through Syria, marching on eastward, where he met and routed the Persian army east of the Tigris River at Gaugamela. This battle in October of 331 was the final nail in the coffin of the once mighty Persian Empire. Alexander expanded his empire greatly with thrusts further eastward, but died in 323 in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II in Babylon. He may be the only general in history who never lost a military battle, but who nonetheless lost the battle of life through reputed uncontrolled vice and self-indulgence.

Alexander's ambitions extended beyond military conquest and rule:

As Alexander swept across the areas of his conquest an impact greater than the sword alone can produce was eventually to obtain. This potent force was "...a body of ideas" that was in fact a culture unparalleled in history. This refined Grecian culture, best known as Hellenism, came to be the chief contribution of Alexander's meteoric career. Its impress upon the world through language, literature, philosophy, science, and art has practically determined the course of subsequent history, especially in the West, but to a degree even in the East. The Jews were not immune (McClish 2).

One writer calls Alexander "the apostle of Hellenism" (Pfeiffer 67). On the heels of his victories, Alexander founded cities and settled them with Greeks. He also colonized existing cities with them. Thus, he extended the Greek culture throughout his domain. One scholar assigns the first Palestinian colonization as early as 332 in Samaria (Bickerman 41). As the Hellenistic influence diffused, it

was with growing difficulty that the small province of Judea could totally resist it. The principal vehicle upon which Hellenism rode was the Greek language. How could the Jews engage the Gentiles in commerce without learning the language? As we shall see, the Greek influence would play a major role in Jewish political events in the second century B.C.

The Jews Under the Post-Alexander Empire (323-167 B.C.)

Alexander died with no provision for a successor. The power struggle initially involved various generals, satraps, and family members (the “diadochi”). After numerous wars (and some assassinations), most of his empire was divided between four of his generals, represented by the four horns of Daniel 8:22, but the struggles for their respective territories were not completed until 301 B.C. While little is known of the Jews’ history in this uncertain time, Hester says that during the “twenty-five years after Alexander’s death Jerusalem changed hands seven times” (321). Only two of these successors directly affected the Jews: Ptolemy I (Lagi) gained control of Egypt and southern Syria, and Seleucus initially ended up with Babylon and northern Syria. Palestine was the sandwich filling between these two monarchs and their dynasties for the next century. The Ptolemy and the Seleucid dynasties warred frequently for the coveted land of the Jews, rarely with a definitive victor, although the Ptolemies maintained control over it. The Jews paid tribute to Egypt, and they were allowed to govern themselves through their High Priests.

Ptolemy I imported thousands of Jews to Egypt where some were placed in military service, while most of them were settled in Alexandria, which the Ptolemies made their seat of government. They built the city into one of such prominence that it was larger than Rome and was second in prominence only to Rome at its zenith of power, size, and wealth.⁵ It became the home of the largest concentration of Jews in the world, many of them great scholars, during the Ptolemaic era. The Jews there gradually gave up their Hebrew tongue in favor of the predominant Greek. This circumstance led to the famous and valuable translation of the Old Testament into the Greek language—the Septuagint (LXX, the Roman numeral 70, for

the traditional number of translators)—during the reign of Ptolemy II, who ruled from 285-246 B.C. Hester summed up the significance of this translation:

This was a most significant event, since with this translation available every person who spoke Greek could read the scriptures. It made the Old Testament with all its predictions of a Messiah available to hundreds of thousands of people who otherwise might never have had the opportunity of reading the Jewish scriptures (320).

The issue between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids was finally settled in 198 B.C. when the Seleucid king, Antiochus III (“The Great”) soundly defeated Ptolemy V, taking undisputed control of Palestine. The Jews would have to deal with the Seleucids for the next 135 years. Antiochus divided the land into the five provinces familiar to New Testament students: Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Trachonitis, and Perea.

Antiochus IV (“Epiphanes”) ascended the Seleucid throne in place of his assassinated brother, Seleucus IV, in 175. He was a passionate evangelist for Hellenism, which was having its effect by association upon many of the Jews, particularly those dispersed throughout Syria. He set about to **enforce** this way of life on all of his subjects—including those in Palestine. His cultural zeal and insane cruelty would lead to one of the darkest periods of Jewish history short of Hitler’s Holocaust of the twentieth century. It would also lead to the last period of Jewish independence.

As Hellenism progressed in Judea, an element of the Jews became alarmed. In defense of strict adherence to the Law and to halt the Hellenistic inroads, the “Hasidim” (i.e., “the pious ones”) party appeared. It opposed the liberal element that welcomed all things Greek, which element had become strong by the time the Seleucids gained control of the Jewish homeland. In 170, Jason, an extreme Hellenistic Jew, led 1,000 men against Jerusalem to take the office of High Priest by force. Antiochus supposed this trouble represented a full revolt by the Jews against him, consequently:

He turned his troops loose on a city already bathed in blood by Jason’s treachery, and ordered a massacre, irrespective of age or sex.

The Temple was plundered with the assistance of Menelaus (the reigning High Priest, an unauthorized Benjamite), and its remaining treasures were carried away to Antioch (McClish 10).

The book of I Maccabees states that he slaughtered 40,000 in this stunning and outrageous attack. The Jewish depopulation was replaced by the importation of Hellenistic colonists.

However, this brief assault was only a prelude to the one Antiochus launched only two years later. In 168, he returned from an unsuccessful attempt to topple the Ptolemy regime in Egypt where he was rebuffed when Rome came to Egypt's aid. He vented his anger this time by launching an extended war of extermination, not against the Jews themselves, but against their religion, seeing in it the source of a growing anti-Syrianism.

He began his pogrom by sending an army of 22,000 against Jerusalem, waiting to fall upon the city until the Sabbath, knowing the Jews would not defend themselves on their holy day. They burned Jerusalem, forbade observing the feast days and offering the sacrifices, erected an altar to Zeus on the great altar, and, on December 25, 168, sacrificed a sow upon it, thus fulfilling Daniel's prophecy of four centuries earlier:

And forces shall stand on his part, and they shall profane the sanctuary, even the fortress, and shall take away the continual *burnt-offering*, and they shall set up the abomination that maketh desolate (Dan. 11:31).

(The Lord later quoted Daniel to describe the blasphemies the Romans would visit upon the temple in A.D. 70—Mat. 24:15.) Thus, began the crusade that made it a capital offense to circumcise their baby boys, to possess a copy of the law, to observe the Sabbath, and to refuse to eat pork or animal flesh offered to pagan deities. His proscription of Judaism led to the merciless slaughter of additional thousands, with many women and children sold into slavery.

JEWISH INDEPENDENCE—THE MACCABEAN REVOLT

Antiochus underestimated the depth and breadth of loyalty the Jews had to their Law. The repeated bloody atrocities, the plundering and desecration of the temple, followed by the force of new laws

intended to destroy all that gave the Jews their identity inflamed many. The Hasidim, formed a century earlier to stem Hellenistic apostasy, found many now joining cause with them either in fact or at least in will. All the resistance needed was leadership.

The Origin of the Revolt

The spark that ignited the Jews to revolt occurred in Modein, a little town twenty miles northwest of Jerusalem. In 167 B.C., Apelles, a Syrian officer, came to the town to compel heathen sacrifice. When an apostate Jew stepped forward to comply, one Mattathias sprang from the bystanders and slew both the Jew and Apelles, and pulled down the heathen altar. Consequently, running through the town, he cried, "Everyone that hath a zeal for the law, and maintaineth the testament, let him follow me." Upon this he fled to the mountains with his five sons, leaving all possessions behind (McClish 13).

Thus began what is known as the Maccabean Revolt, which produced the Hasmonean Dynasty.⁶

Though a devout priest, Mattathias made a crucial, two-fold decision relating to the resistance effort he would lead. First, he determined his forces would fight any and every day of the week, including the Sabbath. Second, he decided on a strategy that included offensive as well as defensive action against the Syrians. The Hasidim quickly joined his efforts.

Within a year of his revolt at Modein, Mattathias died, but had named his son, Judas, to lead the movement. He proved to be a bold, elusive, and clever strategist for the guerrilla campaign and later as a field general. He first led rapid sorties out of the wilderness areas, destroying pagan altars, performing circumcisions, and generally enforcing Moses' law, striking fear in the hearts of the apostates and modernizers. These efforts replaced despair with hope in the hearts of masses and attracted ever-growing numbers to their insurgency. In a two-year span he molded his forces into a regular army that, while always numerically inferior to the Syrian forces, proved superior to them repeatedly on the battlefield. The successes of the Maccabees won them a peace treaty with the Syrians just two years after the uprising that began with one elderly priest in a small town.

Judas was able to march into Jerusalem and restore the worship of Jehovah without Syrian interference. The old defiled altar was torn down and a new one erected, the garments and furniture replaced, and the temple was rededicated with sacrifices on Kislev (December) 25, 165 B.C., exactly three years after its defilement by the swine-offering (McClish 18).

Judas decreed an eight-day feast in perpetuity to commemorate this occasion, to which John refers (John 10:22), and which Jews yet observe as Hanukkah. Ironically, the demented Antiochus Epiphanes died in early 164, only a few weeks after the dedication of the temple he had defiled. Daniel's "little horn" that came forth from one of the four "notable horns" and that took away the continual burnt-offering and shut up the sanctuary at last "was cast down" (8:9-11, 23-25).

With the freedom regained to openly follow the Law, the Hasidim had accomplished their aims; they never had political ambitions. Not so with the Maccabees, however, who sought political as well as religious liberty. Menelaus, the Benjamite High Priest, was replaced with Alcimus, a descendant of Aaron, but nonetheless a zealous Hellenist. When he gained office (with Hasidim support), he promptly had sixty of the Hasidim leaders executed. The Maccabees fled once more to the hills to carry on the fight. They won one more major battle with the Syrians, after which, in 161, Judas sought and obtained a mutual defense pact with Rome—the rising power in the West that had earlier scotched the Syrian threat to Egypt. Shortly afterward, the Syrian army finally crushed the Maccabean rebels before Rome could come to their aid, and the heroic Judas fell. Thus, seven years after Mattathias took his stand, the first chapter of the resistance to the Syrian attempt to destroy Judaism came to a close. It appeared, for the moment, that all was now lost and that the Jewish Hellenizers would be able to move forward unrestrained. History shows that such rejoicing in Antioch and Jerusalem was premature, however.

Jewish Independence Achieved

Judas' mantle fell upon his brother, Jonathan, who proved his military ability in further successful guerrilla strikes, but who accomplished far more by other means:

He was the crafty politician rather than the warrior. During the eighteen years of his leadership (161-143) Israel was to make great seeming advances, not due so much to her own strength, but through the clever way that Jonathan and his successors turned the weakness of Syria with its ever-present rival claimants for the throne to the advantage of Palestine (Enslin 20).

Alcimus, the Hellenistic High Priest, died in 159, and the office remained vacant for the next few years. Jonathan threw his support behind the rival to Syria's throne who eventually triumphed, for which he was duly rewarded. The most dramatic Maccabean gains of political power to this point were realized when, in 153, the new Syrian ruler named Jonathan High Priest. "In the span of only fifteen years (167-153), the Seleucid powers had run the gamut from attempted annihilation of the Maccabeans, to outbidding each other for their favor!" (McClish 25). It got better: In 150 the same Syrian monarch declared Jonathan "governor and partaker of his dominion." This empowered him to drive the entire remaining pro-Greek element out of Jewish government for good.

In 143, Jonathan fell into the hands of a Syrian insurgent who executed him. The Maccabean leadership now fell upon Simon, yet another of the sons of Mattathias. He was so successful militarily, as a general that he could demand complete independence from Syria, which he received. For the first time in almost five centuries the Judean Jews could claim independent national status. The people appointed Simon High Priest along with his military and civil power as governor, which roles he filled with great success and honor. The legitimizing of Simon as religious, military, and civil ruler (i.e., *Ethnarch*) marked the beginning of the Hasmonean Dynasty that in one form or another would continue until the beginning of the Roman rule (63 B.C.).

Simon fell prey, however, to political intrigue within his own family. In a bid for power, his son-in-law murdered him and two of his three sons in 135 B.C. The third son, John Hyrcanus, escaped the plot and succeeded in laying claim to all of his father's titles. George Gibson described his interest as follows:

Fired with great worldly ambitions, he gave himself to mere conquest. The marvelous religious zeal that had characterized the Maccabees disappeared, and in its place there came worldliness and greed for power (19).

He destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim and compelled Samaria to capitulate, however, not out of religious zeal, but because the Samaritans had long been a disturbing element to the Jews politically.

Hyrcanus died in 104, by which time the Jewish state was at its greatest power since the time of Solomon. His son, Aristobulus I, disdaining *ethnarch*, denoted himself *King of the Jews*. His Jewish name was Judah, which he used only in dealing with his own people. He preferred Aristobulus, his Hellenistic name, thereby showing his sympathies for Hellenism, the very influence that provoked the father of his dynasty to revolution six decades earlier. When he came to power he imprisoned his stepmother (whom he starved to death) and all of his stepbrothers, lest they challenge his power. The world was better off when he died after only one year.

One of Aristobulus' imprisoned stepbrothers, Alexander Jannaeus, succeeded him and ruled the Judean kingdom the better part of thirty years. He extended his kingdom's borders to rival those of Solomon's, even as Hyrcanus had brought the kingdom to a place of influence not seen by the Jews since the days of "Solomon in all his glory." He was even more cruel to his subjects than Aristobulus had been to his family. He was also a Hellenist, and the descendants of the Hasidim hated him and publicly reviled him. Lamar McGinty described his revenge:

in retaliation for this hatred he killed, in all, probably 50,000 of his people, some 800 being crucified at a banquet after their wives

and children had been slain before their eyes. This tragic occasion introduces us to the cross in Jewish history (143-44).

He left the kingdom to his wife Alexandra when he died in 76 B.C., and she occupied the throne nine years, appointing her son, Hyrcanus II, High Priest. When Alexandra died (67), Hyrcanus became king, a role for which he had neither interest nor aptitude. His younger brother, Aristobulus II, unseated him in less than a year, causing him to flee for asylum to Aretas, a Nabatean Arab chief whose stronghold was the “rose city” of Petra, about seventy miles south of the Dead Sea. Another non-Jew, Antipater, an Idumean⁷ chieftain, sought to gain power in Jerusalem by restoring Hyrcanus II as his “puppet king.” He bargained with Aretas to rally his Arab hordes to besiege Aristobulus II in Jerusalem.

The Roman general, Pompey, then in the East, sent his army to Jerusalem and “mediated” the conflict by taking Jerusalem. The Romans would hereafter have dominance in Palestine. The Hasmonean rule was at an end, and with it, Jewish independence. The year was 63 B.C. (McClish 27).

THE JEWS UNDER ROME

Pompey removed Aristobulus and took him and his family, along with other Jews, to Rome to include in his homecoming victory parade of the conquered. When he restored Hyrcanus II as High Priest and Ethnarch of the province of Judea, he rewarded Antipater by making him adviser to Hyrcanus. Julius Caesar treated the Jews with benevolence regarding their religious observances and general freedoms, but he required their annual tribute money, as would be expected of a subjugated people.

Caesar further rewarded Antipater by appointing him procurator of Judea in 48 B.C., making him a very powerful political force in Palestine. He was poisoned after only one year in office, and his two sons, Phasael and Herod later were appointed procurators of Judea and Galilee, respectively. Furthering Herod's rise was Antony's favor after Caesar died in 44 B.C. Moreover, he married Mariamne, granddaughter of Hyrcanus, thus marrying into the Hasmonean family. Antony named him King of the Jews in 37, which title he

held until his death in 4 B.C., his reign briefly overlapping with the birth of our Lord.

Herod was so jealous of his power and paranoid concerning plots to seize it (whether real or imagined) that he had several of his family members murdered, including his Hasmonean wife, Mariamne, her mother, and some of his several sons. His paranoia and depths of merciless cruelty are on full parade in his slaughter of the innocents in and around Bethlehem in his efforts to slay the baby Jesus (Mat. 2:16). He left many monuments to his thirst for building, including the famous fortresses of Masada and Herodium. However, the zenith of his construction projects was the rebuilding of the Temple, begun in 20 B.C. The Temple proper was finished in a year and a half, although work on surrounding buildings and courts continued almost to the time of its destruction in A.D. 70.

Herod's death brings us to the end of the intertestamental period, as miraculous and prophetic activity resumed near the end of his life. Such activity would continue throughout the first century after the Lord's birth, until the Gospel was revealed and confirmed in its fullness (1 Cor. 13:8-12; Eph. 4:11-15).

MISCELLANEOUS NOTABLE DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PERIOD

Although there are no great prophets or inspired historians in the period between the Testaments, the era gave rise to various institutions and even some literature. Notice has already been given to the production in the early third century B.C. of the monumental and vastly influential translation of the Old Testament into Greek—the Septuagint. Brief notice of some of the other significant products of this time is appropriate.

The Old Testament Apocryphal Books

Earlier reference was made to the apocryphal I Maccabees as a primary source of the history of the Maccabean Revolt and the events that precipitated it. It is one of fourteen books, collectively called "The Apocrypha," so called because of the meaning of the term: Secret, hidden, or of doubtful origin. The Roman Catholic

Bibles sandwich them between the Old and New Testaments, but they are universally—and rightly—omitted from all other Bibles.

All of these books originated in the intertestamental period and were perhaps intended to be somewhat of an uninspired appendix to the Old Testament to fill the inspiration gap between the Testaments. Their dates of writing and authorship are, for the most part, shrouded in uncertainty and mystery. They abound in historical and geographical errors as well as anachronisms and fall well short of the level of the canonical books. The Lord settled the Old Testament canon as He summed up all of its contents as the things “written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms” (Luke 24:44).

Jewish Parties

The Jewish sects of which we read in the New Testament originated in the period between Malachi and Matthew. The two prominent parties discussed in the accounts of Christ’s life, the Pharisees and Sadducees, are believed to have had their origin in the events surrounding the Maccabean Revolt. As mentioned earlier, in response to the Hellenistic pressures that were eroding faithful observance of the Law, the “Hasidim” (“pious ones”) had begun resistance efforts. When, in 168 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanes visited the terrors upon the Jews intended to destroy their religion, the Hasidim began taking to the mountains. When Mattathias and his five sons sparked a full-scale revolt and fled to the mountains a year later, the Hasidim joined their effort. In their zeal for the Law, they played a major part in the success of the Maccabean push for independence.

The **Pharisees** were perhaps the largest of the sects so much discussed in the accounts of Jesus’ life. Although their origin is not known with any certainty, it is possible that they existed as early as the time of Jonathan (161-143 B.C.). *Pharisee* is generally understood to mean “separated ones.” Historians almost as one believe that the Pharisees are the successors to the Hasidim. When the concession was won to rededicate the Temple and restore Jewish worship, the Hasidim separated from the Maccabean cause. Some speculate that this separation marks the source of the party and gave it its name.

The **Sadducees** were the offsetting party to the Pharisees and are also prominent in the first four New Testament books. Just as the Hasidim opposed Hellenism, there was also a party that was zealous for it under the Seleucids. It is not uncommon to find the Sadducees identified with this liberal element of two centuries earlier. *Sadducee* is usually traced to **Zadok**, the name of the High Priest in Solomon's court. It was the Hellenizing element that sold its faith to the Seleucid rulers for a mess of political power, and it was the Sadducees who enjoyed such political power in Jesus' time.

The **Zealots**, though not as prominent as the aforementioned parties, are worthy of mention, if for no other reason than that the Lord chose as one of His apostles "Simon who was called the Zealot" (Luke 6:15). The Zealot Party agreed with the Pharisees religiously, but they considered it treason to pay tribute to Rome when Jehovah alone was their true and only king. Their origin dates to the time of the Roman sacking of Jerusalem under Pompey (63 B.C.). They engaged in guerrilla-type excursions against Roman garrisons. Like the Maccabees, they seemed to be bent on fighting to the finish against foreign domination. In zeal, purpose, and strategy they revived the spirit of the Maccabees.

The **Sanhedrin Court** conducted travesty trials of the Lord that condemned Him to death and later forbade the apostles to preach any more in Jesus' name in Jerusalem. *Sanhedrin* is a Greek word spelled in English letters that means "sitting together," thus a council or assembly. It dates back at least to the time of Alexander Jannaeus, the Hasmonean King of Judea (76 B.C.) when it is mentioned in connection with his administration.

CONCLUSION

Herod the Great was the transitional character regarding Jewish history. His permitted *reign* over Judea by the Romans was the bridge between two eras. His last days would be the first earthly days of the prophesied true King of the Jews (but not as a successor to Herod). This King would become "King of kings and Lord of lords" of Jew and Gentile alike. Deity would once more speak and act through more than providence.

Alexander the Great and his successors had supplied Koine Greek, an all but universal language, to the civilized world. The translation of the Old Testament into this language of the people (the Septuagint) made it possible for the first time for many thousands of Gentiles to read the Jewish Scriptures, thereby learning of the one true and living Creator-God and the Messiah of the prophets. The Romans were not only great warriors, they were also great engineers and builders, which resulted in a network of roads. The Pax Romana (“Roman Peace”) that began with the accession of Caesar Augustus in 27 B.C. provided a period of political stability that would endure for two centuries in the vast empire ruled by the Caesars. All of these developments occurred during the “silent years” between “Babylon and Bethlehem,” providentially setting a propitious stage for the fruition of Daniel’s Prophecy:

And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44).

“The fullness of the time” had arrived, and “God sent forth his Son” (Gal. 4:4). Thus, ended the four centuries of Scriptural silence.

ENDNOTES

¹For those unaware, *B.C.* abbreviates *Before Christ*, which period ends at His birth. Thereafter, the historical era is marked by *A.D.*, the abbreviation for the Latin words, *Anno Domini*, meaning, “in the year of the Lord,” referring to the birth of Christ. Correct form places *A.D.* before the date noted (viz., A.D. 250) and *B.C.* after the date noted (viz., 400 B.C.). It is only fitting that the incarnation of Deity, the birth of the Only Begotten Son of God, should be the dividing line of history.

²Historians also refer to the Persian Empire as the “Medo-Persian” Empire, it being composed of both Medes and Persians, though the Persian element was dominant. The prophetic references to the Medes should be understood as meaning the Medo-Persian or Persian Empire (e.g., Isa. 13:17, 19; Jer. 25:25; 51:11).

³These world empires are depicted again by means of four beasts in Daniel’s vision recorded in 7:2-8.

⁴At some point following the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls (Neh. 4:6), Nehemiah returned to Babylon, only to make a second trip to Jerusalem 12 years after his first (2:1; 13:6-7). No one else is mentioned as accompanying him on this second trek. Suggested date for the latter visit is 432 B.C.

⁵Seleucus Nicator, who received Babylon and upper Syria after Alexander's demise, founded Antioch in Syria for his capital in about 300 B.C., naming it after his father, Antiochus. It prospered greatly, becoming as significant to the north-eastern Mediterranean as Alexandria was to the southeastern. This is the Antioch of Acts 11 and became Paul's "home congregation."

⁶*Hasmonean* springs from a priest, Asamoneus, the great grandfather of Mattathias. The Jewish political rulers who descended from him became the Hasmonean dynasty. *Maccabean* derives from the son of Mattathias, Judas Maccabeus (or "the Maccabee," i.e., "the hammer"), chosen by his father to succeed him in the insurgency. Thus the revolt or resistance effort is named "Maccabean."

⁷*Idumean* is another name for an Edomite. Edom was another name given to Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Gen. 25:30). Thus, the Idumeans were very distant "cousins" of the Jews.

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PERIOD OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

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INTRODUCTION

When I speak of a certain period in history I am referencing a point in past time and space when certain human events transpired. In this case, I am dealing with the history of the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Of that historical period the apostle Paul wrote:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

In the previous Scripture, I want to consider *fulness* as it relates to “the time” or that period of history when the “word became flesh” (“made of a woman”—Isa. 7:14; Mat. 1:22-23) in the physical world of men (John 1:1, 14). Truly, in bringing to fruition God's great Scheme of Redemption, it was the prepared time, place, and state of affairs in the world of men for Jesus to come to earth and accomplish His work.

As to the meaning of the concept of “the fulness of the time,” one need only to visualize an empty container filled with water. When it is **fulfilled**, it is **filled full** of water—it is filled to capacity and

can hold no more water. Thus, the apostle is telling his readers that when Christ came into the world, everything necessary for Him to accomplish His work among and for mankind was prepared or filled full—in the world in general and among the Jewish people in particular (Gal. 3:24). In this study, we recognize how God can order things, men, and all that relates thereto through His providential care to bring matters to a certain and special point in history to accomplish His purpose, but do it without directly and immediately infringing upon the free will of any person to choose for oneself what one will or will not do. **God's foreknowledge** (from man's perspective) **does not alter or infringe upon man's free moral agency to choose for himself and act upon that choice.** With the previous points in mind we shall briefly study the secular world of Jesus' day and how its culture came into being—a place prepared for Jesus to do His work and in so doing to save man from his sins.

THE ROMAN WORLD INTO WHICH JESUS WAS BORN

When this chapter speaks of the Roman world, it is referring to the political, social, cultural, and religious ideas and realities of what was the Roman Empire of Jesus' day. It dominated the Mediterranean world and what is today southern Germany and England. Regarding Judea, the religion of the Jews was particularly different from other religions of that period, but it is to be better comprehended by noticing that difference against the general background of the Greco/Roman world. Thus, it is helpful to understand Jesus, not only as a Jew in the flesh, but as the Word made flesh who lived and worked to accomplish what He came to do as the citizen of a country subject to Imperial Rome.

Space limitations will not allow for much of a study of the culture that was the Roman Empire. Suffice it to say that the civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Rome, Greece, and Canaan (the place settled by the ancient Hebrews, called Palestine by the Romans) had a part to play in forming the culture of the diverse peoples of the Roman Empire at the time Jesus was on earth.

The military conquests of Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) brought the world of that time under the influence of Greek cul-

ture. It was a vast Empire, covering an area from western Asia Minor (Turkey), with the eastern coast countries of the Mediterranean, including Egypt, and all the way to India. Because he saw himself as “the apostle of Hellenism” (Greek *Hellas*, “Greece”—the Greeks thought of themselves as “Hellenes”), he fully intended to Hellenize the people he had conquered. Thus, to a greater or lesser extent from Gibraltar to India the Greek culture made a lasting impact on what would later become the Roman Empire.

Following the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. his Empire was divided between his generals. Over the next 20 years several major wars were fought between and among them regarding their inherited lands conquered by Alexander. Beginning in 198 B.C. the Seleucid Empire came to dominate the land of Palestine. The Hellenizing policies of the Seleucids were unacceptable to most of the Jews, especially those policies enacted by Antiochus IV. The consequences of which caused the Jews to revolt against them. In time they gained their independence, establishing finally their own monarchy and ruling themselves until 63 B.C. when the Romans came to dominate them.

The Hellenistic empires of the eastern Mediterranean Sea came under the domination of Rome while it was a Republic. In the second and first centuries B.C. those same empires were subdivided into Roman provinces. Palestine became a part of the Syrian province in 63 B.C.

The Roman Republic ended with Octavian Caesar’s rise to power after he defeated Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C. and the subsequent suicides of Antony and the Ptolemaic Queen Cleopatra in Egypt. Octavian was made *Imperator*, or supreme army commander when he returned to Rome. The Senate also conferred upon him the titles *Augustus*, the August, and *Princeps*, the first of the Senate. This inaugurated the Roman Empire in 27 B.C., and its first emperor, Octavian, called Caesar Augustus. Through his wisdom as a ruler, Augustus secured the borders of the empire, enacted an empire-wide road building project (“All roads lead to Rome”), and as far as Roman Emperors go, was an excellent and just administra-

tor. Thus, he brought into existence the *pax Romana*—the peace of Rome. Jesus of Nazareth was born during the reign of Augustus.

Following Augustus, Tiberius became Emperor of the Roman Empire (A.D. 14-37). He was the stepson of Augustus, grand-uncle of Caligula who succeeded him, paternal uncle of Claudius who succeeded Caligula, and the great-grand uncle of Nero who followed Claudius to the throne. It was Tiberius who appointed the prefect of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Under the rule of Tiberius, Jesus engaged in His ministry and accomplished His work.

To sum up the conditions of the culture of the Roman Empire, it was a place of safer travel than any time to that point in history. For the most part the wars that transpired were fought to secure the frontiers. One notable exception to this was the war with the Jews in A.D. 66-70, which was fought to put down the Jews' rebellion against Rome.

However, with greater mobility the spread of disease was more rapid. Thus, physicians and healers of every kind abounded throughout the empire. In the New Testament we have Luke, the physician, Paul's companion in his many travels.

Communication between the peoples of the empire was more easily carried on because of the road system (remember, "All roads lead to Rome"), safety from pirates in sailing the Mediterranean, and the Koine Greek (common Greek). It is no surprise then that the New Testament was written in Koine Greek.

Slavery was prevalent in the Empire. Conquered peoples for the most part provided the source for slaves, and they were a large part of the Empire's population, especially in the city of Rome. Slaves at times were abused, but those who were loyal many times gained their freedom. Slaves who were domestics, tutors, secretaries, and experts in finance were allowed to earn money, and in time some of them purchased their freedom. It must be remembered that slaves had no rights because they were no different than the animals owned by their masters—they were chattel. Slavery had been a long time part of the ancient world and no one suggested that slavery, so important to the Roman culture, should be abolished. Thus, we see

the relationship of slaves to masters alluded to on several occasions in the New Testament.

The great wealth of the Empire was controlled by a few aristocrats, and the free poor were considerably below the slaves in status in Roman society. The gap between rich and poor continued to be great throughout the empire, including Palestine. Moreover, supplying the people with enough food, especially in the cities, was always a problem, and famines were not uncommon in the empire—some of which are mentioned in the New Testament.

The Roman Empire presented a fascinating conglomeration of diverse religious philosophies and beliefs. In Rome religions having their origins in Egypt, Persia, Greece, Gaul, Africa, and other far-flung areas of the empire were found. All kinds of philosophies and religious experiences were available to challenge the intellect and emotions. The New Testament mentions Simon of Samaria who was a magician. As a babe in Christ with a very weak faith, he fell back into his old desires offering money to Peter in an attempt to buy Peter's power to impart miraculous gifts to members of the church (Acts 8:9-24; also see Elymas the sorcerer—Acts 13:8). Idolatry was a part of the fabric of the empire and the people were highly superstitious.

FIRST-CENTURY RELIGION IN PALESTINE

Following the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile, the Gentiles made continual intrusions on the Jews themselves, their religion, and their customs. This process begins in the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah, and continues aggressively with the secular history of Hellenization begun by Alexander the Great, and finally culminates with the Romans.

The **Pharisees** arose to oppose the Gentile intrusions. *Pharisee* derives from a word meaning "to separate." They were zealous for the Law of Moses but were even more so for their oral traditions. An example of this is the prohibition of the Law of Moses to work on the Sabbath. Over the years the Rabbis determined what was and what was not work. The Pharisees bound those traditions and

multitudes like them on the populace to the point of setting aside the many component parts of the Law of Moses (Mat. 15:9).

The sect of the **Sadducees** was smaller than that of the Pharisees, yet they were a powerful force in Jewish society. They were the heirs of the Hellenists and were more Greek in their view of the world than they were Jewish. The Sadducees were also the wealthy ruling class in Jesus' day. They only accepted the Torah as God's Word and did not accept the prophets or the oral traditions. Thus, they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, life after death, angels, or spirits. They were fundamentally materialists. Many of them were part of the priesthood that controlled the temple in Jerusalem and the Jewish legal council called the Sanhedrin. They were in constant conflict with the Pharisees over their differences, two examples of which are recorded by Luke in Acts 4:2; 23:6-9.

The Sadducees thought it was best to get along with Rome. As long as they were at peace with Rome they could live comfortably. Because the Sadducees feared the people and Rome, they were against Jesus. They believed the Messiah would come, sword in hand, and drive the Gentiles out of the Promised Land. Because the Sadducees shared the popular view of what the Messiah would be, in their minds any Messiah figure was a threat to their power (John 11:48).

A third sect of the Jews was the **Essenes**. They are not mentioned in the Bible. They dealt with the culture of the day by withdrawing from it. They viewed everything in Jewish society as corrupt and lived in a monastic community, seeing themselves as the pure among the Jews. They thought the Messiah would come from them, and the pure from among the Essenes would re-establish Israel. The Romans destroyed the Essene community before attacking Jerusalem. It is thought that they copied the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The **Herodians** backed the policies and government of the Herodian family. This was especially the case during the time of Herod Antipas, ruler over Galilee and Perea during the lifetimes of John the Baptist and of Jesus. They are mentioned only twice in Mark and once in Matthew, but never in Luke, John, or the rest of the New

Testament. Mark tells us that they conspired with the Pharisees to kill Jesus, early in Jesus' ministry in Galilee (Mark 3:6). The Pharisees and Herodians joined with each other in an attempt to trap Jesus concerning paying taxes to Caesar (12:13-17; Mat. 22:16).

The foregoing is a very brief sketch of the culture and society of the Greco/Roman world in which the Jews in Palestine lived. Into this world Jesus was born, did His work among and for mankind, and ascended back to heaven (from which He came) following his resurrection.

INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND EARLY LIFE OF JESUS

The period of the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth is recorded in the four Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the first four books of the 27 books that comprise the New Testament. (Referring to these books as “the four gospels” is foreign to the New Testament and borrowed from denominationalists, whose respect for Bible authority is nothing more than lip service and their ignorance of how to ascertain it is woefully lacking. It ought to be given back to them.) There are not “four gospels,” but only one Gospel with four Holy Spirit inspired accounts of it. Remember the admonition of the apostle Peter: “If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11a). Moreover, we do not have the space to cover everything recorded about Jesus in the four accounts; thus, we will limit ourselves only to some things written about Jesus in the Divine record.

The four accounts are not biographies in the true definition of a biography. They were written to provide adequate evidence and credible witnesses to the end that good and honest-hearted people (Luke 8:11, 15), through a proper study of the same (John 5:39; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15), can be brought to:

1. Believe that Jesus is the unique and singular Son of God, who came to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies concerning Himself and demonstrate His power over all things (John 3:16; 8:24; 20:30-31; Mark 2:10; Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Jam. 2:14-26; Rev. 2:10)

2. Understand that Jesus was tempted (solicited) by Satan to sin (transgress God's Law—Jam. 4:17; 1 John 3:4) in every point as the devil tempts men to sin, but He did not succumb to Satan's efforts (Heb. 4:15)
3. Realize that Jesus taught the truth He daily lived, that He suffered crucifixion, and in so doing shed His blood for the remission of all men's sins as He died on behalf of lost mankind (John 1:1, 14; 8:31-32; 17:17; 3:14; Mat. 26:28; 16:21; Tit. 2:11-15)
4. Know Christ's body was buried, that He rose from the dead on the third day to die no more, that having received all authority from His Heavenly Father (John 2:19-21; Mat. 28:18; 1 Cor. 15:1-4), ascended back to heaven to rule over His kingdom/church, having first commissioned the apostles to preach His Gospel (God's power to save—Rom. 1:16) to all mankind until He comes again (Mat. 16:18-19; 28:18; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; 2 Tim. 2:2; Rom. 1:16; Acts 1:9-11; 2:38, 41-42, 47; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Eph. 5:23-27)
5. Comprehend that when Jesus comes the second time He will not set foot on the earth, but will execute judgment on all accountable persons who have ever lived on this old world so corrupted by sin (Mat. 25:31-48; John 12:48; Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 The. 1:7-10); following which the saved will enter heaven's eternal glory and the lost will be condemned to the eternal fires of hell because they refused to obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the way, the truth, and the life—being man's only access to the Father (Mat. 25:31-46; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 5:9).

The New Testament informs us that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea (Mat. 2:1). From secular and sacred sources we may determine that His birth was circa 6 B.C. His mother Mary was a virgin betrothed to Joseph of Nazareth, Galilee, who was a carpenter by trade (1:18-23; Luke 1:26-36). According to Matthew, His lineage is traced back to King David (Mat. 1:1-17). Jesus was

born during the reign of Herod the Great, who, having heard of His birth felt threatened and, thus, sought to kill Him by ordering all of Bethlehem's male children under age two to be killed (2:16-18), but Joseph was warned by an angel and took Mary and Jesus to Egypt. After Herod's death, Joseph brought the family back to Palestine, settling in Nazareth of Galilee (2:13-14).

Inspiration reveals little concerning Jesus' early life. Luke 2:41-52 recounts that when Jesus was 12 years old He accompanied His parents to Jerusalem. When they started their return trip to Nazareth, they were separated from Him, thinking Jesus was with others with whom they were traveling. When Mary and Joseph learned He was not with them, they returned to Jerusalem where they found Jesus in the temple, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." In response to His mother's comment, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing," Jesus responded with, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" The text leaves us with the following comment concerning the time between this event and when He began His ministry. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (2:43-52). After Jesus reached about 30 years of age, following His baptism by John the Baptist (Immerser), the forerunner of the Christ to the Jews, John declared him to be the Son of God. Jesus then entered into His earthly ministry (Mat. 3:1-13; John 1:34).

After Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit directed Him into the Judean desert where, after fasting for 40 days and nights, the devil approached Jesus for the express purpose of getting Him to transgress God's Law (to sin) (Mat. 4:1; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1; 1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17). Jesus' temptation is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the Synoptic accounts). They are called *synoptic* because they include many of the same accounts of the life and events in Christ's life, often in a similar sequence and wording. *Synoptic* is derived from the Greek words *syn*, meaning "together," and *optic*, meaning "seen" (*Oxford Dictionary*).

The devil came to Jesus and tempted Him three times—once to turn stone to bread, once to cast Himself off a mountain where angels would save Him, and once to offer Him all the kingdoms of the world. In all three cases, Jesus overcame and rejected Satan's temptation with the proper use of the Scriptures. Following the third attempt to get Jesus to sin, having failed in his efforts, the devil departed from the Lord (Mat. 4:1-11).

JESUS' GALILEAN MINISTRY

In Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his household, the apostle gives a picture of Jesus' ministry (Acts 10:37-38). He tells us:

That word, *I say*, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

Following the arrest of John, the forerunner of Jesus, our Lord returned to His home country of Galilee (Mat. 15:21ff). "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all" (Luke 4:14-15; Mark 1:14-15).

About Galilee

Around 160 B.C. a large Gentile population, with comparatively few Jews, lived in Galilee. However, by the first century the population of Jews therein had grown considerably. The area around the Sea of Galilee was noted as the busiest part of the place. Capernaum, located in the Northeast corner, was rich and contained a multi-ethnic population. In the first century the area was identified as upper and lower Galilee. Its population continued to be multi-national. Accordingly Matthew called it "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Mat. 4:15).

Major roads ran through Galilee. It was a place of continuous traffic. Hence, in Matthew 4:15 the King James Version calls it "the way of the sea." The towns were heavily populated, and, in general,

the people were uneducated, bad-mannered, and filled with superstitions. When Jesus visited Nazareth, the people did not receive Him well (Luke 4:16-30; Mat. 13:54-57; compare John 4:43-45). Nathanael well represented the general view of people outside of Nazareth regarding it when he asked, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Galilee as a whole was more interested in and more receptive to Jesus than were those of Judea.

We may divide Jesus' Galilean work into periods—one before and one after He sent out the twelve apostles to preach (Mat. 10). At that time, Jesus preached around Galilee, and His first disciples began to follow Him as He traveled the country (4:18-20). John tells us of Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine (pure grape juice) at a marriage feast at Cana.

The early work of Jesus was rejected by His home town (Luke 4:16-30). In the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus read Isaiah 61:1ff. When He finished the reading, He amazed all who heard Him, announcing to those present that this Scripture was now fulfilled in their ears (Luke 4:21). Jesus' reputation began to spread throughout Galilee. In Mark 1:21-28 and Luke 4:31-37 we read that the people were astonished at His doctrine because He taught them with authority. After casting a demon out of a man, He went to Peter's house. Finding Peter's mother-in-law sick with fever, He healed her, and she arose from her sick bed to take care of them. However, it is interesting to note the fleshly brethren of Jesus did not believe He was the Son of God until after His resurrection (Mark 6:3-4; John 7:5; Acts 1:12-14; 12:17; 15:13; 21:8; Gal. 2:9; Jam. 1:1; Jude 1; 1 Cor. 15:7; Jude 20-21).

Luke 5:1-11 includes the account of the first miraculous draught of fishes in which Jesus told Peter that from henceforth he would fish for and catch men. Peter left his net, and, accompanied by James and John, the sons of Zebedee, he followed Jesus as His disciples thereafter.

This period includes the Sermon on the Mount, the first of five major sermons from Jesus found in Matthew 5, 6, 7. It is Luke who records the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6).

The first part of Jesus' Galilean work began with the healing of the nobleman's son (John 4:43-54). It continued until the twelve apostles were commissioned to preach.

The Samaritans were interested in Jesus' message (4:39), which was not the case with many of the Galileans. Jesus returned to Cana, the site of His first miracle. Due to His Judean miracles, His fame had preceded Him (4:45). It was because of that reputation that the nobleman came to Jesus on behalf of his son who was almost dead. Jesus had rebuked the Jews for their desires to see a sign from Him (4:48), but after listening to the humble and plaintive pleas of a father on behalf of his sick son, our Lord told the nobleman to go on his way for his son lived. The man had approached Jesus with the following words, "Come down" to his residence and heal his son, but the man's faith in Jesus to heal his son was so strong that he accepted the Word of Jesus (4:50). As the man traveled to his home, he received the glad message that his son was healed. Thus, the nobleman and his household came to believe in Jesus (4:53). We know this as the second miracle of Christ's Galilean ministry (4:54), the first, as previously noted, being at a marriage feast when He turned water into wine (2:1-11). It was at this time that Jesus began calling the twelve apostles. Their names are found in Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, and Luke 6:13-16. The major part of Jesus' ministry began with the healing of the nobleman's son and the stilling of the storm (Mat. 8:23-27). The nobleman's faith in Jesus was commended, but the lack of the disciples' faith in Jesus when He calmed the storm was rebuked.

During this time, our Lord continues to call His twelve apostles (9:9). He also continues to collide with the Pharisees. They were very upset with Jesus because of His association with "publicans and sinners." "But when Jesus heard *that*, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (9:12). Following this confrontation, Jesus went up to a mountainside to pray and remained there, praying to His Father all night. When morning came, He called His disciples and from them chose the twelve apostles.

Jesus sent the twelve apostles to preach to the people. Their names are given in Matthew 10:2-3. He tells them to carry nothing with them as they travel from city to city. Luke informs us that Jesus sent seventy disciples in pairs before Him to preach to the different towns (Luke 10:1-24).

We learn from Matthew 11:2-6 about two messengers that John the Immerser sent to Jesus to enquire whether Jesus was the Messiah, or were they to wait for another.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me (11:4-6).

The works that Jesus did testified as to Who He was. After this episode, Jesus spoke to the multitudes about John, the man sent to prepare the people to receive Him.

During this time our Lord delivered many lessons in parables. Beginning in Matthew 13:1, Jesus taught about the Kingdom of Heaven. He delivered the parables of the Sower, the Tares, the Mustard Seed, and the Leaven to the multitudes. Privately, Jesus spoke about the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl, and the Dragnet.

Jesus' second or final **Galilean ministry** began after the murder of John the Immerser at the hands of Herod. His second ministry in Galilee included the events of feeding the 5000 and walking on water (14:22-23, Mark 6:45-52, John 6:16-21). Following this, the apostles "came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Mat. 14:33). After hearing of John's death, Jesus took a boat and privately traveled to a place near Bethsaida where He could be alone. On that occasion He spoke to the many people who had followed Him, walking from the communities. At this time He fed them all with a boy's "five loaves and two fish."

During this time, in Matthew 15:1-20 (also see Mark 7:1-23), Jesus taught on what truly defiled a person. In answer to the fault-finding of the Pharisees, Jesus said:

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are *the things* which defile a man (Mat. 15:18-20).

After these things, Jesus traveled to parts “of Tyre and Sidon.” This is where the event involving the Canaanite woman’s daughter transpired (15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). This incident is an example of the importance Jesus places on one’s faith in Him. He told the woman, “O woman, great *is* thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Mat. 15:28). Furthermore, Jesus taught once again on the importance of faith in the matter of the cleansing of the ten lepers (Luke 17:11-19).

We learn from Mark, that after Jesus passed through Sidon, He entered the region of the Decapolis: a group of ten cities south east of Galilee. This is where the healing of the deaf mute took place (Mark 7:31-37). Following this miraculous healing the disciples say: “he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.” This is the last event in a series of miraculous reports which builds up to Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (8:29).

From Judea and Perea to Jerusalem

At this point in time, Jesus began His last journey to Jerusalem. He traveled around Samaria, through Perea, on through Judea, coming finally to Jerusalem. On this occasion Jesus spoke to His apostles about His death, for this was the week of His crucifixion. He was entering Jerusalem for the last time. Thus, His death was only a few days away. Matthew and Mark record Jesus teaching His disciples “how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Mat. 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-33).

Later, during this same period, which record is found at about the middle of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we find the confession of Peter and the transfiguration of Jesus. These events began in Caesarea Philippi, located just north of the Sea of Galilee, as Jesus began His final journey to Jerusalem. These events in Jesus’ life reveal

further declarations to His disciples that He is the Son of God and that His suffering and death were all a part of God's great Scheme of Redemption of mankind from sin.

That which led to Peter's confessing that Jesus is the Son of God began as a discourse between Jesus and His disciples (Mat. 16:13; Mark 8:27; Luke 9:18). Jesus queried His disciples with: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" (Mat. 16:13). Peter answered Him: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Matthew tells us that Jesus blessed Peter for his answer, and said to him: "flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (16:17). By acknowledging Peter's confession, Jesus by implication declares Himself to be the anointed Son of God. Jesus also declared that He would build His church on the bedrock truth that Peter confessed—that He is the Son of God and that His upcoming death would not stop Him from keeping His promise to build His church.

Jesus' Later Perea Ministry

Following Peter's confession, we have the account of Jesus' transfiguration recorded in Matthew 17:1-9, Mark 9:2-8, and Luke 9:28-36. Peter, James, and John were taken by Jesus up to an unnamed mountain. Once on the mountain, Matthew tells us Jesus "was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (17:2). The prophets Elijah and Moses appeared with Him, and Jesus talked to them. Luke describes Jesus as being in a state of glory and records that the apostles beheld His "glory" (Luke 9:32). Following Peter's proposal that a tabernacle should be built for Elijah, one for Moses, and another for Jesus, a bright cloud appeared around them, and a voice from the cloud declared: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (Mat. 17:5). From the transfiguration of the Christ we see God the Father declaring that it is His Son to whom we are to listen (John 14:6; Mat. 28:18; Col. 3:17; Heb. 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:16-18).

Luke records many of the events in the later part of our Lord's Judean ministry. John the apostle informs us that Jesus returned to the area where He was baptized. In John 10:40-42, he also tells us that

“beyond Jordan” many people “believed on him,” saying “all things that John spake of this man were true.” Because John the Immerser was active in Bethabara and Aenon it is thought that Perea was in this area (John 1:28; 3:23).

This period of Jesus’ ministry includes His teaching on the church. In His teaching, Jesus set out a future body of followers and explains the part the apostles would have in that one body (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18). The parables of the Lost Sheep and the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18, also referencing the Kingdom of Heaven are included.

In Matthew 18:18, Jesus continued instructing the apostles, saying to them, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Literally in the Greek language Jesus is saying to the apostles that they will only bind on earth what has already been bound in heaven, and they will loose on earth only what has been first loosed in heaven. Thus, the early church understood that the apostles were speaking the will of the Christ as the Holy Spirit revealed to them and directed them to speak it infallibly (Acts. 2:42).

Toward the conclusion of this period, the apostle John relates the account of the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-46). After that amazing episode, the next day the people gather for the feast in Jerusalem; they welcome Him as He comes down from the Mount of Olives, walking toward Jerusalem (Mat. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19). As Jesus nears the city, He pauses to contemplate the city’s sad history of sin and to weep over it, forecasting its doom (Luke 19:41-44). Jesus then made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which events moved Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin to decide to kill Him. The three synoptic books have Jesus entering Jerusalem and cleansing the temple. They also include several parables and sermons such as the widow’s mite and Jesus’ forecast of the destruction of the temple, as well as His second coming during the week following.

During the week the synoptic books relate conflicts between the elders of the Jews and our Lord. The Jewish leaders questioned His

authority and He pronounced woes on the Pharisees, specifically emphasizing their hypocrisy. During this period Judas Iscariot colluded with the Jewish elders to hand over Jesus to them for the price of, as Matthew notes, thirty pieces of silver (Mat. 26:14-16).

In Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, we have the account of Jesus' Olivet Discourse, named accordingly because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives. The discourse is about the signs that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem, destroyed by Titus (the Roman General) in A.D. 70, and the end of the world with no signs preceding it, which time is not known by man.

Then follows the account of Jesus and His disciples' observance of the Jewish Passover feast and our Lord's institution of His Supper. Furthermore, following the institution of the Supper, Jesus made it clear that the Lord's Supper was not to be observed again until He would partake of it with the citizens of it (Mat. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). At this time, Jesus also gave the great example of service by washing the disciples' feet (John 13:4-15). After these events, Jesus walked to Gethsemane and therein underwent the agony of mind and body in facing up to the ordeal of the crucifixion through intense and fervent prayer. Following His betrayal, arrest, and what followed in the garden, He finally came face to face with the reality of His shameful and agonizing crucifixion at Golgotha and His death on the cross.

After six grueling, shameful, and agonizing hours nailed to His cross, Jesus willed Himself to die. He had declared His work finished and commended His spirit to His Father. Then the great curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn from top to bottom, thereby signifying that access to God was now open to all through their belief and obedience to Jesus (John 14:6; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 5:8-9; John 19:1ff).

After the Romans pierced His body's side with a spear to make sure He was dead, the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross, laid in a borrowed tomb, and left until after the Sabbath. Early on the first day of the week following Jesus' death, women came to prepare the body for burial, they found the tomb empty. Jesus had risen

from the dead and would appear to many to prove that death had no hold over Him (Mat. 27:27-66; Mark 15:16-47; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:17-42).

During the forty days between the crucifixion and His ascension, Jesus appeared alive several times. At one time He appeared to over 500 of His disciples. First, He appeared to the women near the tomb who came to prepare His body for burial, then to Mary Magdalene, to whom He declared that He had not yet ascended to the Father. He suddenly appeared in a room without coming through the door. Jesus appeared to Thomas who had doubted the reports of His resurrection that he might have the necessary proof that He had been raised from the dead.

Again in Galilee He appears, and the disciples saw another miracle. Though they had fished all night and caught nothing, Jesus instructed them to lower their nets one more time, and their nets were filled with fish. Then Jesus cooked breakfast for them and taught them many important truths. Peter was told to feed the Lord's sheep and was told the manner of death he would suffer. Jesus appeared to two men on the road to Emmaus, and as He ate with them and talked with them, they recognized Him. The men returned to Jerusalem, found the disciples, and testified of their encounter with Jesus (Mat. 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:1-53; John 20:1-21:25; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:6).

Jesus' last act on earth was to ascend from it and go into heaven. He did this in the presence of the disciples. He ascended on a cloud which hid Him from their view. As they stood gazing into the heavens, two angels came to tell them that Jesus would return one day in a similar manner. Until then, Jesus sits at the right hand of His Father in heaven, having all authority in heaven and on earth, ruling over all things, including His church, to which He adds all of those who believe and obey the Gospel in being baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins to live faithful lives in service so they too might someday be where He now is (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:9-11; 2:38; 22:16; Gal. 3:27).

We close the brief study of the life of Christ on earth with the words of John the apostle:

And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen (John 21:25).

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PERIOD OF THE CHURCH

Gene Hill

Carl E. "Gene" Hill, Jr., was born in New Richmond, Ohio. He is married to the former Jerry Booker. They have one son and one grandson.

Gene and Jerry obeyed the Gospel in 1975, at the old Andrews Avenue Church of Christ in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He began studying at the Florida School of Preaching beginning in 1976, and graduated in 1978. This was during the tenure of the late B. C. Carr as the school's Director. Gene began full-time preaching in 1982, serving congregations in Florida, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. He is currently working with the congregation in Indianola, Mississippi.

A Biblical understanding of what the church is, who makes up its membership, and what its responsibilities are is crucial if we are to be adequately prepared for the Second Coming of Christ and the judgment of mankind that follows.

The church is that religious organization one reads about upon the pages of the New Testament planned from eternity (Eph. 3:8-12) with the purpose to contain all those heeding the Gospel call (2 The. 2:13-14; Rom. 16:25-27) in loving obedience (Heb. 5:8-9) upon which obedience the Lord adds them, as the saved, to His church (Acts 2:47). It is the church Jesus promised to build (Mat. 16:18-19) which began on the Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:1-47). This church is not a Jewish synagogue. It is not the Roman Catholic Church. It is not any Protestant denomination (Mat. 15:8-9). It is not an afterthought or replacement for any previous plan of God which man somehow was able to thwart.

This lesson deals with the church beginning in Jerusalem on the Pentecost following the crucifixion of Christ, which beginning is recorded in Acts 2. It continues through Revelation and, by implication, unto the Second Coming of Christ.

The mission of the church is gleaned from the Great Commission passages of Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:46-47. It is one of instruction in the Gospel (Mat. 28:19; Mark

16:15) that required repentance and remission of sin be preached in His name beginning in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46).

The parable of the Sower should also be considered (8:11-15), as this passage gives us some insight into our work. Jesus tells us the seed is the Word of God and the soils are representative of the hearts of the various people with whom we will come in contact. Furthermore, we learn we are to sow only the Gospel seed, that we will not convert the world, that evangelism is our task, and our audience is accountable for its own response (Mat. 13:10-18).

Jesus, in His last instructions before ascending into heaven, informs the apostles they are to be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then into all the world. The record of Acts gives more than ample testimony to the faithfulness of the apostles of Jesus in carrying out this command. However, for this to happen, and it be self-sustaining, the church, yet to be established, had to be structured in such a way that it would be able to continue the work of evangelism (28:20).

The church—that is the blood-bought body to which the Lord added the souls of those being saved (Acts 20:28; 2:47)—is pictured as a kingdom over which Jesus is now reigning (Mat. 16:18; Dan. 7:13-14; Acts 1:9; 2:22-36). The kingdom of heaven, as any kingdom, has a ruler or king sitting on His throne (2 Sam. 7:12-13; 1 Chr. 17:11-15; Acts 2:29-36; 5:31; Phi. 2:9-11; 1 Tim. 6:15). This heavenly kingdom has a territory which is all the world (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16) and every nation (Isa. 2:2-3; Rom. 16:25-26). It also has subjects—all nations (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 10:34-35), every creature (Mark 16:15-16), and whosoever will (Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17). Christ the Lord is our King (Jer. 23:5-6; Mat. 2:2; Luke 1:31-33), on His throne (Isa. 9:6-7; Acts 2:22-36), and is now reigning in actuality (Acts 2:30-33; 1 Cor. 15:24-26). The Word of God is its law (Psa. 19:7; Jam. 2:12), a perfect law (Jam. 1:25; John 12:48), all-sufficient for God's ends (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Eph. 3:1-4).

Jesus is the head of the church which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18, 24). There are no other positions of overall leadership of

a single individual in the church of the New Testament. The local congregation consisting of saints, a plurality of bishops overseeing the local church, along with those serving as deacons is the only structure authorized by God to carry out His work here on earth (Phi 1:1). The only references we find regarding *church* are only mentioned in regards to a local congregation (as is the one in Philippi), to congregations in a district (1 Cor. 16:1-2), or to the church as made up of all the saved (Acts 20:28). There is no other hierarchy or government authorized.

The very first congregation of that church purchased by God's blood (20:28) is described in Acts 2:41-47. In verse 41 we see it founded and partially organized. It begins its work of teaching to bring spiritual maturity to its members in verse 42. We see love for one another (1 Pet. 1:22) expressed by physical needs being seen to (Acts 2:43-45). Both evangelism and edification are pursued as demonstrated in verses 46-47 with the inevitable conversions taking place. We see Peter and John vigorously pursuing their apostolic mandate by going into the temple and preaching the Gospel with the results expected (3:1-4:4) in spite of being arrested. This then is the work Christ assigned to the apostles and which work has been passed down to us (Mat. 28:20).

As we contemplate this religious organization started and purchased by Christ, and we begin to see it functioning under the hands of the apostles, we wonder how congregations would organize themselves after the passing of the apostles and the cessation of the miraculous. Acts, as well as the epistles, gives us ample information to guide our efforts going forward through time to the coming of our Lord with His mighty angels (2 The. 1:6-10).

Inevitably, in any organization needs will arise that require additional hands to assist in carrying the burden. In Acts 6, we see such an occasion. Regardless of the reasons for which a want arose, the fact is that more efficiencies were needed to see that the needs of everyone were met (5:34-37; 6:1). Whether or not the seven men chosen were in fact the first deacons, it is the case that they "served

tables” (6:2-7). This was merely the ongoing effort in organizing local congregations.

The Holy Spirit has provided for the church in all times and places a plan for governing and ordering the affairs of the local congregation. As stated previously, there is no organization larger than the local church yet smaller than the church universal and such being the case the only appropriate conclusion is that each local church is self-governing with no higher earthly authority to direct its affairs.

It is not until the first missionary journey of the apostle Paul (13:2-14:28) that we see the first elders being appointed (14:23) to a leadership capacity. The Holy Ghost has provided qualities which must be possessed by any man to be appointed for the work of an elder (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). We see the need for men to possess these qualities when we recognize the practical work they do (Acts 20:17-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

They serve in submission to Jesus as the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18) and in His capacity as Chief Shepherd and Bishop (1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4). They serve in an oversight capacity to a congregation (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Tit. 1:5) with a plurality of men serving (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). Their Head, Jesus, and His headquarters, is in heaven (1 Pet. 3:22; Acts 2:29-36). Each congregation is autonomous or self governing with no authorized oversight or interference from any outside, much less superior, authority (1 Pet. 5:2).

A local church (congregation) is authorized to do only that and all of that which is specifically stated or implied by what is revealed in Scripture (Col. 3:17). They are to see to the physical needs of their own members (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). A local congregation is able to assist any church member (Gal. 6:10), as they are able (2 Cor. 8:1-6), regardless of locale (Acts 11:27-30; Rom. 15:22-29; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). They also have the authority to help any person in need (Gal. 6:10). The church is to have a teaching program for the body to edify and bring itself to spiritual maturity (Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 4:6-16; 2 Tim. 2:2). Each member is to participate in this and all other efforts of the local church (Heb. 10:19-25).

A local church is to see to the spiritual purity of its own membership. By taking heed to the doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), we are able to discern truth from error (Mat. 7:15-20), to try the spirits (1 John 4:1) to see if they are in fact faithful (Rev. 2:2). Spiritual and mature brethren also have the ability and obligation to see that members are walking in the faith, living pure lives (1 Cor. 5:1-13), and if not, to exhort them to return to faithfulness (Jude 23). Should they not desire to do so, then we are mark and avoid (Rom. 16:17), or to note and have no company with those walking disorderly all the while admonishing him as a brother (2 The. 3:6-15). The purpose of this effort is not to be vindictive but to see whether the sinful will destroy the works of the flesh (1 Cor. 5:5; Col. 3:5ff).

As head of the church, the Lord has given instructions to all those that would believe on Him, through the words of the apostles (John 17:20-21), what the mission of the church is (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-49; Acts 1:8). Evangelizing the world, therefore, is what the church is to be doing. What happens when a local congregation faithfully carries out its responsibility to teach and preach God's will?

Persecution by evil-minded, ignorant individuals can result simply because the Gospel is faithfully preached (Mat. 10:32-42; 2 Tim. 3:12). The events of Acts 3, 4, and 5 provide insights as to how the church in any age is to conduct its affairs. Those guilty of sin need to be clearly charged not only with their conduct but also the consequences (3:11-18). Repentance needs to be specifically called for on the part of the guilty (3:19-26). Not only will the guilty not like it (4:1-3), they will also attempt to suppress the message and silence the messengers (4:5-18). The faithful have no recourse but to stand firm (4:19-22) and continue the Lord's work (4:31).

This same lesson applies to brethren that seek to maintain a faithful walk in the Lord. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that their congregation would face false teachers not only from without, but even from among their own selves would some men arise seeking to draw away disciples after them (20:29-30). Paul faced false brethren

that persecuted him (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4). Peter and Barnabas at one time caused problems (2:11-21).

We also see how the church is to handle problems of internal discipline and how the Lord views even secret sins (Acts 5:1-11). There arose a need in the congregation to raise funds to support members in financial need, and the brethren rose to the occasion (4:34-37). Ananias and his wife Sapphira conspired to appear to be more generous than their covetous hearts would allow in selling a parcel of land and representing the money donated from proceeds as if it were the whole amount (5:1-2). The inevitable discipline was swift and sure, resulting in their deaths (5:3-10), with far-reaching effects on both the congregation and the community at large (5:11-16).

There is a greater lesson here for any congregation and the church at large as well, one that would appear to be obvious. Whereas Peter, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, was able to discern the thoughts and the intents of the heart (5:3), the only way we have of determining the thoughts of the heart is by the words we hear or the actions we see (Mat. 7:15-20; 12:33-37; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-9). When we see or hear actions identified by the Holy Spirit as works of the flesh, then we are not merely justified to judge them as carnal; we are commanded to do so (Eph. 5:11; John 7:24).

How serious is the issue of congregational faithfulness? We can see how relatively little time can pass before congregations find themselves in spiritually dire circumstances. It is commonly accepted that the apostle John is the author of the Revelation letter having written it in about A.D. 96. The dating of Acts 2 in which the church was founded is about A.D. 33. Assuming these dates to be correct, then a period of 63 years has passed. The Ephesian church had its beginning under the hand of Paul in about A.D. 54-55 as recorded in Acts 19. This gives us a period of about 41-42 years for the Ephesian church to become as described in Revelation 2:1-7. Some of the brethren addressed by Paul in Acts 20:17-38 may have still been alive and serving. Even though doctrinally correct (Rev. 2:2-3, 6), the church had left its first love. One writer speculates that the first love may have been the burning of the books in Acts 19:19-20, after

which the Word of God grew and prevailed. It may also have been their love manifested towards Paul in Acts 20:36-38. He also suggests the love they expressed towards the saints (Eph. 1:15) (Hailey 122). Whatever the first love actuality was, it was clear that what they had become was not what they had been, and the Lord admonishes them to repent and return to that first love.

What can a local congregation do to acquire and maintain their good standing with the Lord? It is reasonable to believe that the answer to the question would be applicable to any congregation of the Lord's people at any time up to and including the Lord's second return.

The Ecclesiastes writer provides the answer (Ecc. 12:13; John 14:15; 4:23-24). The clear-cut answer for church soundness from her founding until Christ returns to receive the kingdom unto Himself and to deliver it back to God is to remember Who we worship and why.

We must understand why it was necessary for an innocent Lamb to be sacrificed for us; then we will be a long way towards the same sort of heart possessed by the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). When we can appreciate God's gracious gift to us as much as did Paul, our worship will become deeper and richer (Rom. 5:15-18; 6:23). The heart that appreciates God's great gift of salvation will truly worship God as completely as He expects and desires. Paul expresses the sort of devotion this kind of worship must have (Gal. 2:20).

If I eagerly look forward to each opportunity to gather together with other saints of the Lord to offer up prayers, songs of praise, listen to preaching that magnifies and extols God, pay into the treasury a portion of God's physical blessings to me, participate in communion with the Lord as I examine my own faithfulness in light of God's Word, how would I ever become unfaithful? The answer is that I would not (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

What would be the effect on my desire to spread the good tidings of God's grace to those around me so they too might share in the blessedness to be obtained by a heart set on God and His Will?

Would it not be equal to or even greater than the brethren of the first century church, especially when we have a more complete revelation than they at any given time?

If a congregation were truly in possession of such a spirit of humility, thanksgiving, and spiritual awareness as this, would there be much of an ongoing need to exhort brethren to be faithful to congregational gatherings? Would there be a need to actually recruit Bible class teachers, or would we instead have an eager waiting list of well-qualified and mature Christians?

If the churches of Asia admonished by Jesus in the Revelation letter had kept this focus, would there have been a need for a call to repent? If brethren in our own time truly accepted the testimony of the Holy Spirit, would there ever be a breach in fellowship occurring at all, much less continuing on for years with no end in sight?

There are a few thoughts in regards to the church and its progress into the future which we might consider. The Parable of the Sower teaches us that the Word of God is a seed to be sown in the hearts of men in which it will have varying degrees of success at growing and bearing spiritual fruit (Luke 8:11-15; Mat. 24:35). That the seed will not pass away and will produce today what it did in the first century provides hope for the future of the church, as long as there are honest and good hearts to receive the Word. It may well be that should the Lord delay His return long enough that the church could become cold in its prayer vigils and many formerly faithful fall away (18:1-8; 2 Pet. 3:1-13; Mat. 24:12-13). Realizing the dangers, we should continually study and lay hold on the faith.

Every Christian in each congregation of God's people must make a determination as to whether or not they will continue to watch and wait for the Savior (Mat. 25:13; 1 The. 5:5-6). May the faithful of the Lord be vigilant until His return!

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SECOND COMING AND JUDGMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the second coming of Christ gives the Christian hope to press forward in this life. Without faith in the second coming, the Christian lives his life in vain. We can be assured that one day Christ will return as He has promised (John 14:1-3).

The second coming of Christ is one of the more prominent doctrines in the New Testament. It is also one of the most misunderstood doctrines taught today. For many years controversy has surrounded this subject because of the many twisted and perverted views which have been advocated.

The most popular view in the religious world is that when Christ comes again, He will establish His kingdom and rule from Jerusalem for one thousand years. This view, known as Premillennialism, will be discussed at length and compared to the Bible teaching about the second coming.

THE PREMILLENNIAL VIEW

One of the most out-spoken advocates of the premillennial view was William Blackstone. In his book, *Jesus Is Coming*, Blackstone made several references to the premillennial idea of the second coming. He said:

This “Day of Judgment” is also called “The Day of the Lord,” “The Last Days,” and “The Great Day.”

It is ushered in with plagues and closes in fire, between which lies a long season of the “sure mercies of David,” or the Millennium (102-103).

According to Blackstone, the “day of the Lord” is not a literal 24-hour day, but a long series of years (102). Therefore, the “day of the Lord” is not the end, but the beginning of the thousand-year reign of Christ, according to Blackstone. He said:

In it there will be four visible judgments, in the following order:
 I. The Judgment of the Saints for their works.... II. The Judgment of the living nations, who are upon the earth at the Revelation....
 III. The Judgment of the dead at the Great White Throne....
 IV. The Judgment of angels, into fire “prepared for the devil and his angels” (103-106).

He believes that the saints who have been caught up in the rapture will come with Christ to execute judgment upon the world (104). This judgment will be upon those living on the earth during Christ’s coming at “the Revelation.” “Then follows the Millennium, which is one continuous day of Judgment (Acts 17:31)” (104).

Most premillennialists, like Blackstone, advocate several comings and departures of Christ. They feel that 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 refers to the rapture and 2 Peter 3 refers to “the Revelation.” It is at the Revelation, they believe, that Christ begins His thousand-year reign. Hal Lindsey, in his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, believes that when Christ comes again, it will be with His saints who had been caught up in the rapture seven years previously (173). He believes that at Christ’s coming, there will be a violent judgment and the gathering of all nations against Jerusalem to battle. At this time, Lindsey believes that God will give the Jews supernatural strength to fight and they will overcome (174). Christ will then establish a kingdom in Jerusalem to reign on the earth for one thousand years.

At the end of a thousand years the unbelieving children rebel, Christ judges them, then He completely changes the old heaven and earth and creates a new one (Rev. 21; Isa. 65:17; 2 Pet. 3:8-13) (178).

Lindsey further states, “the ‘elements’ are actually atoms that will be ‘loosed’ which will be caused by the fervent heat. Afterward, Christ will put these atoms back together to form the new heaven and earth where only glorified persons without their sinful nature will live” (178).

The Bible **never** mentions Christ coming **with** His saints in “a rapture,” but it does teach Christ **coming for** His saints to take them home to heaven (John 14:1-3; 1 The. 4:17). Furthermore, Revelation 2:10 reveals that when we are faithful unto death, we will receive a “crown of life.” That crown is given in heaven, not on earth during a thousand-year reign. In 1 Peter 1:4, Peter tells the Christians they have an inheritance waiting in heaven. He does not tell them that they will receive this inheritance after the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth.

The New Testament nowhere reveals that at a “great battle against Jerusalem” the Jews will be given supernatural powers to overcome. In Acts 10:34-35, Peter says that “God is no respecter of persons.” Peter does not teach a thousand-year reign in 2 Peter 3:8-13. It does not teach that unbelievers will be judged and then Christ will completely change the old heaven and earth into a new one. It is preposterous to believe that Christ will “destroy” or “loose” atoms with heat and then put them back together again to form a “new heaven and new earth.” G. C. Berkouwer, in his book, *The Return Of Christ*, said, “Although Peter spoke of the perishing of the world that then existed in the flood (2 Pet. 3:6), he apparently was not referring here to total destruction or annihilation” (222). He believes that Peter refers to renovation rather than destruction. He also believes that the “new heavens and new earth” will be right here on the earth today, but in a renovated form. He believes that “nothing will be lost” (221).

Proponents of premillennialism offer no **valid** proof that the new heaven and earth will be here on the present earth. These passages are twisted to fit their perverted doctrine. W. E. Best, in his book, *Christ's Kingdom Is Future*, follows suit with those already discussed. He believes that 2 Peter 3:12 describes an earth that is discovered,

not annihilated (149). He further states that 2 Peter 2:13 refers to a renewed earth that is free from sin (150). In the *Second Coming Bible*, the author explains verses twelve and thirteen as an earth that will be renovated, not destroyed (Biederwolf 533).

The problem with those who teach this doctrine is that they have absolutely no understanding concerning the kingdom. They believe that the church and the kingdom are different. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus said, “upon this rock I will build my church;...And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom.” Jesus is referring to the same thing in these verses. The church and the kingdom **are** the same. In Mark 9:1, Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.” In Acts 2:1-4, this very thing of which Jesus had referred, was fulfilled. In Acts 2:30-34, Peter tells the people assembled that Christ is sitting on the throne of David. This is not a literal throne in literal Jerusalem, but in heaven (1 Cor. 15). The kingdom is not future as some contend, but it is here now! If these men, and others like them, would understand that fact, then they would understand 2 Peter 3 without forcing a meaning into the text that does not exist.

W. E. Best said that Jesus will sit on the throne of David. That throne, he believes, is in Jerusalem, not in heaven (144). He believes Jesus will sit on a literal throne, in the literal city of Jerusalem and reign over an earthly kingdom. Jesus Himself denied this in John 18:36. He explained to Pilate that He would not literally rule in Jerusalem because His kingdom was not an earthly one, but a spiritual one. Jesus never promised to establish and rule over an earthly kingdom. That is why the Jews were upset and confused. They thought that Jesus was planning to establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem.

In the *Neal-Wallace Discussion on the Thousand Year Reign Of Christ*, Neal said about the day of the Lord: “‘Day’ may mean a period of time of twelve or twenty-four hours, six days, forty years or a period of centuries in duration” (337). He said that the day of grace runs from Christ’s first coming until His second. He also states that

“the day of the Lord, just as the day of grace, is an extended period of many events” (337). He categorizes the events that are to take place as:

1. the morning of that event is the taking of his own (1 Cor. 15:22-23),
2. the reign of Christ over His enemies (1 Cor. 15:24-26); 2 Pet. 3:7),
3. the evening of that day is the destruction of the earth by fire and the destruction of the ungodly (2 Pet. 3:7, 12; Rev. 20:11-15),
4. after this comes the period of absolute righteousness under the “day of God” (2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1-8) (337-8).

Neal also believed “the ‘day of the Lord’ gives space for the ‘times of restoration’ (Acts 3:19-21); or the reign over his enemies (1 Cor. 15:24-26); or the thousand-year reign plus a little season (Rev. 20:1-10)” (338). He sees a distinction between “the day of the Lord” from the eternal period after the fire that is called “the day of God” (338). In answering this doctrine, Foy Wallace said:

No one denies that “day” is sometimes used in the dispensational sense, as the “day of salvation” in 2 Cor. 6:2—but the thing mentioned must be continuous through the dispensation. Salvation is continuous through that “day” or period. The resurrection is the thing mentioned “at the last day.” If that is a dispensational day, then the resurrection must be continuous through it...

The expression “at the last day” when the righteous are raised (John 6:40, 44, 54), and “at the last trump” when the Lord descends (1 Cor. 15:51, 52; 1 Thess. 4:16), signify the last occasion—the end of time. There can be no thousand years after “the last day.” There cannot be another resurrection after “the last trump” (345-6).

THE BIBLE DOCTRINE OF THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

As previously noted, there are many perverted views about Christ’s Second Coming. Both the premillennialists and the post-millennialists take 2 Peter 3 out of context and give it a meaning to fit their doctrine. What does the Bible actually teach in 2 Peter 3 about the Second Coming of Christ? It teaches (1) the certainty of

his coming (3:1-9); (2) the circumstances of his coming (3:10-13); and (3) the consequences of his coming (3:14-18) (Winkler 22).

Peter dealt with the Second Coming in this chapter because of the scoffers who were denying this great event. The scoffers felt that since Christ had not already returned, He would never come back. Peter wanted the Christians to know that Christ would come again as He has promised. He would not come on man's timetable, but on God's. A simple exegesis of 2 Peter 3 will prove the doctrines previously discussed are false. More emphasis will be placed on verses 8-13.

Verses 3-4

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.

Peter warned the saints that the scoffers would come denying the Second Coming of Christ. Kistemaker comments on verse 3 by saying, "in the years that precede the return of Christ numerous scoffers will ridicule Christians for their faith in God" (325). Commenting on verse four he said:

They deny the judgment day will come...they scoff at Jesus' promise that He will return on the last day and contemptuously they ask, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" Hence, they doubt the truthfulness of the written and spoken word of God (325).

Guy N. Woods adds, "These mockers insinuated that the promise of the Lord's coming was a delusion, and the expectation thereof a vain hope" (181).

Verses 5-7

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

In verse 5, Peter reminds the Christians that it was God who made the world. In verse 6, he points out that it was also God that destroyed the world in the days of Noah. Peter contrasts verse 7 with the past destruction and the future destruction by starting with *but*. He says, “**But** the heavens and earth, **which now are**, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment.” The world at that time was destroyed by water, but the world now will be destroyed by fire. Paul discusses this same event in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9.

Verse 8 begins a section of great controversy today. What did Peter mean in the following six verses? Did he teach a thousand-year reign or utter destruction at Christ’s second advent?

Verse 8

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Peter did not want the first century Christians to be ignorant of the Second Coming of Christ. He did not want the scoffers to lead the Christians away by convincing them that Christ was never coming again. He states “that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Peter was not saying that Christ was coming back to reign for one thousand years. He simply shows them that we are restrained by time, but God is not. Woods said, “This does not mean that a day in ‘God’s calendar’ is a thousand years long. The meaning is that the passing of time does not affect the promises and threatenings of God” (185). Kistemaker, on page 332 of his commentary, said that Peter “knows that God looks at time from the perspective of eternity, and that man, who is conditioned by cosmic time, is unable to comprehend eternity.” Kistemaker also agrees that this verse does not provide the information needed to prove a literal millennium (333).

Verse 9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

This is Peter's third refutation of the scoffers. He assures the Christians that the Lord is not slow in keeping His promises, but is longsuffering to us. What men count as slackness is really the longsuffering of God toward us (Henry 1055). "The cause of the delay stems not from indifference or inattentiveness on the part of God. It lies in God's grace and mercy toward sinners. He allows them to repent of their sins" (Kistemaker 334). God shows His longsuffering because He does not want anyone to perish. On a daily basis God grants mankind an opportunity to change from his sinful way of life. This shows God loves mankind enough to give these opportunities. This also proves that God is not a liar; He will send Christ back, but it will be on God's timetable, not man's.

Verse 10

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Despite the scoffers' denial, Peter gives assurance that the Lord will come again. He also tells His manner of coming: "As a thief in the night." There is not going to be an announcement prior to His coming; it will be unexpected. There will not be "wars and rumors of war" as was given in the destruction of Jerusalem (Mat. 24:1-35) but will be swift and sudden (24:36ff). It will not be a secret coming for the saints, neither will it be a coming with the saints to establish a millennial kingdom; for the "heavens shall pass away with a great noise...the earth also and the works...shall be burned up" (2 Pet. 3:10).

Peter may have been recalling the words of Christ in Matthew 24:35, when He said that "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Also, he may be referring back to Isaiah 34:4, when Isaiah of old said, "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, And the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll." Peter refers to the elements melting with fervent heat. This is the very opposite of what occurred during the days of Noah that Peter previously mentioned (2 Pet. 3:6). Instead of water, it is going to be in-

tense heat. “The earth also and the works shall be burned up.” There is a textual variance of the last two words. Some manuscripts have the Greek word κατακαήσεται (*katakaesetai*) which means “burned up,” while other manuscripts have the Greek word εύρεθαήσεται (*eurthaesetai*) which means “laid bare, discovered” in the text. This author feels κατακαήσεται is a better rendering and is supported by more Greek manuscripts than εύρεθαήσεται. Regardless of which word is now used, the idea that Peter was conveying was utter destruction. Christ did not promise to renovate the earth for a thousand-year reign as some contend, but utterly would destroy it at the Second Coming.

Verses 11-12

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

Since the world would be destroyed, Peter admonishes the people to live holy and godly lives. The Christians were told to look for and earnestly desire the coming of that great day. There is much discussion about the phrase “day of God” in this verse. The premillennialists believe that the “day of the Lord” and the “day of God” are two different comings; however, there is absolutely no basis for this idea. Peter continues with the same idea and the same coming throughout the chapter. There is no reason to think that in the middle of discussing Christ’s Second Coming he would change to talk about “God’s coming” in judgment after a thousand-year reign. Those with this belief are “strain[ing] at a gnat and swallow[ing] a camel” (Mat. 23:24) to get this passage to fit their perverted doctrine! Wayne Jackson states, “This is a clear testimony to the deity of the Lord Jesus” (Rutherford 176). Matthew Henry states that this is “evidence of His divinity and Godhead even to those who counted him as a mere man” (1056). Peter is not dealing with two different comings, but simply attesting to the Deity of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 13

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Peter now gives the promise from God of “new heavens and a new earth.” This passage also gives great difficulty to those who believe the premillennial view of this chapter. They think that this old world will be renovated into a new one for the millennial reign of Christ. Hal Lindsey said, “Christ is going ‘to loose’ the atoms of the galaxy in which we live.... Then Christ will put the atoms back together to form a new heaven and earth” (179). He is pulling a meaning out of the text that is not there. Peter had already talked about the utter destruction that would take place upon Christ’s second advent. This leaves no room for a renovated earth for those who are righteous to live. This phrase is simply a symbol of heaven. As Christians we have heaven, not earth, in which we are to look forward (John 14:1-3; 1 The. 4:13-18). Wayne Jackson says that this is a “symbolic reference to heaven itself!” (Rutherford 175). Kistemaker says, “The inhabitants of this new earth will be forever with Jesus, who as the Son of Man will dwell with his saints. For the saints to be eternally with Jesus is to be in heaven” (340-1).

RELATED PASSAGES

There are several passages throughout the New Testament that deal with the Second Coming of Christ. In the Olivet discourse of Matthew 24, Jesus dealt with this very question asked by His apostles. Beginning in verse 36 going through 25:46, Jesus explains in detail about the Second Coming. He does not tell them **when** it will be happen, but tells them to be prepared when He does come back (24:42-44, 50-51). He gives two parables in Matthew 25:1-30 dealing with readiness. In Matthew 25:31-46, He describes the events of that great day.

One of the strongest passages about this event is found in John 5:28-29. When Christ returns, all will know it, for all will be judged. It will not be a secret coming to “rapture” certain ones, but a coming about which all will know. Paul tells the people in Acts 17:31 there is a day appointed in which God will judge the world

in righteousness. This will take place when Christ returns. There is no room in this passage or any other for a millennium.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:2, this matter is discussed because the Christians of that day were troubled about the death of other Christians. Paul gives them comfort by explaining what will happen to them when Christ comes again. He gives them assurance that those who are dead will rise first (4:16) and those who are still alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (4:17). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul deals with the second coming from a negative standpoint. He tells the fate of those who “know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 The. 1:7-9). In verse 9, Paul tells of the final separation that will take place for those who are ungodly.

In Hebrews 9:27, the Hebrews writer states, “as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” He tells us assuredly that after death comes the judgment, not a millennium. This refutes **any** idea of a millennium.

These passages give proof that the premillennial idea of the Second Coming is false. Men continue to pervert God’s Word by giving it a meaning to fit some man-made doctrine rather than simply follow what the Bible teaches.

CONCLUSION

For years, the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ has been one of the more prominent doctrines discussed in the New Testament. It has also been one of the most misunderstood subjects today and has been perverted by many in the religious world. Peter was clear in his teaching concerning the Second Coming. By applying the other passages mentioned, it is easy to see the truth about this great event.

Peter told these Christians that Christ was coming back (2 Pet. 3:1-9) and that they needed to be ready (3:10). He then admonishes them to live righteously (3:11) and anxiously await the “new heavens and a new earth” (3:13). Christians can continue to have faith in Christ and look forward to His second coming. This final coming

gives hope to the Christian that this life of headaches and problems will be turned into an eternity of peace and happiness.

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GOD'S SCHEME OF REDEMPTION

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INTRODUCTION

Often, when we hear *scheme* we think of a nefarious plot devised by some evil doer to accomplish some evil deed. However, the presence of the word in the phrase, the scheme of redemption, is a part of the description of the most gracious plan ever devised for the benefit of man.

Redemption literally means “to ransom or buy up.” We often express that meaning with “buy back.” When an individual takes an item to a pawnshop and takes out a loan against the item, he later goes back to redeem that item. That means he pays the principal, the initial amount that he borrowed, plus the amount of interest that is charged. One is, in effect, paying the ransom to retake possession of the item. God devised a plan to redeem man from the guilt and consequences of sin.

THE ENTRANCE OF SIN AND THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A SCHEME

Satan made his presence known in the Garden of Eden in the form of a serpent tempting Eve to partake of the tree that grew in the midst of the garden, the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:1-6). Although God had commanded Adam not to partake of that fruit (2:17), Eve did, then gave the fruit to Adam (3:5). By that action, both

of them sinned against the commandment of God. God pronounced a curse against the serpent that is recorded in Genesis 3:14-15:

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou *art* cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

It needs to be understood that even though God had a plan already in place for the redemption of man when Adam and Eve sinned, and that the plan would come to fruition according to God's own timetable, God's foreknowledge to devise the plan does not mean that He foreordained Adam and Eve to sin. God knows all things, including that Adam and Eve would sin, but that does not mean He forced them to sin. That would have been the height of unfairness on the part of God. That God had the plan and that Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8) demonstrates a connection between God's love and foreknowledge, not between man's sin and God's foreordination.

THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION FORESHADOWED

Sometimes, men speak of the law of Moses as though it was only put in place to show men today how easy they have it—as opposed to how difficult Israel of old had it. In Acts 15:10, Peter testified that the Gentiles should not be compelled to keep the law of Moses, because it was a yoke that (according to the apostle) neither their fathers nor they were able to bear. However, if that is all one thinks about that law, he has missed a very important purpose of the law. The law included sacrifices for sin, as we read about in Leviticus. Those sacrifices, imperfect though they were, foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross (Heb. 9:6). The old law had a priesthood, which included a high priest. The high priests under that law were men, and they sinned, yet they foreshadowed our perfect high priest, Jesus Christ, who was tempted in all points like we are, yet did no sin (4:15). The old law had first a tabernacle, then a temple, referred to as the House of the Lord, and His dwelling place. Today, the church

is the temple of the Lord, His house (1 Tim. 3:15). The priests under the old law could not enter the tabernacle, later the temple, unless they first washed (Exo. 30:20). One may not enter the house of God, the church, except he first be washed from his sins by baptism (Acts 22:16). It is easily seen then that the law, which was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, in its sacrifices and washings, which were for cleansing from sin year by year, were a foreshadowing of the scheme of redemption that would be fully executed at the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4).

The Old Law foreshadowed the very concept of redemption. The firstborn of both man and beast belonged to God (Exo. 13:2). Yet there was a law of redemption that involved the firstborn among man and unclean beasts. The people were commanded to redeem those (13:13; Num. 18:15-16).

THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION FORETOLD

God's scheme of redemption involves a number of things. Jesus Christ, who as the redeemer, would pay the cost of redemption with His perfect blood. There would be a king, who was also prophet and high priest. That, too, would be, and is, Jesus. There cannot be a king unless the king has a kingdom over which to rule; Jesus is king over His kingdom, the church (Mat. 16:18-19). God would make a covenant that would replace the old covenant. Under the new covenant, unlike the old one, where sins were remembered year by year (Heb. 10:1), sins and iniquities would be forgiven and not be brought up again (8:12).

The Old Testament prophets prophesied of all these and other matters relating to the scheme of redemption. As they specifically relate to redemption, blood plays a vital role. In preparation for the angel of death to pass over their houses and not kill their firstborn as would happen in the houses of the Egyptians, the Israelites were commanded:

And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that *is* in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning (Exo. 12:22).

The children of Israel were redeemed by blood. God later explained to them that the life of the flesh is in the blood, and it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul (Lev. 17:11).

The prophet Isaiah, in one of the most poignant passages of the Old Testament (Isa. 53:1-12), described the sacrifice that Christ would make on the cross for man's redemption. Verses 6-11 of the passage reads:

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned every one to his own way; And the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, Yet he opened not his mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, So he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: And who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; For the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, And with the rich in his death; Because he had done no violence, Neither *was any* deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, He shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; For he shall bear their iniquities.

Inasmuch as God's scheme of redemption is redemption from sin, the particulars of the new covenant would involve the forgiveness of sins. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied of this forgiveness in chapter 31 of his prophecy. Jeremiah wrote in verses 31-34:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, That I will make a new covenant With the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers In the day *that* I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt; Which my covenant they brake, Although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, And write it in their hearts; And will be their God, And they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: For they shall all know me, From the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: For I will forgive their iniquity, And I will remember their sin no more.

When the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph announcing the coming birth of Jesus, he told him not to fear to take Mary his wife, because that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost. He then made a statement to this good man that pronounced the most precious blessing man could hear about or receive. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Mat. 1:21). In the beloved tenth chapter of John when Jesus declared himself as the door of the sheepfold He took this claim for Himself: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly" (10:10). Both Matthew and Mark quote Jesus saying that He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Mat. 20:28; Mark 10:45). In other words, through the death of Christ, redemption from sin would be made available for man.

THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION BROUGHT TO FRUITION

The dastardliest deed ever performed by man is a great paradox for it was also the most necessary one for man's redemption. After His arrest and mock trials, Jesus went to the cross to accomplish the deed that was and is the ransom paid for man's redemption. It brought to fruition the scheme of redemption that God had devised to recover obedient men and women from the guilt and consequences of sin. Jesus so stated that fact with His dying breath as He hung on Calvary's cruel cross. John records that when Jesus had received the vinegar filled sponge He said, "It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (John 19:30).

The noteworthy of the deed is affirmed by the events that accompanied the Lord's death: the darkness that filled the earth, the earthquake, the graves opening, but most of all the veil of the temple being torn in two. We are told with specificity that the veil was ripped from top to bottom (Mat. 27:51; Mark 15:38), signifying that this deed, as dastardly as it was, was in the plan God had devised to redeem man from sin.

Just as God had informed Israel in the long ago that it was blood given upon the altar for their atonement, so Peter informs us that it was the blood of Christ that redeems us.

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Unlike the blood of bulls and goats that cannot take away sin, the blood of Christ does, and in so doing, Paul also informs us that Christ redeemed them from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13).

The redemption of man from sin, and God's plan for it, is not just for the blessing of forgiveness in this life. It was to make available eternal life. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they had access to the tree of life. As long as they had access to the fruit of that tree, they had life. With sin, that access was taken away. Since man has an eternal soul, if he remained in sin, eternal destruction would be his lot. With the forgiveness of sin, eternal life subsequent to the judgment would be possible. However, for that life to be possible, Jesus could not remain dead and in the grave. He had to come forth for man to reap the everlasting benefits of the forgiveness of sin. Thus, on the third day, Jesus came forth from the grave, winning the ultimate victory over Satan and sin. He dealt a crushing blow to the head of the serpent just as Genesis 3:15 said He would! Paul expressed it so beautifully to the preacher Timothy:

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 1:8-13).

Paul reminded the Corinthians of the Gospel that he had preached unto them and that by it, standing firm, they were saved (1 Cor. 15:1-

4). He outlined the facts of the Gospel emphasizing that these things were according to the Scriptures. He not only reminded them that Christ not only died for our sins according to the Scriptures, not just that He was buried, but that He rose again according to the Scriptures.

THE SCHEME OF REDEMPTION'S FORMULA FOR MAN'S RESPONSE

When the great day of Pentecost was fully come, Christ had already been crucified, buried, resurrected, and ascended; it was now the time for the good tidings of redemption from sin to be heralded to man beginning at the appointed place of Jerusalem. Peter informed the multitude on that day that with their wicked hands they had crucified the one who by God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge would also be raised up to sit at the right hand of God. This one whom they had crucified and that God had raised up, was made both Lord and Christ. Understanding their guilt, the people cried out to the apostles, asking what they were to do. Peter's answer is recorded. They were to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). In verse 41, we are told that about 3,000 gladly received his word and were baptized, both men and women. Those three thousand, and still others, were daily added to the church Jesus had promised to build and then died for to purchase (redeem, ransom) with His own blood (20:28). A thorough study of the New Testament clearly teaches us the formula of man's response to the Gospel that he might receive its benefits. He has to hear the Word (15:7). Having heard the Word, one must then believe that Jesus is He, or he will die in his sins (John 8:24). As Peter instructed those on Pentecost, repentance of sins is necessary, or as Jesus said, one will perish (Luke 13:3, 5). To believe that Jesus is the Christ is not sufficient; one must confess it (Rom. 10:9-10). Beginning with the record of Acts 2, in every specific case of conversion in Acts every single individual was baptized. Why? Because, as both Jesus said, and Peter wrote, it was to be saved (Mark 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21)! As Saul of Tarsus was told, it was to wash away sin (Acts 22:16). As Paul wrote to the Romans, baptism is where one dies to sin and raises a new creature, implying that baptism is where the blood of Christ is applied (Rom. 6:3-4). As Paul wrote to the

Galatians, it was to put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). If one can be saved in his sins, saved outside of Christ, and without contacting the blood of Christ, then one does not have to be baptized. However, we know those things are not so.

It has always been a mystery that many who deny the necessity of baptism do so arguing that to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins equates with a meritorious work, resulting in salvation being earned. How can anyone do something that is given by the command of God, with God stating both the accomplishments, and the present and future attendant blessings resulting from the obedience, be regarded as a meritorious work of man, and thus unessential to salvation, because it sets aside the commonly believed doctrine of salvation by faith alone? Baptism is God's command, so is faith. If it is the case that being baptized for the remission of sins and salvation is an act that puts God in man's debt, and thus He owes man salvation, so is faith, because faith is also something God commands man to do. Baptism, then, is as essential to salvation as faith is, because it is commanded as a part of the scheme of redemption devised by God.

Man's response to the scheme of redemption does not end with his baptism into Christ and being added to the church—the kingdom of Christ. Paul wrote in the aforementioned Romans 6:3-4 that we are buried with Christ by baptism into His death to arise and walk in a newness of life. God does not redeem man from sin that man can continue to live in sin. Paul quashed such a foolish notion in the first two verses of the very same Romans' chapter. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (6:1-2).

God's scheme of redemption includes faithfulness. Remember, in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul said the Corinthians were saved by the Gospel, provided they had not believed in vain? The last verse of the same chapter exhorts them: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (15:58). In the last chapter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he implored them to examine and prove their own selves. Christ was in them unless

they were reprobates (2 Cor. 13:5). These are the same brethren that Paul told he buffeted his body daily lest after he had preached to others he himself should be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27). May we conclude then that man's obedience to God's commands is essential not only for his salvation initially, but also essential for his remaining in a saved state? Absolutely! Is faithfulness an essential part of God's scheme of redemption? Unquestionably! Why else, when Simon sinned, as recorded in Acts 8, was he told that he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity? He was told to repent and pray God for forgiveness (Acts 8:22-23). Why else is the cleansing blood of Christ contingent upon walking in the light (1 John 1:7), if continued faithfulness is not a requirement of the scheme of redemption? Revelation specifically states that faithfulness is required (2:10). The latter part of that verse states, "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

CONCLUSION

God instructed Adam and Eve not to sin. They did sin. Every person who has lived to reach the age of accountability to God since then, with the exception of Jesus, has sinned. Since the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), man needed to be redeemed from sin. He needed to be ransomed. Christ came to fill that need. "For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). God has done His part to buy us back from the clutches of sin, by providing a scheme of redemption and a Savior to execute it. The question we must each answer is, "Have I done my part in obeying that plan—as the New Testament (not as man) explains and requires it?"

WORK CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

WORSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

One of the needs God placed within man at creation was the need to worship. Thus, one will find any society worshipping something or someone. However, it is the Creator of both the universe and man who rightfully deserves our worship.

WHAT IS WORSHIP

Worship is from the Middle English word that means “worthiness, respect” and is defined: “reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power, also an act of expressing such reverence.” The main word translated *worship* in the Old Testament carries the meaning “to bow down, prostrate oneself.” It was a posture indicating reverence toward one considered superior. The primary word in the New Testament is *proskuneo*, which means, “to kiss toward.” Arndt, Danker, and Bauer write that this word is:

used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground...**to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to** (882).

Zodhiates explains a little more in detail when he writes:

To worship, do obeisance, show respect, fall or prostrate before. Literally, to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage. The ancient oriental (especially Persian) mode of salutation between persons of equal ranks was to kiss each other on the lips; when the difference of rank was slight, they kissed each other on the cheek; when one was much inferior, he fell upon his knees and touched his forehead to the ground or prostrated himself, throwing kisses at the same time toward the superior. It is this latter mode of salutation that Greek writers express by *proskuneo*. In the NT, generally, to do reverence or homage to someone, usually by kneeling or prostrating oneself before him. In the Septuagint it means to bow down, to prostrate oneself in reverence, homage (G4352).

In all the definitions of *worship* we have the idea expressed of showing respect to one whom we consider superior. Far too many today do not have a proper view and attitude of God, which results in improper worship. When we view God properly, we will worship Him acceptably.

JEHOVAH IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

He is Creator

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). “For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exo. 20:11). God created the universe in which we now live. On each day of the creation week, God was preparing a place for the crowning glory of His creation—man. He created a beautiful garden in which He placed man. Even though man fell and lost access to the Garden of Eden, we can still see the beauties of His creation. This speaks to the glory of God and that He is worthy of our worship. The 24 elders fell down before God to worship Him and said, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). Later, John records that an angel flying in the midst of heaven was saying “with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth,

and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (14:7). Jehovah is worthy to be worshiped because He created such a marvelous universe for our existence.

He is Sustainer

God did not simply create the universe (including man) and then leave man to himself, as the Deist holds. Instead He continually sustains the existence of all things—including man. Without God providing those things necessary, this world would cease to exist. The sweet singer of Israel wrote, “Thy righteousness *is* like the great mountains; Thy judgments *are* a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast” (Psa. 36:6). After the return from captivity, the people are gathered together:

Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, *and* Pethahiah, said, Stand up *and* bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, *even* thou, *art* LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all *things* that *are* therein, the seas, and all that *is* therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee (Neh. 9:5-6).

They recognized that He was worthy to be worshiped because He preserves all things.

He Is Omnipotent

Man is awed by power. Simply notice all the television shows that are clearly a demonstration of man’s power. The weightlifting events in the Olympics are designed purely to see how strong a person is. How many children and adults thrill as the historical accounts of Samson are told? Why? The reason is that man is fascinated with power. Yet, if one was able to combine all the strength of all the people who have ever lived upon the earth, it would not come close to *touching* the great power of God. Isaiah would write, “Lift up your eyes on high, And behold who hath created these *things*, That bringeth out their host by number: He calleth them all by names By the greatness of his might, for that *he is* strong in power; Not one faileth” (40:26).

There are at least three ways we see the great power of God: (1) creative power, (2) sustaining power, and (3) recreative power, i.e., creating in man a new life. God was able out of nothing to create that which we see. Simply by speaking, things came into existence (Heb. 11:3). Jeremiah was certainly correct when he writes, "Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, *and* there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17). What greater power could exist than to be able to simply speak something into existence out of nothingness?

God's ability to sustain this universe also shows His great power. This world, which was created by the spoken Word of God, must be sustained. That ability to sustain it takes as great a power as it would to create it.

We also observe God's power in His ability to recreate or His ability to create in man a new life. Paul states:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

The Gospel is God's power to save sinful man. It gives man the ability to live by faith, thus creating a new man in Christ. It was stated of Christ: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). God is able to save all people and to create within them that new man. Paul would write to the Ephesians: "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). He repeated this idea to the Colossians in 3:10. Through the power of the Gospel, God is able to recreate man into a new man. Paul is a perfect example of this as he was a leading persecutor of the church and was recreated into that new man who became persecuted. God's spoken Word brought about the creation of all things at the beginning, and God's spoken Word, the Gospel, is able to bring about creation spiritually.

GOD'S NATURE

Holy

There are more passages that speak of His holiness than any other part of His character. The psalmist would write, "He sent redemption unto his people: He hath commanded his covenant for ever: Holy and reverend *is* his name" (Psa. 111:9). In another psalm, we have: "The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, And holy in all his works" (145:17). Peter adds: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). The basic application of *holy* when applied to God is separate from sin or free of sin. When speaking of God, there is no sin associated with Him. John puts it: "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). With God there is absolutely no darkness or sin in Him. James puts it: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jam. 1:17). No matter how one looks at God, He is only light and does not change, nor can God associate with sin, as the prophet wrote:

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, And canst not look on iniquity: Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, And holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth *the man that is* more righteous than he? (Hab. 1:13).

Our God is one who is worthy of being worshiped because of His holy nature.

Righteous

Again, the psalmist writes, "The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, And holy in all his works" (Psa. 145:17). Early in the history of man, God had determined to destroy Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain. Abraham, concerned with those who had not succumbed to the wickedness of the city, asked God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). The answer is that God **always** does that which is right. At best, man sometimes makes mistakes.

Even trying our very best, we will not always do right. What an amazing being that whatever He does, it is always right! In every way He acts, every decision He makes, everything about Him, it is always right.

Love

God is perfect in love. John writes:

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.... And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him (1 John 4:8, 16).

His love is expressed in different ways. It is **universal** in that God loves the world (John 3:16). It is **altruistic**, or “unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others” (Webster). It is putting another’s interest above one’s own, and it is a love that is not influenced by others. God loves because it is His nature to love; He is desirous of giving love; in fact He must give it, but does not give it on the basis of someone deserving it (doing something for it), nor does not give it to receive something in return. Paul states: “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

God’s love is **sacrificial** in that He “gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). There could be no greater sacrifice made than to give one’s “only begotten Son.” God’s love is also **personal** in that He loves each individual person and takes a personal interest in him. God has a **special** love for His children. Even though God loves the world (John 3:16), the Father loves those who keep the words of Christ. John writes, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1). God’s love is also unending. Jeremiah writes, “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). Unlike man’s love, which might come and go, God’s love remains constant and He is worthy of being worshipped because of His perfect love.

Savior

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:2). Man cannot save himself (Eph. 2:8-9). Thus, man needs a savior and God provides His only begotten Son as such. John writes, “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world” (1 John 4:14). What a marvelous Being Who would do such for sinful man. He is worthy of being worshiped for being our Savior.

JEHOVAH’S GLORY

In addition to realizing God is the only one worthy of worship, we need to have a proper view of God and His majesty.

Isaiah

The call of Isaiah is a perfect illustration. The prophet gets a view of God’s majesty, kingship, holiness, and glory.

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: The whole earth *is* full of his glory (Isa. 6:1-3).

Upon seeing the awe-inspiring view of God, the prophet realizes his own unworthiness. “Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (6:5). When one sees the greatness of God as Isaiah did and considers his own unworthiness, it brings him to worship that One Who is so high and lifted up.

John’s Vision

John saw God sitting on a throne in heaven in Revelation 4. Consider how John describes the majesty of God to show that He reigns from the center of the universe, and He is in control.

And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and *there was* a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about

the throne *were* four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunders and voices: and *there were* seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne *there was* a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, *were* four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast *was* like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast *was* like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about *him*; and *they were* full of eyes within (Rev. 4:2-8a).

John discusses these four living creatures (beasts—KJV) that are around the throne of God. He uses figures to show their strength, service, intelligence, and swiftness. Having wings shows their mobility, and being full of eyes represents their all-seeing nature. We are then told that these four living creatures “rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (4:8b). These living creatures get a view of the greatness and holiness of God and continue to proclaim that holiness. However, notice the result of seeing the majesty of God and His holiness.

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (4:9-11).

When those around the throne hear the creatures giving this praise, glory, and honor, they fall down and worship God. They recognize the worthiness of God to be worshiped which led to their worship of Him.

Israel

The children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt. They cried out to God for deliverance. God heard their cries and raised up Moses to deliver them. God sent Moses to Pharaoh with the message: “Let my people go” (Exo. 5:1). God knew Pharaoh would not acquiesce to

His demands. “And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand” (3:19). The English Standard Version says, “unless compelled by a mighty hand,” while the NASV has “except under compulsion.” Thus, God brought upon Pharaoh and Egypt ten plagues to *compel* him, and He showed His total power over the various gods of Egypt. Israel, living in the land, saw the plagues God brought upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. After the first three plagues, God separated the Israelites from the Egyptians so the rest of the plagues only came upon the Egyptians. In instituting the Passover, God states:

And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What *is* this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage (13:14).

Upon bringing Israel out of Egypt, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened, and he follows after them. When Israel sees Pharaoh and his army getting close, “they were sore afraid” (14:10). God then prevented Pharaoh from coming near the Israelites.

And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness *to them*, but it gave light by night *to these*: so that the one came not near the other all the night (14:19-20).

God not only gave Israel protection from Pharaoh’s army, but also deliverance.

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry *land*, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry *ground*: and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left (14:21-22).

When the Egyptians tried to follow, the water swallowed them up and they were destroyed. Through all these events, God is showing Israel His great power.

God then leads Israel to Mount Sinai. He calls Moses up to the mountain, where He tells him: “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (19:4). He sends Moses down to the people to prepare them for when He could come and speak to them.

And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that *was* in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice (19:16-19).

God was preparing the people in all these events to have a proper respect for Him, and to be able to see His great glory and power. As recorded in the next chapter, God speaks to them giving them the Ten Commandments (20:2-17). Notice how the people reacted:

And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw *it*, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God *was*. And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee (20:18-24).

The Israelites got a glimpse of the greatness of God with the result that they had a proper fear (dread and respect) for God. However, notice how worship is connected with this. The first two of the Ten Commandments have to deal specifically with worship (not to make

any graven image and not to bow down and serve them), as does the fourth (remember the Sabbath). After giving the Ten Commandments, after which the people requested that Moses to speak to them instead of hearing God directly, God tells Moses to reemphasize the aspect of worship. Moses is to inform the people that they are not to make idols but to worship only Him: altars and all sacrifices shall be only to God.

While the majesty and glory of God made an immediate impression upon the Israelites, sadly that impression did not remain. They soon lost sight of the awesomeness of God and forsook Him when He brought them to the Promised Land. After hearing a negative report by ten of the spies who had been sent into the land to spy it out, they showed their lack of faith in Him. “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:19).

CONCLUSION

To worship properly, we must first get a view of the majesty and awesomeness of God. While the worship of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4) shows us that not all worship is acceptable to God (another lesson will center upon acceptable worship today), when we really *see* God, it will change our attitude about our worship, in addition to changing our lives. It will compel us to put our entire being into worshipping the One who is worthy of such and doing so in the proper way.

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NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

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Ken has preached in a number of states as well as having done mission work in England (1968-1972 and 1985-1992) and Canada (1974-1977). He has preached in Gospel meetings and spoken on numerous brotherhood lectureships. He served as a part-time instructor at the "West Virginia School of Preaching," edited *Old Paths* magazine (primarily distributed in Great Britain), and has had articles published in various brotherhood publications. He is on the staff of Truth Bible Institute. Since returning from England in 1992, each year he has made mission trips to England along with a mission trip to India. Since the beginning of 2000, he has served as evangelist with the Belvedere Church of Christ in South Carolina.

In John 4:24 the words of Jesus are recorded: "God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth." Worship has been defined as:

1. A group of specialized activities in which we draw near to and commune with God in an extraordinary manner.
2. The outgoing of the human spirit toward God, recognizing in Him the source of all life, love, goodness, holiness, and righteousness.
3. An act in which the redeemed person seeks to express his appreciation and gratitude for salvation, as well as to discover even fuller enrichment in life, in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.
4. The adoring reverence of the human spirit for the Divine.
5. Worship, in general, is an act of reverence to a Divine Being.

However, we need to be concerned, particularly in this lesson, as to what constitutes New Testament worship. Jesus' statement specifies two areas with respect to such worship—"in spirit" and "in truth." The one (*in spirit*) has to do with attitude as well as the part of man that is to worship. The other (*in truth*) has to do with what

acts of worship are authorized as part of New Testament worship. We will examine these briefly in the next few pages and see what the New Testament teaches with respect to what acts of worship are commanded.

IS ALL OF LIFE WORSHIP?

There are some that would teach that “all of life is worship or “everything we do is worship.” The basic point that is made by the proponents of this error is this: from the moment we come up out of the waters of baptism we are worshipping God in everything we do, and we continue in worship until we go to the grave. However, the New Testament refutes that notion. A study of both the Old and New Testaments reveals numerous examples which show that worship involves specific acts to be performed and that there is a difference between acts of worship and the normal mundane course of life. Then the false teacher will refer to Romans 12:1-2: “*which is your reasonable service.*” However, they usually quote from a modern translation that places the translators’ theology into the text rather than accurately translating the original language. They will use a *translation* that reads: “this is your true and proper worship” (NIV 2011), or “which is your spiritual worship” (ESV), or similar phraseology. The argument is made that our lives are a sacrifice, and since sacrifice is an act of worship, then everything we do is worship. However such is based on an inaccurate translation of the Greek word *latreuo*, translated *service* in the KJV and ASV. To *serve* is broader in its meaning than simply to worship. All worship to God is service to God but not all service to Him is worship. A refusal or failure to recognize this distinction brings confusion and departure from Biblically-organized worship.

There are distinct Hebrew and Greek words used for *worship* than from those used for *service*. Space will not allow for discussion; however, a study of the use of these words clearly shows a distinction. The primary Greek word for *worship* is *proskuneo*—meaning “to kiss toward” or “bow down”—clearly indicating specific acts or actions.

NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP—A MATTER OF AUTHORITY

New Testament worship is a matter of authority. God's authority must be distinguished from the commands of men to determine if an act is of human or divine authority. The Bible is the **only** source of authority, the teaching of Christ under the New Covenant. Christ now has "**all authority**" (Mat 28:18—ASV; Eph. 1:20-23). Whether one is wise or foolish is determined by whether or not one obeys the Christ who speaks with authority (Mat. 7:21-29). Jesus has delivered the will of God as committed to Him (John 12:48-50). This was done by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (16:12-15; Mat. 19:27-28) who were His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Through them, He bound and loosed (John 20:21-23).

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. wrote:

The principle is stated in Colossians 3:17: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." The only ground upon which to meet God in worship is to worship *in* his name, *where* his name is recorded. God's name has always been recorded in what he has commanded. In the Old Testament God put his name on physical altars, and later in the temple of Solomon.... God speaking through Moses, said "In every place where I have recorded my name, there will I come unto thee, and there will I bless thee." And to these particular places the worshippers went, in order to worship God. God has put his name there.

In the New Testament we worship "in the name" but in a different way. God puts his name on things commanded. If it has not been commanded, his name is not on it; and that thing cannot be done by his authority. Therefore we could not meet him in the act.

It is a question, then, of divine authority. It is a question of respect for the word of God. I have been convinced for a long time that the fundamental error of the religious world today, is the lack of respect for the word of God. The need for divine authority for what is done in the realm of religion is no longer recognized. But the fundamental principle of worship is simply this: In the realm of worship we stand in the realm of revelation (473).

A lack of respect for divine authority and the failure to do all things in the name of Christ has led to many engaging in bizarre activities in so-called worship. We read concerning those who be-

came Christians on that first Pentecost following the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Let us now look at what acts of worship the New Testament authorizes. There are five specific acts of worship that are authorized by the New Testament; we will look at each of these individually.

LORD’S SUPPER

One act of worship authorized in the New Testament is the partaking of the Lord’s Supper, communion. The early church partook of the Lord’s Supper (also referred to as the “breaking of bread”). Luke records, “And upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (20:7). The apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth:

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Christ instituted this Supper (Mat. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). These Scriptures show that there are two emblems Christians are to partake of when they remember the death of Christ: unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. The unleavened bread reminds us of His body which was broken and bruised on the cross: “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (22:19). The fruit of the vine is to remind us of His blood that was shed for the remission of sins: “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mat. 26:28). The unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine could not be

His literal body and blood, as is taught by Roman Catholicism in the so-called “Sacrifice of the Mass.”

SINGING

Another act of worship that is authorized in New Testament worship is the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in praise to God. Two passages emphasize this, although there are other passages that indicate that Christians are to sing praises to God in worship:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16).

We note that singing is what is authorized. There are those who would seek to add instrumental music to the singing but this is a different kind of music. Had Scripture taught that Christians were to “make music” then either singing or instrumental music or a combination of both would fulfill the command. However, Scripture is specific—Christians are to sing, thus to use instrumental music would be adding to God’s Word (Deu. 12:32; Pro. 30:6; Rev. 22:19). Note that the singing that is done is not only done to the Lord but as a means of speaking to and teaching one another. What is sung therefore must be in harmony with Scripture.

TEACH/PREACH THE WORD OF GOD

When Paul was at Troas, we are told that the brethren came together to “break bread” (partake of the Lord’s Supper). However the verse goes on to tell us: “Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7). Preaching and teaching has always formed a part of authorized New Testament worship. It is essential for one to have faith: “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

In the giving of what is often called the **Great Commission**, the Lord speaks of the necessity of preaching the Gospel, teaching

all nations (Mat. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47). Paul exhorted the young preacher, Timothy:

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Paul, in writing to the Roman church, stated by inspiration:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Rom. 10:13-15).

Following the first Gospel sermon on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, we read the Christians: “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). A study of Acts, as well as references in the epistles to churches, show the importance of the preaching and teaching of the Word of God was a vital part of the work of the church, not just to those outside of Christ but also to Christians (the members of the Lord’s church) that they might know what God would have them to do to be saved and remain saved.

PRAYER

Those who became Christians on the first Pentecost following the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). The importance of prayer for the Christian, both publically in worship and privately, is stressed throughout the New Testament.

Jesus gave His disciples the **Model** Prayer (Mat. 6:9-14; Luke 11:2-4). The Thessalonian brethren were exhorted: “Pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). Timothy the evangelist was instructed by Paul to teach brethren concerning prayer:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:1-5).

GIVING

The fifth act of worship that is authorized in the New Testament is that of giving. In writing to the Corinthians Paul wrote:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Paul said he had “given order to the churches of Galatia”; thus this instruction was not simply given to the brethren at Corinth. This authorizes that a collection be made of funds so when needs arise, they can be met. Thus, we see here the authorization for a church treasury.

Note Scripture does not state a specific amount such as a tithe (ten per cent) as had been the case under the Law of Moses. However, one is to give as “prospered”—that is, in accordance with how God has prospered him. The more the Christian is prospered, the more he should give.

Also, there is planning that is involved for later in his second letter to the church at Corinth; he writes, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). This means that there **must** be preparation and planning as to how Christians give. It should not be a haphazard thing, but it requires prior thought and preparation. Thus, one does not start searching in his billfold or purse to see what money he has to put in the plate, but rather the determination as to the amount to be given, based on how the individual has been prospered, has been pre-planned.

DAY OF WORSHIP

In the Old Testament, we see that the Jews were commanded in the fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exo. 20:8). However, while the Old Testament repeatedly stresses the keeping of the Sabbath (the seventh day) as the day of worship, the New Testament emphasizes the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). The resurrection of Christ came on the first day of the week, not the Sabbath (Mat. 28:1; Mark 16:1-2). Scriptures testify that the early Christians did certain things on the first day of the week, not on the Sabbath: they came together to break bread, to partake of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7). Also, they gave of their means into a common treasury on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). There is no record in Scripture or history that shows that the Christians met for Christian worship on the Sabbath. They did go to the Temple and to the Synagogue on the Sabbath, but that was not for Christian worship but to teach Jews the Gospel (Acts 13:14-45, 17:1-4; 18:4).

The Apostles did as they were commanded and directed by the Holy Spirit (Mat. 16:19; John 6:13-14; etc.). They **bound** and **loosed** as the Lord directed. Clearly, part of that teaching was that the Christians were to meet on the first day of the week (Sunday)—not the seventh day (Sabbath). The early church, we are told, followed the “apostles’ doctrine” or teaching (Acts 2:42). Did the apostles err in allowing Christians to meet on the first day of the week? Clearly, they did not, despite efforts by Sabbatarians to show otherwise. Following the death of the last apostle, writers such as Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr in the second century confirm that the first day of the week was the day of Christian worship. That was about a century before Constantine is alleged to have changed the day of worship from the seventh to the first day of the week.

Why do we refer to the first day as the Lord’s Day? The earliest recorded use of “Lord’s Day” is by John when he was on the isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:10). Surely, those to whom he wrote knew and understood the day to which he was referring since he used it *casually* assuming they would understand. *Lord’s Day* is meaningful

for the Christian to use. *Lord's* is an adjective defining it as Christ's day, Jesus is Lord (Acts 2:36). That it has been designated that way, Christians have no choice but to accept it. It is a memorial day for the child of God. The Lord's Day memorializes the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Luke 24:1-21; Mark 16:9). When one reflects upon the importance of resurrection of Christ, he is made more conscious of just how meaningful the Lord's Day is. Reflecting on such Scriptures as Romans 1:1-4, Acts 13:32-35, Matthew 12:38-40, and Acts 2:22-36 will help us to know why the Lord's Day is of such importance.

ARE THESE ACTS OF WORSHIP RESTRICTED TO THE LORD'S DAY?

Are the five acts of worship restricted to the Lord's Day (the first day of the week, Sunday)? Some religious groups partake of the Lord's Supper on other days of the week and at special events. Some only partake of the Lord's Supper twice a month, once a month, once a quarter, even annually. Where do they get the **authority** to do such? The Bible states that it is on the first day of the week when the disciples came together to partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). The teaching that it can be partaken of on any day of the week comes from the commandments of men and not the Bible. However, when one follows the commandments of men, it makes worship vain (Mat. 15:9). Further, Acts 20:7 and its context show that it was the regular practice of to meet on the first day of the week to "break bread." If it were permissible to partake on other days than the Lord's Day, why did Paul not call the brethren together on another day since the context shows he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem? As it was, he tarried there awaiting the first day of the week to meet with the brethren. Furthermore "upon the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread" (20:7) implies every first day just as the command to "remember the sabbath day" (Exo. 20:8) implied every Sabbath day. How often was there a Sabbath day? Every week, every seventh day! How often is there a first day of the week? Each week has a first day.

What about giving? Again we are taught:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

How often is there a “first day of the week”? There is one each week. Again, if it did not matter when the contribution was collected, Paul would not have issued such instruction to the Corinthian brethren as he had done to the Galatian brethren. Thus, it is restricted to the first day of the week. However, some religious groups seem to have a collection every time they meet! Where is the Scriptural authority for this? It does not exist!

What about singing, prayer, and teaching and preaching of the Word? Singing is not restricted as to when it is done, and neither is prayer. Paul and Silas were in jail in Phillipi singing praises to God and praying while they were in the stocks: “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them” (Acts 16:25). Indeed, Paul told the Christians at Thessalonica: “Pray without ceasing” (1 The. 5:17). Earlier we stated in reference to the day of Christian worship being the first day of the week: They did go to the Temple and to the Synagogue on the Sabbath, but that was not for Christian worship. Instead it was to teach Jews the Gospel (Acts 13:14-45, 17:1-4; 18:4). Indeed, on other occasions the Word was preached, and people were taught on occasions other than the first day of the week; for example, Paul preached on Mars Hill in Athens (Acts 17).

IN SPIRIT

Until now we have placed emphasis on worship being “in truth”—that is in keeping with the Lord’s will. However, as recorded by John, Jesus said: “God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). “In spirit” suggests the right attitude in worship as well as the part of man that is to worship. The right act of worship performed with a wrong attitude or manner is not acceptable to God. Neither is a wrong act even though done with sincerity. We worship not simply with the

outward man but also the inward man, from the spirit. New Testament worship is to be spiritual not material or mechanical.

Respecting the partaking of the Lord's Supper, the manner of observance is emphasized. It is not just the eating of some unleavened bread and drinking some fruit of the vine, the manner of observance is also vitally important. Paul pointed to the need of self-examination: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup" (1 Cor. 11:28). He also writes concerning the need to partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner:

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.... For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (1 Cor. 11:27, 29).

What does this mean? It has reference to the manner in which we partake. When we partake we should be concentrating on what we are doing, remembering the death of Christ, and not on what we are going to eat for lunch after worship is over or any other thing that has nothing to do with partaking in remembrance of Christ. It also has to do with partaking with a heart that is right with God. How can we truly commune if we have sin in our lives that has not been forgiven because we have not repented? Also, how can one partake in a worthy manner if one has not been obedient to the Gospel?¹

With respect to giving, it is not just a matter of the giving of money or the amount that is given, it has to do with the attitude one has as one gives. We are not only to give on the first day of the week, but our contribution must be given "as *God* hath prospered him" (16:2). When we give, is our attitude right? Are we joyous to give as we have been prospered, or do we give begrudgingly? Paul also wrote: "not grudgingly, or of necessity: for *God* loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). When we give, we should give cheerfully, not grudgingly or simply because we feel that we have to give. For the contribution to be acceptable to God it must not simply be as we have prospered and purposed to give, but also to be done cheerfully.

We should be happy to give of our means that God has prospered us with for the furtherance of the cause of Christ. Also, when we give, it should not be that men will see what we give (Mat. 6:1).

With respect to prayer, not only is it part of God's plan for New Testament worship but there are also some things that are taught that have reference to our attitude when we pray. For our prayers to be acceptable to God, one must be willing to forgive others as they ask for God to forgive them (6:14-25). We are to pray humbly and fervently (Jam. 4:6, 10; Rom. 12:11-12). Further, Jesus warns about praying to be seen by men (Mat. 6:5).

The preaching and teaching of the Word should come from a right attitude of heart (Phi. 1:15). The attitude of the preacher or teacher should be right. However, if the truth is taught, the hearers will be blessed even if the heart of the preacher/teacher is not. However, the hearers must have the right attitude as was expressed by the Bereans: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). When the Word of God is preached and taught, we should receive it with a ready mind and check out what was taught to see that it is in harmony with the will of God.

When it comes to the matter of singing, it is not simply following the command of God to sing (which excludes the use of instrumental music) but also involves the manner and attitude of our singing. Singing must come from the heart: "making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19); "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16).

CONCLUSION

We should always seek to worship God "in spirit and in truth" in accordance with His divine instruction through those acts or avenues of worship that He has authorized. Let us also serve God in our daily lives by seeking to be the kind of people that we ought to be in all that we say and do. In all these things one must not go beyond that which is written—that which is authorized by the Word of God (2 John 9-11; Gal. 1:6-9; Col. 3:17). Let us never forget

that one can only truly worship God acceptably if he is a child of God—one who has been obedient to the Gospel of Christ.

ENDNOTE

¹Editor's Note: All men are under obligation from God to partake of the Lord's Supper (as they are obligated to engage in every aspect of worship); however, only those who are Christians have qualified themselves to do so acceptably.

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HOW WE GOT THE BIBLE

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Doug Post has been preaching for 15 years. He has preached in Indiana and Connecticut. He received a B.A. in Communications from the University of Connecticut, a B.A. and M.A. in Biblical Studies from Southern Christian University, and is continuing his education in New Testament Theology and New Testament Greek at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston and the Theological University of America.

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The Bible is the most popular book in history. It has been printed more than any other book since the invention of the printing press. Guinness records estimates that 2.5 billion Bibles were printed between 1815 and 1975, while *The Economist* estimates 100 million Bibles are printed annually, creating over 6 billion in print. The *New Yorker* magazine conservatively estimates that 25 million Bibles are sold annually in America alone; they also pointed out that in 2005 the number of Bibles sold in the U.S. alone was conservatively estimated at 25 million (Pepper).

The Bible is the Book of books. It contains everything we need to know for life and eternity. It is the wisdom of God and the mind of Christ between two covers. God's Word is the means by which God instructs mankind because it contains everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). It is the source which contains knowledge for our understanding, advice that counsels us, food which feeds us, milk which nourishes us, honey that sweetens our lives, gold that enriches our lives, a sword that cuts our hearts, minds, and souls, a hammer that molds and shapes us, a lamp that leads and guides our paths, and a mirror to see ourselves as we are. The Bible is infallible, never failing, ever reviving, always relevant, and forever settled in heaven. We read the Bible to be wise, obey it to be saved, believe it to be happy, and proclaim it to be joyful. The Bible is unique because of its Author, wisdom, and message. The Psalmist praised God's Word—the Bible—not only in Psalm 119 but also in

declaring that God, Himself, magnified His Word even above His own name (138:2). There is no other book like the Bible, but how did we get the Bible? Where did it come from? Who wrote it?

Before answering these questions, it needs to be understood that the Bible does not begin with a twelve-step program to believing in God, nor does it provide a defense for God's existence. The Bible simply begins by declaring, "In the beginning God." At the very outset of the Bible, God's existence and eternity are immediately established—**God Is!** Therefore, it is not the purpose of this presentation to prove God's existence, or to prove that the Bible comes from God. God does exist and, therefore, the Bible is His revelation to mankind. The Bible is, indeed, the Word of God—the greatest book of all!

FROM GOD TO MAN—A PROCESS

All of the content of the Bible is **revelation**. Revelation discloses what had been previously unknown. Quite simply, God revealed His Will, making known His thoughts, desires, and intentions to and for mankind. Without God revealing all of this, we would not ever know God intimately. We could not know how to have a relationship with Him, nor would we know of our lost condition and need for a Savior. The revelation of this content involved a process, and the process by which the content of the Bible was revealed is called **inspiration**. The Bible makes a clear distinction between revelation and inspiration:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are

freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:7-13).

Paul says he spoke of the "wisdom of God" which had been previously hidden. No one knew or understood because this "wisdom of God" was hidden from men (2:7-9). However, God would reveal these things, by the Holy Spirit, to the apostles (inspired men including Paul), which is the meaning of *us* in this passage (2:10). Then Paul says he took that revelation and made it known to the Corinthians (and others) through the power of the Spirit guiding him. Note that Paul said the things which were revealed to him, he spoke. Paul spoke by inspiration, the Holy Spirit giving him the exact words to speak (2:13). Therein lies the difference between **revelation** and **inspiration**.

According to Gausson, inspiration is

that inexplicable power which the Divine Spirit aforesaid, exercised upon the authors of Holy Scripture, to guide them even to the word which they have employed, and to preserve them from all error, as well as from any omission (37).

Inspiration simply means that the Holy Spirit exercised supernatural power upon those who wrote the Bible, guiding them and giving them the exact words to write, in the way in which the Spirit wanted it expressed. In fact, every word in the Bible was given to the writers, by the Holy Spirit, and the teachings these authors wrote down contain the exact words, forms of words, and wording the Spirit desired, including tense, voice, mood, gender, and number of a word. The fact that a certain word in Scripture is found in the singular rather than the plural is all part of the Divine purpose and work. Everything in Scripture is there because God wanted it. Some refer to this as the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, meaning that every word (verbal) in the entire Bible (plenary) is Holy Scripture (inspiration). Of course, we should be careful not to confuse natural inspiration with "God-breathed" inspiration. Saying someone was inspired to write or say something is a result of being **indirectly** motivated by someone or something. Perhaps a

writer draws inspiration from another source such as a person or an object. An artist may be inspired to paint a wonderful picture based upon some life experience. On the other hand, Bible inspiration always involved a **direct** or miraculous activity of God, providing men with supernatural guidance in speaking and writing for God.

To further understand what is meant by *inspiration*, Paul writes: “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). “Inspiration of God” is from the Greek word *theopneustos* combines two words, *theos* meaning “God” and *pneustos*, from *pneuma* meaning “spirit” or “breath.” The Scriptures are literally “breathed out” or “spirited out” of the mouth God—“God-breathed.” Packer writes: “theopneustos means ‘out-breathed’ rather than ‘in-breathed’ by God—Divinely ex-pired, rather than inspired” (29). God “breathed out” “all Scripture” and all the words contained therein. Therefore, the inspiration of Scripture is directly connected to God’s authority, which is illustrated by, “What the Scriptures say, God says,” for they are one and the same with regards to authority.

Because the Bible is a product of God, the Scriptures are authoritative. This means that whatever God asserts in Scripture must be believed, whatever God enjoins in Scripture must be obeyed, and whatever God prohibits in Scripture must be avoided.

Although God used men to write the Scriptures, none of the words they wrote down originated with them. It is through inspiration that men of God were able to both speak and record in writing Divine words. While God provided these men the words to use, they were still able to write using their personalities, demeanor, backgrounds, perceptions, and experiences. Such is the miracle of inspiration. Of course, this is the point Peter makes when discussing this particular phenomenon:

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Here we learn some things about the *inspiration* of Scripture. First, Peter emphatically declares that Scripture is not the product of man. Men did not and could not conceive of such a work; rather men were “moved by the Holy Ghost” in speaking and writing the words of God.

Second there are some key words we need to consider. Peter (by the Spirit) uses the Greek word *ou*, which carries an absolute negative of possibility—“in no way” or “not ever.” The idea is that man could in no way (not ever) produce such a message as found in Scripture. Man could not perceive to conjure up such a message for mankind. Without having God’s supernatural help, it is impossible for men to do. Second, the verb *phero* means “to bear, carry along, convey, produce, bring forth, or bring along.” (The word image is like that of the wind blowing a boat along on the water.) No message was ever conveyed, borne, carried along, produced, and brought forth by an act of human will. Instead men were (*phero*) carried along, moved along, conveyed, brought forth by the Holy Spirit to speak from God. The Holy Spirit provided them the supernatural ability to speak and write words from God. Third, the Greek word *apo* comes before the word “God,” which means “out from God,” evincing the fact that the source of the words is God. God gave the words to the Spirit, who in turn gave the words to the holy men of God, directly guiding them as they spoke and wrote.

Finally, the passage stresses the passivity of man’s involvement even though they physically penned the words. God gave them through His Spirit! The Bible explains that David was inspired of God and his example also demonstrates the process involved with inspiration: “The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, And his word *was* in my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). Luke confirms this activity saying:

Men *and* brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus (Acts 1:16; cf. Psa. 41:9).

In writing his first epistle to the Thessalonians, concerning inspiration, Paul writes:

For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe (1 The. 2:13).

God chose selected men to speak and write. These men were miraculously and supernaturally guided and aided by the Holy Spirit to ensure there would be no errors or omissions when they either spoke God's words or wrote those words down. In this manner, God—through the Holy Spirit—not only delivered His message to mankind but preserved it as well. The Scriptures are indeed God's Word, and we can be assured of their authenticity, authority, and accuracy.

BIBLE FORMATION—CANONIZATION AND TRANSMISSION

Bible comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which is plural for “books” or documents written on papyrus. *Scripture* (which is synonymous with Bible) comes from the Greek word *graphai*, meaning “writings.” As we previously noted, all Scripture (the writings) are “God-breathed.”

The Bible is actually a library consisting of sixty-six documents or books. It is divided into two testaments—the Old Testament and New Testament. *Testament* means “covenant.” There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. The Old Testament was primarily written in Hebrew, the language of the Jews. The New Testament was written primarily in Greek. A tiny portion of Aramaic is found in both testaments. All of these books were written by forty, inspired men over a period of approximately sixteen-hundred years.

As God revealed His mind, and as inspired men wrote it down in the words of their language, they would do so on materials common for their time. These materials included, stone, clay, papyrus, animal skins, leather, vellum, and parchments. By the time of Christ in the first century, the Jews had divided the Old Testament into three sections, which today is known as “the Tanakh, from the first letters of the Hebrew *Torah* (the Law), *Nevi'im* (the Prophets) and *Kethuvim* (the Writings, which begin with the book of Psalms)” (Hulme).

Jesus was familiar with this division and referred to the entire Old Testament in similar fashion:

And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and *in* the prophets, and *in* the psalms, concerning me (Luke 24:44).

In other words, the entire Old Testament testifies about Christ.

Sometimes the entire Old Testament is simply referred to as “the law”: “Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?” (John 10:34). Here Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 referring to it as “law.” The apostle Paul, similarly, refers to the entire Old Covenant as the “law” and finally, in allegorical fashion, as the “bond-woman” (Gal. 3:2-24; 4:24-31). Paul also referred to the Old Covenant as the “holy scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:15). In fact, the entire Old Covenant (the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings) was referred to as the “oracles of God” (Rom. 3:1-2), and it is here we learn that God entrusted the Jews with the responsibility of preserving the Old Testament Scriptures.

Involved in the preservation of the Old Testament is what is called “Canonization” or the process of identifying and recognizing what books are sacred or Scripture and which books are not. *Canon* comes from the Hebrew word *qaneh* and the Greek word *kanon*, both meaning a rule, measurement, or a standard. “With respect to the Bible, it speaks of those books that met the standard and therefore were worthy of inclusion” (Beckwith 51). The New Testament acknowledges that the Jews had identified, codified, and established the canon of Old Testament Scripture long before the first century (Mat. 5:17-18; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16-17; 24:44; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom. 3:21). Moreover, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 demonstrated that the Old Testament contained in our modern Bibles were the same books contained in the Hebrew Bible of the Jews.

Moses gave the Jews instructions in identifying error and preserving Truth. Any teaching that was contrary to the already-accepted canon of Scripture at that time was to be rejected (Deu. 13:1-18).

Furthermore, if there was no miraculous evidence in connection with the teaching, it was to be rejected as well (18:15-22).

Therefore, we know God preserved His message in the Old Testament Scriptures, safeguarding them through inspiration, aiding and guiding inspired speakers and writers. We know God preserved all the books of the Old Testament through the instrumentality of His chosen people, the Jews. The thirty-nine books of our modern Bibles are the identical contents of the Hebrew Bible. The Old Testament points to a time when it would be replaced with the New Testament:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, That I will make a new covenant With the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers In the day *that* I took them by the hand To bring them out of the land of Egypt; Which my covenant they brake, Although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD (Jer. 31:31-32).

The Hebrews' writer begins his treatise saying: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the preeminent spokesman for God, the One for whom the Old Testament prophets prepared (1 Pet. 1:10-12). The Hebrews' writer contrasts the *old revelation* with the *new revelation*. God revealed Himself "in time past"—to the fathers in the prophets. He dealt directly with the fathers of each household during the Patriarchal period (Abraham—Gen. 12; Isaac—Gen. 26; Jacob—Gen. 28), and during the Mosaical period God expressed His will to men through prophets such as Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, et al.

This "time past" or *old revelation* came in differing proportions and made in different ways. As the prophet Isaiah said, "here a little, *and* there a little" (Isa. 28:10-13). The revelation of the past (Old Testament), came piece by piece—bit by bit, however "in these last days" (New Testament) God has spoken by His Son, Jesus Christ. In the transfiguration of Matthew 17 God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him" (17:5). Jesus Himself

affirmed He was God's spokesman (John 5:19; 12:49), which makes it necessary to heed His message:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let *them* slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard *him*; God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will? (Heb. 2:1-4).

Here we learn God spoke through Jesus and Jesus spoke to His apostles and inspired men, who not only spoke for God, but also wrote for God. Jesus told His disciples (apostles):

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come (John 16:13).

Christ would speak to His inspired men through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would guide them, teach them, and bring to their remembrance all things Jesus said to them while He was with them on earth (14:25-26). The Spirit would give them the very words God wanted spoken (Mat. 10:19-20). The truth of the Gospel of Christ, the New Covenant, which the apostles and inspired men spoke and wrote, was free from error (inerrant), as it was guided and aided by the Holy Spirit. This message was authoritative because Jesus had "all authority" (28:18—ASV).

In similar fashion to the Old Testament writers, the apostles and inspired men wrote down the words of God, creating Scripture. The early church made copies and shared them with each other (Col. 4:16). Therefore, the Christians of the first century would immediately recognize Scripture. The Thessalonians knew immediately that Paul's writings were Scripture and the Word of God (1 The. 2:13). They were able to discern true documents from false ones. Miraculous gifts were granted to first century Christians as the Spirit willed (Heb. 2:4; 1 Cor. 12:11). Certain gifts, including that of prophecy

and “discerning of spirits” (12:10; 14:29; 1 John 4:1) were exercised for purposes of determining which documents were truly Scripture or canonical (1 Cor. 14:37). Once an epistle was written, it was automatically regarded as Scripture or canonical. Therefore, we know and can be assured that all twenty-seven books of the New Testament were accepted as God’s Word—and only these twenty-seven. While there are no “original” documents in existence, there are literally thousands of copies (these copies are now called manuscripts). In addition to trusting God in preserving His Word, we can also verify this preservation through historical means. Various men of the second, third, and fourth centuries made reference to the New Testament books:

Athanasius gives us our earliest list of the 27 books in the AD 367, while Origen (c AD 250) may have mentioned all of them a century earlier (though there is debate whether he named the book of Revelation as manuscripts differ on this point). Either way, the core of the New Testament was functioning as canon by the end of the second century as other evidence shows. At that time, Irenaeus and the Muratorian Canon mention the core of the New Testament, noting the four gospels, Acts, the Pauline Epistles, I Peter, and I John. These were the books that had apostolic roots and that churches in many distinct regions were using. Origen, Irenaeus, and the Muratorian Canon predate any church councils where some claim the canonical books were chosen. New Testament books were not chosen but recognized by their use over time in churches (Bock).

Furthermore, it has been said that the entire New Testament, with the exception of eleven verses, can be reconstructed from the writings of the early church or what has been termed the “Church Fathers.” Whether or not that is true, we do know that the early church did, indeed, quote the New Testament extensively. In many cases, while a direct quote was not provided, allusions to the New Testament saturate all of the early Christian writings. The index of New Testament references in Clement of Rome, Mathetes, Polycarp, Ignatius, Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus shows they all were familiar with nearly every canonical work.

We who trust in the Lord God Almighty are cognizant of His existence and are keenly aware of His mighty power. We know that the very same power exhibited in the creation of the universe is the very same power which sustains and preserves the powerful Word—“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:25).

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THE WHOLE OF MAN

Paul Vaughn

Paul Vaughn was born in Maysville, Kentucky, and attended Maysville Community College and Lexington Technical Institute. He graduated from East Tennessee School of Preaching in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1986.

Paul edited *Triumph and Tragedy*, which is on the history of the church in central and eastern Kentucky (currently out of print). He has written lesson commentaries on Hebrews, Daniel, and Luke, along with numerous articles on Restoration History for *Contending For The Faith*. Paul is a regular speaker on the television broadcast, "What Does the Bible Say," sponsored by the Southwest Church of Christ in Jackson, Mississippi. He speaks in a number of lectureships and Gospel meetings each year.

He married Ricki Jett in 1973. Paul and Ricki have worked in the mission fields in Ohio and Kentucky for eighteen years, helping to establishing congregations in Brown County, Ohio and Jackson, Kentucky; they are presently working with the Marion Church of Christ in Marion, Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

God has given man an incalculable amount of blessings. His blessings bring joy, peace, and encouragement to the soul. Yet most of the world has no idea, nor can they fathom the tranquility of the mind and soul that comes from being in God's family, the church of Christ. The multitude of humanity anchors their emotions and well-being to their own heart and opinions. What they do not understand is that at best they can only arrive at a vague idea on which to build confidence for true hope and peace.

It is written, "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool, But whoever walks wisely will be delivered" (Pro. 28:26). Man must not trust in his own self-will when it comes to business, home, and especially his religion. It is truly folly to build a life without the true knowledge of God. His blessings are an absolute necessity for the well-being of any man! Solomon said:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14—KJV).

With these last two verses in Ecclesiastes, Solomon sums up man's responsibility to God and himself.

The complexities of life often bring heartache and pain. These sorrows present in life are often brought on by self-deceit creating a form of self-importance in doing things our way. The words of Solomon, penned in Ecclesiastes, address the problems of life and the remedy to correct it while providing a relief for those errors, faults, evil desires, and sins that people allow themselves to engage in.

LIFE WITHOUT GOD IS VANITY

Life is very precious and must be regarded as extremely valuable. Life should be cherished more than diamonds, sapphires, and rubies; yet, most people in history and today view life as nothing but a physical existence seeking the treasures of material earth. Throughout the Bible there are numerous examples of those who viewed life through the eyes of an Epicurean philosopher for their short journey on earth. James said, "whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (Jam. 4:14). They wanted to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, never considering the outcome of their godless decisions. They had yet to learn that life without God is vanity.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes from the unrestricted prospective of one living "under the sun" (a life without God). It is a life that is unrestricted by God's standard and his conclusion for that type of life, living "under the sun," is nothing but vanity. *Vanity* is used thirty-eight times in the book. The Hebrew Word: "לָבֵל" Transliteration: *hébél*, meaning breath" (Strong), emphasizes that which is passing and empty, vain. Living without God, one's life passes as a breath, a vapor leaving a refuge of no real substance. It is a life that wastes the air that God has provided to sustain mankind on the earth. A life without God, at best, is insignificant and worthless, yet history is filled with men and women who chose to live without God in their lives.

THE ANTEDILUVIAN PERIOD

The seed sown by Adam and Eve in the Garden sprang forth with wickedness that demanded the judgment of man. The family of Cain grew large in numbers and sins. They lived without God, taking each generation in a direction of sin with an influence reaching to the family of God. It is written:

Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they *were* beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose (Gen. 6:1-2).

The descendants of Seth married the descendants of Cain. The moral and spiritual conditions of mankind had deteriorated to the point that God saw no redeeming qualities in man. Only Noah and his family kept God in their lives and the rest of the antediluvian world was living a life without God. Moses records, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every intent of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually" (6:5). Materialism and ungodliness abounded upon the earth and man's existence was nothing more than vanity, except for God's remnant. The people of the world could view Noah and his family as nothing but scrap, a remnant held over from some out-of-date morality, yet it was their lives that God viewed as vain. They failed to understand that the whole duty of man was to seek God.

LOT CHOSE FROM A WORLDLY POINT OF VIEW AND LOST EVERYTHING

One of the examples of a man choosing unwisely for himself and his family was Lot. He was the son of Haran, the nephew of Abraham (11:27-31). Lot traveled with Abraham when he left Ur of the Chaldeans and his material wealth grew to the point that it was becoming as great as that of Abraham.

Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents. Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together (13:5-6).

Abraham was the spiritual leader in his family. It is truly disheartening that the characteristic Abraham was known by did not extend to Lot. Under the circumstances, the family of Abraham and the family of Lot could not dwell together in unity and peace. Therefore, Abraham proposed an acceptable solution for both men. “So Abram said to Lot, ‘Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we *are* brethren’” (13:8). Abraham had brought Lot with him when they left their home in Ur. The solution put forth by Abraham perhaps should have brought a remark from Lot that, since Abraham was the patriarch in the family, he should choose and Lot would go in the other direction. However, Lot did not honor Abraham or God in the exchange.

And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it *was* well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched *his* tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom *were* exceedingly wicked and sinful against the LORD (13:10-13).

Abraham understood that as long as he was seeking to please God, God would take care of him and his family. Abraham knew that the “whole of man” was to fear God and keep his commandments. Lot, thinking in a materialistic way, separated himself from the very one who would lead him in God’s way and “pitched *his* tent even as far as Sodom.” Lot, making his choice from an earthly point of view, lost everything. The influences of living among a godless people affected this family so greatly that they turned from God. He lost daughters and their husbands to Sodom, his wife became a “pillar of salt,” and his daughters encouraged him to drink until he lost all sense of right and wrong and committed incest with them. When men choose not to honor God and abide in His will, the depravity of the world soon imprints it mark on their hearts, and their lives become nothing but vain, and the profit of their labor is

gone. “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity’” (Ecc. 1:2).

ACHAN CHOSE FROM A WORLDLY POINT OF VIEW AND LOST EVERYTHING

One of the great examples of a godly man in the Old Testament is Joshua. As a leader of the nation and a leader of his family, Joshua understood that the whole duty of man was to “fear God and keep His commandments.” He said:

And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Jos. 24:15).

Yet the influence of a godly man will only extend as far as those around him will observe and learn. There must be desire to see and follow the example of a righteous man.

God demonstrated His power to the Israelites when they crossed the Jordan River on dry land and when they captured Jericho. He commanded them not to take any of the property from Jericho.

Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who *are* in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, *are* consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD (6:17-19).

Achan closed his eyes and did not appreciate all the evidence of God’s power—to do exactly that which God commanded them not to. Because of a desire to gain material wealth, Achan’s sin led to the defeat at Ai, and thirty-six men were struck down.

All who refuse to adhere to the words of God will end their life’s journey on earth realizing that they have lived a life of vanity. Achan learned this lesson late—the price for sin is extremely high. The wedge of gold, Babylonian garment, and silver Achan took amounted to nothing and truly demonstrated the vanity of vanities.

THE GODLY WALK WITH GOD

Solomon learned that man must

Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil (Ecc. 12:13-14—KJV).

This lesson has been exhibited throughout the Scriptures. Faithful men and women have sought to walk with God and overcome the vanities of life.

ZACHARIAS AND ELIZABETH WALKED IN ALL THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD BLAMELESS

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Luke 1:5-6).

Zacharias and Elizabeth were seeking to please God as a family. There are many who believe they were sinless, but the Bible decisively and clearly teaches that all have sinned, except for Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:23; Heb. 4:14-15; 5:8-9). Luke was describing the character of Zacharias and Elizabeth and their way of life. They were not seeking notoriety or the material wealth of the world. They made it their life's goal to be humble servants of God, "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." They perceived the whole duty of man was to walk with God. This godly couple served God faithfully, and no charges could be made against them. They refused to let the vanities of life lead them from God!

Because of their faithfulness and love for God, they became the parents of John the Baptist. Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Mat. 11:11). John the Baptist followed the example of his godly parents, walking in God's way. It cost him his head to satisfy the demands of the wicked Herodias and her daughter. John never had the wealth of the world. King Herod had all that a

man and gold could attain, but his life was vain and empty of any real value.

THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN IS TO GLORIFY GOD

Today, most people live in a world of worthlessness. They see no advantage of seeking out God and His will for man. All that is important to them is an abounding supply of the treasures that soon turn to rust and dust. Yet these treasures are of more value to them than walking in the path that leads to spiritual success. The carnally-minded use the land that God created and never appreciate its Creator; they use the air God supplied and never see the One who supplied it; they use their bodies as vessels to attain material possessions and never see the Creator in whose image they are created. Their total existence is nothing but emptiness. "One generation passes away, and another generation comes," and all is vanity. The vanity of pleasures and the vanity of selfish desires have blinded their eyes to the "whole duty of man."

God is glorified by His creation, the universe. To glorify God as God is to recognize Him as the Creator and sovereign of all. The psalmist David wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language *Where* their voice is not heard" (Psa. 19:1-3). The heavens glorify God as examples of His handiwork; their existence is evidence of a Creator. There can be no other than the infinitely powerful and wise Supreme Being that brought it all into existence. All the evidence is open for man to see, but most refuse to honor the information that is *speaking* from above. Paul wrote:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became

futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools (Rom. 1:18-22).

Adam and Eve did not glorify God when they ate that which He commanded them not to. The people who died in the flood did not glorify God by turning their lives over to wickedness. Lot did not glorify God when he pitched his tent among wicked people. Achan did not glorify God when he took that which God commanded him not to. Zacharias and Elizabeth glorified God by “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord” (Luke 1:6), and they were accounted as righteous. Jesus glorified God in His life by doing the work He was sent to do. Jesus said, “I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 17:4).

Today, men glorify God when they do not accept the doctrines of men. “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mat. 15:8-9). Men glorify God by believing that He is God and seeking His will. “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

UNDERSTANDING THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN TO GLORIFY GOD

There are spiritual advantages to the Christian life. Christians have real blessings for they are members of God’s family. They know that in their life they must: “Fear God, and keep his commandments,” for this is the only way to please Him. Carnally minded people never understand the importance of the Christian walk or the duty of man to seek out wisdom from above. They never attain a real understanding of spiritual blessings. They do not have a desire to magnify God in their lives or be motivated by the death of Jesus on the cross. The Romans took a crown of thorns and fitted it as a crown of shame upon Jesus; then they nailed Him to the cross.

All the suffering Jesus went through on the cross should motivate mankind to glorify God by complete obedience. It is the “Whole of Man.”

CONCLUSION

The “Whole of Man” is to glorify God by sacrificing self to the will of God. All who seek to honor Him must live for the Lord. “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Solomon had to see the vanity of life before he came to the conclusion that it is man’s duty to honor God and keep His Commandments.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Sadly, there are very few who come to this understanding.

WORKS CITED

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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Understanding the Will of the Lord

The apostle Paul wrote, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15-17). We must understand what the Lord's will is to live the life God wants us to live: walking circumspectly, redeeming the time, being wise. The Bible is the revelation of God's will to man (1 Cor. 2:9-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

This book is published to help the common man understand the Bible, specifically the three dispensations of time and how those dispensations are segmented into various periods. Knowing these will give you a good base to begin to understanding God's will. This book also contains some additional chapters to help provide additional information regarding the church, worship, salvation, and man's purpose. We pray that you use this book both to help *Understand the Will of the Lord* and aid in obtaining heaven's home.