



# **BIBLE**FRAMEWORK

**for Worship and Obedience  
in an Age of Global Deception**

**Part VI:  
NEW TRUTHS OF THE  
KINGDOM ARISTOCRACY**

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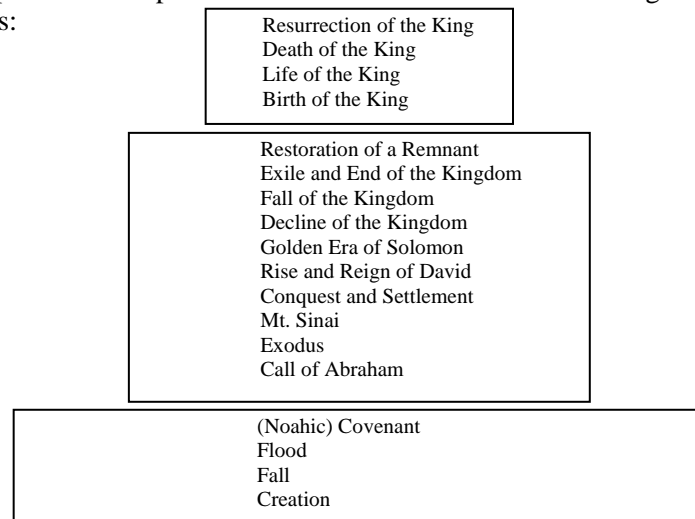
## INTRODUCTION

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This is the sixth and final part of this series on God's historical framework of revealed doctrine. This series has covered so far the historical and doctrinal truths from the creation to the first advent of Jesus Christ. One further area of truth remains: the origin and purpose of the Church. As a fitting conclusion to this series, therefore, Part VI completes the framework with the doctrine of the Church or, in terms of the great Apostles' Creed, "The Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church."

Part VI follows the same approach used in Parts II, III, and IV. Several key historic events will be specified. Then a doctrine or group of doctrines will be linked to these events along with an expose of unbelieving and pagan opposition to these doctrines. The reader will notice in this part more than in the previous ones (except Part V) that prior truths in the framework are necessary to understand properly the newer and later truths. Christ's ascension and session, for example, requires understanding of the prior OT truths of the call of Abraham and the reign of David.

The previous five parts left the biblical framework consisting of eighteen key events:



These eighteen key events mark the progress of God's story. The last two of these events, however, left a historical and theological puzzle. The King had come to establish the Kingdom of God which was promised in the OT but was rejected, died, and departed from mortal history through resurrection. What, then, became of the promised Kingdom?

Recall from Part IV of this series when we discussed the Millennial issue. Remember that there arose prior to the New Testament appearance of Jesus Christ a dispute over when the promised triumphant Kingdom of God would appear. Clearly Israel was God's priestly nation among the international community (Exod. 19:6; Isa. 2:1-4). Was Israel to assume international leadership under the Messiah before or after the judgment and resurrection that would end history? In short, was the triumphant Kingdom to be inside mortal

history or was it essentially the eternal state? After Christ came and was rejected, the controversy became more complex because of the rise of the Church and its relationship with the Kingdom and Israel. Was the Church a “spiritualized” version of Israel and the Kingdom (*amillennialism*)? Or was it actually a nation-like entity replacing Israel that was to conquer the world and bring into existence a physical-political kingdom to hand over to the Messiah (*postmillennialism*)? Or was the Church a “new body” distinct from Israel which somehow prepared the way for the yet-to-be realized Kingdom (*premillennialism*)?

The King Himself warned his followers of His rejection by Israel and the ensuing historical age between His first and second advents. This teaching was something new and not clearly foreseen in OT prophecy. Jesus filled in details not covered by the ancient prophets who saw only the broad features of both advents but were not clear on their distinction (I Pet. 1:11). As the nation began to reject His ministry, Jesus spoke a series of parables about the “mysteries of the Kingdom” (Matt. 13:11). Briefly, these parables teach that the judgment of evil and subsequent establishment of the Kingdom will occur at the end of the inter-advent age (Matt. 13:39-42,49; cf. 7:21-23; 25:34). Professor Alva McClain puts it well:

***“The present age, viewed from the standpoint of the Kingdom, is a time of preparation. During this period the Son of Man is sowing seed (v. 37), generating and developing a spiritual nucleus for the future Kingdom, a group called “sons of the kingdom” (v. 38). At the same time He is permitting a parallel development of evil in the world under the leadership of Satan (vs. 38-39). It is the purpose of God to bring both to a “harvest,” when the good and the bad will be separated, and then to establish the Kingdom in power and righteousness (vs. 41-43,49).<sup>1</sup>***  
***[Emphasis original]***

The newly revealed details of the inter-advent age, then, picture the present time as a period of history in which preparations are being made for the yet future Kingdom. This age, however, is not the Kingdom itself.

This view of the present age is fiercely opposed by amillennialists and postmillennialists who fear that it relegates the Church to a secondary role and detracts from the central purpose of the first advent of Christ. Most of these proponents follow the Reformed theology of the second and third generation Protestants. This theology we discussed briefly in Part V of this series when we developed the atonement of Christ. Such advocates of Reformed theology insist that divine cause-effect must be explained as though we can totally comprehend it. Therefore, they demand that Christ died for only the elect (lest the atonement be “wasted” and God’s purpose “for naught”). The relationship of the atonement to the non-elect tends to be downgraded or ignored in this view. Likewise, they demand that Israel’s rejection of Christ (which is so central to the Cross) marked the end of that nation’s position in God’s plan and hence the Kingdom promises to it. The idea that Jesus made a genuine offer to bring the Kingdom to Israel prior to the Cross and that Israel rejected this offer but will one day still receive the Kingdom is anathema to this kind of Reformed theology. Proponents of this theology believe that this approach makes the

<sup>1</sup> Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 441.

Cross a mere “plan B” in history because it results from the negative side of a choice.

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Such theology, however, forgets that very similar “offers”, “rejections”, and “plan B’s” occurred in past history. In Eden the offer to man to dominate and subdue the earth was rejected and brought about our present fallen mortal history with the need for the Cross (the result of a negative choice). In the centuries after the flood the offer to build a new civilization was rejected and resulted in the calling out of a counter-culture in Abraham (result of a negative choice). Immediately after Mt. Sinai the offer of Canaan to Israel was rejected and resulted in a second miraculous invasion under Joshua (result of a negative choice). In the days of Samuel the offer of a politically simple theocracy was rejected and resulted in the rise of the monarchy which defined the role of Messiah (result of a negative choice). During the fall of the kingdom and exile, the offer of an end-time restoration of the nation was made impossible by the depth of apostasy and resulted in a partial restoration and postponement of the final restoration as announced to Daniel (Dan. 9:20-27) (result of negative choices). Each of these situations could be similarly criticized as bringing about “plan B’s”, but that is the clear pattern of God’s working in history.

This pattern climaxes with the career of Jesus Christ and the inter-advent age. The five events which we will study in this Part VI of the series develop the doctrines that clarify the nature and mission of the Church and its relationship to the Kingdom of God. These events cover the ascension of the King to His heavenly throne, the sending of the Spirit to planet Earth, the emergence of the Church out of Israel, the historic maturing of the Church, and the exit of the Church out of history through the rapture event. Together these events and their linked doctrines define the features of the Christian life. This approach avoids approaching the Christian life as though it were merely an aspect of psychology.

Three appendices deal with special details. One briefly contrasts Dispensational theology with Reformed theology which is a much needed topic in today’s evangelical world. The second covers the Pre-tribulational/Post-tribulational Rapture controversy which has important practical effects in the Christian life. Finally, the third appendix develops the present social implications of the Church’s role in the Kingdom of God.

These appendices will provide a contrast to what historically has often resulted from Reformed theology, viz., the rise of large institutional “state churches” which dominated their respective nations. With the Church seen as replacing Israel in the plan of God (“replacement theology”) such an institutional political presence is inevitable. Experience has shown, however, that such institutions have not been good spiritual witnesses to the gospel or to any manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Postmillennial expectations of a political conquest by the Church of world society sufficient to bring about Kingdom conditions have gone unachieved. Not only has there been that failure but there has always lurked within these institutional churches a latent anti-Semitism which conflicts with the warning of Genesis 12:3. This Part VI, then, in clarifying the role of the Church presents important truths for everyday Christian living.

## CHAPTER 1: THE HEAVENLY ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 155

In their frustration over trying to account for the rapidly-appearing sophisticated technology of ancient man (architectural marvels, navigation, etc.) while denying the biblical record of the origin of civilization, various unbelieving authors have speculated that extra-terrestrial beings somehow influenced ancient man. Supposedly, these beings from outer space periodically visited the planet to help humanity evolve from primitive ape levels to advanced human levels.

There is some truth buried in these speculations. Angelic beings did interact with the human race (not primitive apes, but fully-developed recent created mankind) before the flood (Gen. 3:24; 6:2; II Pet. 2:4-5). All through later biblical history they interacted in ways which were occasionally revealed by the prophets (e.g., II Kings 22:19-23; Dan. 10:12-14). However, as the saying goes “truth is stranger than fiction.” Not only has humanity been influenced by “extra-terrestrial beings”, these very beings themselves have been superseded in rank by a representative of the lowly human race, the Son of Man. Not only has He ascended far above them, He has begun a new human race on earth of a different species, a divine work that fascinates the angels (Eph. 3:10).

The Church, it will be learned in this chapter, originated from beyond the furthest point in outer space, from beyond the entire universe. The Church was created on this planet because of Jesus Christ’s efforts after He ascended and arrived at the throne of God. His work in founding the Church from beyond outer space has been repeatedly remembered in the famous creeds. The Apostles’ Creed, written in the first or second century, for example, says: “I believe. . . He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; From there he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”<sup>2</sup>

After looking at Christ’s ascent using the NT observations, we will examine how that ascent and the subsequent session is interpreted by NT authors who relied upon prior OT truths and pictures. We will then move on to study some of the doctrinal consequences. Christ’s session-work in heaven is the cause of the unique features of spiritual life in this dispensation. To prepare for this study please read Daniel 7, Psalm 110, Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and Acts 1:1-11.

### THE HISTORICAL ASCENSION AND FOLLOWING SESSION

Like the other events in the NT picture of Christ’s career on earth, his unique ascension and session were literal historical events, not mere mythical stories manufactured by Church “spin doctors.” Unlike the other events, however, this one could only have been partially observed by mankind. The first part of his ascent into heaven was observed, but the rest of the ascension

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (New York: Harper Brothers, 1919), I, 21f.

and his session at the Father's throne could not be observed. That part of the event occurred in heaven far beyond man's limited powers of observation. Study of this event, therefore, requires a two-fold approach. For the initial ascent we rely upon the material in the gospels and the book of Acts. For the rest we must rely upon how the NT writers utilized OT material to describe what had happened.

## PREPARATIONS FOR AND OBSERVATIONS OF THE ASCENSION

Christ had tried to prepare his disciples for his coming departure many times. He repeatedly prophesied not only of His death but also of His ascension. The Apostle John later reflected upon Jesus' ministry and reports how He boldly proclaimed that He would return to where He was before the incarnation (John 6:62; 16:28). He would go to be with God in a sense utterly different from that of ordinary dying (John 7:33). When He would arrive in God's Presence, He would somehow empower his disciples left back on earth (John 14:12), an empowerment for which they should be happy (John 14:28). Jesus taught that once back in heaven He would send the Holy Spirit to the disciples for a world wide ministry of convincing all men everywhere of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11).

In spite of all of these remarks by Jesus during their training, the disciples were utterly astonished when He arose into heaven from the Mount of Olives. Three times the NT records the departure of Christ before His amazed disciples. In Mark 16:19 it is described in passive terms. Christ "was received up into heaven." In Luke 24:50-51 Jesus actively leads the disciples eastward out of Jerusalem and to the Mount of Olives between Jerusalem and Bethany. The text notes that while He was blessing them, He "parted from them." In Acts 1:8-9 the passive and active elements are combined. Here the "blessing" is explained as including the promise of the Holy Spirit and the ascent begins while the disciples apparently look on speechless.

The Acts reference also reports that two angels appeared after the ascent began (1:10-11). They inform the disciples that the physical ascent of Jesus up from the earth will one day be reversed and He will return physically. The angels' words clearly imply that Christ's second coming is not to be thought of as some unseen, "spiritual" event that can be identified with Pentecost or with the AD 70 destruction of the Temple. Just as the ascent was physical, so must the descent be!

After this ascent all the post-resurrection appearances of Christ which had been going on for forty days (Acts 1:3) ceased. From this point in time whenever Christ appears, He always appears *from heaven*. Stephen, for example, saw Christ in heaven (Acts 7:56). Paul heard Christ's voice speaking from heaven (Acts 9:3-6). The ascension plainly marked a new stage in the career of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also challenges cosmological ideas of geometry since Christ in a resurrected body is located at some point which projects as "up" relative to wherever one stands on the spherical earth.

## INTERPRETATION OF THE ASCENSION

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Beyond the direct observations of the beginning of Christ's ascent, the NT also provides interpretation of the rest of his ascent to God's throne. According to the NT Christ's ascent was not a mere disappearance but was a real journey through space. I Peter 3:22 describes the ascent as a journey into heaven where He attained command over all angels. In Hebrews 4:14 Christ is said to have passed through *multiple* heavens, as though beyond our atmosphere and outer space there are other "layers" of the created cosmos. Ephesians 1:20-21 pictures the ascent as one to a position above every created power as in the I Peter 3:22 passage.

In Ephesians 4:8-10 the ascent is visualized in terms of Psalm 68:18 which describes a theophany in which Yahweh commemorates His victory over the world powers from Sinai to the reign of David. Psalm 68 is a "song of victory" type of psalm like Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32, Judges 5, and several psalms in the book of psalms. These songs of victory were used in Israel and in surrounding pagan nations to picture the successful conclusion of military conquest. The God or gods were seen to descend from their holy mountains, give victory to their nations' armies, and then retire back to their holy mountains. In Israel's history Yahweh descended to Mt. Sinai after the exodus to take command of his people for the campaign of conquest of Palestine. Yahweh's throne during this campaign was the Ark of the Covenant where His Glory was always located. Observe how Moses and the Israelites saw the Ark as the location of God in Numbers 10:35ff and Joshua 3:3f. In David's day (Psalm 68 is a Davidic psalm) the Ark of the Covenant finally arrived at Mt. Zion, the site of the future Temple (II Sam. 6:12-19; I Chron. 15-16). Psalm 68, therefore, appears to be a victory song David wrote to commemorate Yahweh's faithfulness in bringing the nation into the land and securing its borders from the surrounding pagan threats.

Psalm 68:7-18	Ephesians 4:7-10
Yahweh left His throne to lead Israel in the conquest & settlement from Sinai to the victorious establishment of the Ark on Mt. Zion, the site of His final throne and the place where before Abraham the last of His faithful servants in the Noahic family reigned (Melchizedek, Gen. 14)	Christ victoriously "ascended far above all the heavens" from where He once was (although in pre-Incarnate form, John 6:62; 16:28)
Yahweh leads prisoners-of-war in a triumphant procession	Jesus Christ declares victory over defeated angelic powers (cf. Col. 2:15, I Pet 3:19)
Yahweh receives booty from His defeated foes	Jesus Christ gives the booty to His Church

**Table 1. – Analogy between Yahweh's military campaign of conquest and settlement and Jesus Christ's campaign of birth-life-death-resurrection. Both end in a triumphant celebration.**



In Ephesians Paul sees an analogy between that OT theophany and Christ's ascension. Observe in Table One the details of this analogy and its implications. Paul in application alters the verb "receive" in Psalm 68:18 to "receive" in Ephesians 4:8 to bring out the grace of Jesus Christ in sharing the booty of victory with his Church. If nothing else, this analogy shows how NT writers viewed Christ as identical to the God of the OT. It shows that Christ had ascended to the place of God Himself when the journey was completed. This concept also explains the meaning of the expression in Hebrews 12:22 where the Church "comes" to Mt. Zion, the "heavenly Jerusalem." *The full ascension from earth to heaven, rightly interpreted, teaches the literal transport of Christ's human nature through space to a definite geometrical point where God's throne is located.*

## INTERPRETATION OF THE SESSION

Lesson 157

What did Christ do after He completed the ascension? That question is covered by the term "session." To explain the session, NT writers, continued to use OT analogies. It should come as no surprise that the Creator has so designed the universe and historical experience that certain features are repeated in different contexts over and over. Some writers refer to these features as "typologies" rather than analogies. In any case they are corollaries to the creation doctrine. Three major OT passages supply most of the imagery that NT writers employ to explain the session of Jesus Christ.

The Son of Man and the Fifth Kingdom (Daniel 7). Israel had been called out of the paganized Noahic civilization to form a disruptive counter-culture but as we discovered in Part IV of this series, Israel disobeyed and suffered Yahweh's discipline. When Israel's kingdom fell in 586BC, God showed Daniel that the Kingdom of God would still come on earth but only after a time of delay. There was to be an intervening period of Gentile domination. (We will further study this delay in Appendix A.) In Daniel 7 God presents the moral qualities of each of the five kingdoms which would dominate the world from 586 BC to the end of mortal history. Each kingdom except the final fifth one is represented by a sub-human creature, a picture showing that these four prior kingdoms as unfit for true human living. The fifth kingdom is depicted by a human being, the Son of Man, indicating it alone is fit for mankind and the consummation of the Genesis mandate.

To what does this Son of Man image refer—an individual or a group of people? In Daniel 7:18, 27 a group of people, believers, who are called the holy ones of the most High, are associated with the Son of Man image. Nevertheless, the other kingdom images in Daniel 2 and 7 seem to be associated with the individual founding kings (7:17,19-20, 24-26; cf. 2:31-43, especially 2:37-38). The best interpretation of the Son of Man image, therefore, is that it refers to both an individual founding king and the people of that kingdom<sup>3</sup>. The

<sup>3</sup> See discussion in R.T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), p.170f.

founding king characterizes the people who populate the kingdom. And this final fifth kingdom follows the casting down of all previous kingdom authorities (7:9). The OT image in Daniel 7:9-14 thus teaches that God would establish His Kingdom in future history after His judgment through a genuine human founder who would reign over all the earth.

How is the imagery of Daniel 7:9-14 used in the NT to interpret Christ's session? One way the NT uses this imagery is in teaching that Christ received full authority over the earth when He came to the Father on the throne. Just as the Son of Man figure in Daniel "was given. . .dominion, and glory, and a nation" (7:14), Christ was given glory and honor at his session (note the ideas expressed in Matt. 26:64, 28:18; Mark 14:62; Heb. 2:9; Rev. 1:18). Christ at the session is thus recognized by the Father as the king of the final kingdom. He is set to gain what Satan tried to offer Him during the temptations (cf. Matt. 4:8-9).

A second way the NT uses the Daniel 7 imagery is in showing that the kingdom which ultimately is given to Christ will be made up of "all people, nations, and languages" (7:14). In like manner Christ is given authority over all nations so that his disciples are to penetrate every culture on earth with the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20). The Apostle Paul notes this cultural dominance in his Athens address (Acts 17:30). The session thus marks a point in history when God's revealing and saving program returns to all nations where it had been in the era between Noah and Abraham. Readers are reminded that Israel's ultimate meaning is a channel of blessing to all nations. Though a Jew by birth, Jesus Christ has a larger mission than just being Messiah to Israel.

Finally, a third way the NT uses the Son of Man imagery is to reveal by its negative usage of Daniel 7 details the postponement of the full exercise of Christ's session authority. In Daniel 7 the Son of Man image represents the people of the kingdom as well as the king. If Christ is the king, He must have a people in order to bring the fifth kingdom into existence. Until that people exist, there can't be a kingdom. Moreover, Daniel 7 imagery also shows that the nations must be judged, the Satanic beast slain, and all remnants of the previous four kingdoms set aside prior to the actual reign of the Son of Man. By omitting specific references to these details the NT shows that the session did not fulfill all of this OT imagery.

The Royal Son of God Reigning in Victory (Psalm 2). The second OT imagery used to explain the session of Christ is taken from Psalm 2. This particular imagery came out of Israel's experience with her monarchy. At her founding at Mt. Sinai, Israel was established as a kingdom under Yahweh (see Part III of this series). This preliminary form of the Kingdom of God depended upon Israel's continued sanctification and upon her victorious waging of holy war against the degenerate Canaanite culture of Palestine. Unfortunately, within a century of her founding, Israel failed in her task. A monarchy with human kings became necessary. As the weaknesses of these human kings became apparent, OT saints looked increasingly to an Ideal King who would reign in perfect fellowship with Yahweh and put down all of Yahweh's enemies.

Psalm 2 pictures the Ideal King, the Royal Son, reigning triumphantly from Mt. Zion after being formally accepted by Yahweh (“Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee”). The Ideal King is to pray to Yahweh for world dominion (2:8). He then attains global dominion “with a rod of iron” (cf. Rev. 2:27). Before this forcible conquest, however, the nations are given the choice to bow to the Son’s authority (2:10-12).

The NT uses this Royal Son picture to interpret Christ’s session two ways. First, just as the Royal Son of Psalm 2 was formally accepted by God, so Christ is formally accepted with full honors at his session. Because of His perfect loyalty to God’s will, Christ received “a more excellent name” (Heb. 1:1-5; cf. Phil. 2:6-9). Although prior to His session while on earth, He had been pronounced as “God’s Son” (Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11;

Luke 3:22; cf. Acts 4:23-30), it was not until the finishing of his earthly work that the Son acquired full legal authority (note Eph. 1:20-22). This full legal authority extended over not merely the human race on planet *earth* but also *the angelic beings throughout the universe*.

The NT non-usage of details in the Psalm 2 picture, as it does with its avoidance of details in the Daniel 7 imagery, again points to the delay in full exercise of Christ’s authority. The Son of God must rely upon the Father to attain global dominion in spite of His being formally recognized as king. Christ holds back his judgment in the NT (cf. Rev. 2:26-27; 19:6,15). He does not now rule “with a rod of iron.” Also very obvious is the discrepancy between Psalm 2 that pictures the Davidic Messiah on the physical Mt. Zion at Jerusalem and the NT that speaks of the Son of God sitting at the Father’s right hand in heaven. Whereas Psalm 2 reveals Christ as the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, as the eternal extension of the House of David ruling over the nations on earth, the NT pictures Christ ruling over all the angelic powers throughout the heavens. *Analogies* exist between Psalm 2 and Christ’s present session because both concern the same Person in ruling functions, but the NT doesn’t declare the present session as the *fulfillment* of the Davidic Covenant.<sup>4</sup>

The Everlasting King-Priest in the Order of Melchizedek (Psalm 110). Besides the imagery of Daniel 7 and Psalm 2, the NT also uses imagery in Psalm 110 to interpret Christ’s session. Psalm 110 is a stunning revelation of the Messianic King fulfilling a pre-Israelite, Gentile, office of king-priest. As with Psalm 2 David catches the vision of his Messianic Descendent in the context of the future destiny of Jerusalem and Mt. Zion. Yahweh in David’s vision speaks to this Future One Who must sit and wait for Yahweh to subdue His enemies (110:1). This Descendent receives priestly authority as well as kingly authority. He fulfills the early pre-Israelite Noahic rule modeled by Melchizedek in

<sup>4</sup> Certain “progressive dispensationalists” today insist upon “reforming” dispensational theology so as to make it more compatible with Reformed theology. Making Christ’s present session the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant is their chief maneuver. See discussion in Appendix A.

Abraham's day at the location of Jerusalem (Gen. 14:18-20). His priesthood is distinct from the Jewish Aaronic priesthood. Thus the imagery includes a global reign of One Who combines political and religious offices in Himself.

The NT applies Psalm 110 imagery to Christ's session in two ways similar to the two applications of Psalm 2. On one hand Christ in His human nature is accepted into the full presence of God during the session. He sits at the Father's "right [ruling] hand" (Heb. 1:3; 6:19-20; 9:12, 24; 10:12). Being from the tribe of Judah Jesus cannot participate anyway in the Aaronic priesthood of Israel. His priesthood, therefore, is rooted further back historically in the original structure of Noahic civilization and therefore reaches outward beyond the domain of Israel to all nations. On the other hand Christ waits there for the defeat of his enemies before fully reigning (Heb. 10:13). An extended period of time must pass before all his enemies are put down in historical experience. The NT interprets this "subduing" in the original Genesis sense, a subduing of the entire earth including death itself (I Cor. 15:23-28).

These three OT images—the Son of Man in Daniel 7:9-14; the Royal Son of Psalm 2; and the King-Priest of Psalm 110—are key OT devices for understanding the NT session of Christ. They all teach the same two truths: that Jesus Christ ascended to the very throne of God where He was given authority over all the universe; and that He now awaits a future time when He will exercise that authority directly over all the nations of mankind. Figure One summarizes these two truths.

<b>OT Image Source</b>	<b>Accomplishment of the Session</b>	<b>Accomplishments Still Awaited</b>
Daniel 7	Christ given kingly authority to rule over all nations; comes face-to-face with the Father	Judgment of nations; acquisition of a kingdom people; evil powers set aside
Psalm 2	Christ given kingly authority to rule over all nations by a decree of the Father	Subduing of the nations; nations given opportunity to bow to Christ's authority before they are forced to; Christ not sitting on David's throne at physical Mt. Zion
Psalm 110	Christ given both kingly and priestly authority to rule over all nations; sits at the Father's right hand	Enemies not yet defeated

*Figure One. Pictures how OT images are used in the NT to interpret Christ's session through a selected set of features.*

The ascension and session, then, is an event loaded with new details about how the OT promised Kingdom of God comes about. The King has come, has been rejected, and leaves. His “coming” has been split in two—a first advent and a second advent—with an inter-advent period of history that now comes into existence. During this interim time period the King doesn’t reign over the global physical-political domain on earth that was the expectation of the OT. He doesn’t sit on David’s throne in Jerusalem.

Instead He sits with the Father in heaven at the helm of cosmic history. His throne is the Father’s, not David’s. At this throne He awaits the conditions for the start of the promised OT Kingdom. The NT authors add the detail that from this throne Jesus Christ outranks all angelic powers. It is this new detail that introduces the key to understanding what purposes the new inter-advent age accomplishes. History from the time of the ascent and session of Jesus Christ will now be known as the “last days” (Heb. 1:2; 2:26; I Pet. 1:20; I John 2:18). During these “last days” God imposes the gospel invitation to trust in Christ or face exclusion from the Kingdom onto all men everywhere in every culture after the manner of Psalm 2:12 (Matt. 24:14; 2:19-20; Acts 17:30-31; Rom.1:5). Viewed in this light, the gospel message is not a sweet, anemic religious appeal to humanity. Rather, it is a very sober combination of grave and threatened judgment.

## **DOCTRINAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE ASCENSION AND SESSION: THE FINAL COUNTDOWN OF JUDGMENT / SALVATION**

Lesson 158

The earlier historical events of the flood in Noah’s day and the Exodus in Moses’ day provided a preview of God’s final judgment upon evil and salvation of His people. Evil, it will be remembered from Part II of this series, will not forever plague history. Of this truth God gave believers historical assurance by the flood and the Exodus. With Christ’s death, resurrection, and subsequent ascension and session, however, the years of anticipation ended and the final countdown to the complete judgment and salvation began. The present era is described in the Bible as the “last days” during which the final subduing of creation under Jesus Christ occurs. Previously we have looked at the twin themes of judgment and salvation under five headings (Parts II and III of this series). Let’s look again at each of those five areas of truth.

### **GRACE BEFORE JUDGMENT**

Before the flood judgment God provided over a century of gracious warning to mankind (Gen. 6:3; cf. II Pet. 2:5), and before the Exodus He gave many gracious warnings to the Egyptians (Exod. 5-11). These warnings set the precedent for the era of grace separating Christ’s first and second advents. This inter-advent period of grace is just that. It is an age in which humanity is being given another chance, its last chance, to bow the knee to the Creator and Savior. All mankind everywhere regardless of culture or race or people group are

commanded to radically change their world view and basic beliefs (i.e., repent as in Acts 17:30-31).

History appears on the surface to continue in the same fashion as it did before Christ came. The “times of the Gentiles” that began in 586 BC with the fall of the OT kingdom continue (Luke 21:24).<sup>5</sup> The Kingdom of Man is being allowed to run its course and reveal the all-encompassing nature of evil. Appearance, however, is not necessarily reality. The NT authors exhibit *a powerful optimism and assurance of the final outcome based upon their faith in the ascension and session of Christ*. There is a “victory” over death (I Cor. 15:50-57), a coming separation from all evil (Gal. 5:21), and a coming reckoning with Christ as Judge (II Tim. 4:1, 18; II Pet. 1:11).

This is the consequence of viewing Christ’s session in the light of OT images such as Psalm 2:12 “Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled.” The present age must not be interpreted as God giving up on His centuries-old program (a hope of pagan unbelief). Rather it is an age given to mankind in spite of the rejection of the King and an age that surely will end in a confrontation with that same King. It is not merely grace; it is grace before judgment.

## PERFECT DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination (like the other politically incorrect topic, violence) is an inescapable biblical concept. Discrimination is a corollary of God’s justice: He discriminates between good and evil. During both the flood and the Exodus God kept His elect people separate from the ungodly at large (Gen. 6:8,18; 7:1; Exod. 8:22-23; 9:6; 10:23; 11:7; 12:12-13; II Pet. 2:5b,9). As a derivative of God’s justice, all law necessarily discriminates between those who conform to it and those who violate it. The present day use of the word “discrimination” is trivial and manipulative.

God’s discrimination in these OT events foreshadowed the discrimination caused by His Son. From the moment of the Incarnation men are judged on the basis of what they do with Jesus Christ (see Part V of this series). God discriminates between those who submit to the Son’s authority and those who rebel (Matt. 3:11-12; 7:13-23; 22:11-14; John 3:18-21, 35-36; II Pet. 2; I John 2:19). Mankind is being separated into these two categories by their response to Jesus Christ (II Cor. 2:14-16). In spite of the modern mantra about “pluralism”, in God’s eyes there is only a dualism that hinges upon His Son.

This dualism is seen most clearly in the concept of *imputation*. Imputation is an act of crediting something with a value, an economic term. In Philemon 1:18, for example, Paul urges the Christian owner of the slave, Onesimus, to credit Paul with whatever debt is owed to Philemon. Imputation is inherently discriminatory in that it has boundaries that circumscribe its application. A value is ascribed to a definite object and not another. The NT authors insist that

<sup>5</sup> The modern state of Israel like its first century predecessor is founded upon Gentile treaties and agreements such as the Balfour Declaration and various United Nations’ resolutions. Its struggle to exist since 1948 centers upon the question of its “right” to the land.

God imputes a value to each of two distinct human races. All who trust in Christ are said to have His righteousness imputed to them and have been transferred to a new human race “in Christ.” All who reject Jesus Christ remain “in Adam”, that is, they are credited with Adam’s sin. God thus discriminates now and will discriminate forever between these two human races—the one still in Adam, sharing his sin and punishment; and the other being formed in Christ, sharing His righteousness and blessing.

Walvoord comments:

*“The concept is expressed that Christ is the Head of the new creation composed of all those who are in Christ in comparison to Adam, the head of the old creation, which is composed of those who are in Adam. . . . The concept of the new creation is that just as the old creation partakes of physical birth, the sin nature and spiritual death in Adam, so one who is a new creature partakes of a new birth, a new nature, righteousness and sanctification, and inherits certain wonderful promises. . . .”*<sup>6</sup>

God’s actual pronouncement that imputes Christ’s righteousness to one who believes is called *justification* and was studied in Part III of this series. Justification is the result of imputation and expresses divine discrimination over against the pagan insistence upon the universal brotherhood of man.

## ONE WAY OF SALVATION

At the very heart of God’s saving work is the Cross of Christ. As we studied in Part V of this series, the Cross cannot be properly understood without the biblical concept of *God’s justice*. God’s wrath against our sin must be accepted before the substitutionary blood atonement can be appreciated. All attempts to “reinterpret” the Cross are products of the fleshly mind that flees the presence of God and denies ultimate responsibility before Him. This rebellious disposition inevitably tries to reconstruct a new god that fulfills its wishes for irresponsibility and arbitrary, cheap forgiveness. Thus all pagan religions and Christian heresies must reject the Cross of Christ as the only way of salvation and are left with their “right” to go to hell in their own way.

The death of the King as the sole way of salvation, however, was anticipated in humanity’s prior history of the flood and the Exodus. In the flood the only way of salvation was Noah’s Ark. In the Exodus the only way of salvation was the blood of a sacrificial lamb smeared on the door. The Cross continues this same truth because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He ever remains holy. There can be no arbitrary forgiveness without at the same time compromising His holiness. Every non-biblical scheme of salvation, therefore, at bottom compromises the holiness of God and with that, destroys all hope of an ethical absolute.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 226f.

<sup>7</sup> In Islam, for example, Allah is said to forgive sin because He weighs one’s sins against his good works as though human good in some fashion “balances” human sin. Allah just arbitrarily forgives without any basis in substitutionary blood atonement.

## ALL CREATION INVOLVED

Lesson 159

When God judges and saves, He involves nature as well as man. The flood was a geophysical catastrophe, not just a family adventure story. The Exodus involved many biological, chemical, and geophysical phenomena on a scale sufficient to break the power of the then reigning world superpower. Biblical salvation is never merely sociological or psychological, but objective, historical, and physical. Nature is involved as well as man because the fall affected both (Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 8:20-23). In Part V of this series we studied how nature as well as man shall manifest one day the full glory of God as pictured in Revelation 21-22. But there is more to God's final judgment and salvation in Christ than mankind and physical nature. We now come to a neglected part of Christian doctrine: the *angelic conflict*.

Angels and Israel. When God inaugurated the Mosaic Covenant He called upon angelic powers in the physical environment to act as witnesses to His treaty with Israel. In Deuteronomy 32:1 through His prophet Moses God calls upon these unseen powers to witness His covenant. Later, when He invokes the treaty curses during the decline and fall of the Kingdom, He again calls upon these witnesses to His covenant faithfulness and Israel's rebelliousness (Isa. 1:2; Mic. 6:1-2). In some way not wholly revealed the angels act as witnesses to God's historical behavior with His chosen nation.

At other times in Israel's history angels minister to the nation. Angels visited Lot (Gen. 19:1-22). Angels were involved at Mt. Sinai (Acts 7:53). Evil angels empowered the false religion of Ahab (I Kings 22:19-23). Angels were involved in explaining the meaning of visions sent to Israel's prophets and wise men (Ezekiel, Zechariah, Daniel). Angels were involved in the background of international relations between Israel and the pagan nations (Dan. 10:10-21). These angels were closely identified with "natural" phenomena such as fire and wind (Psa. 104:4). However it was not with Israel only that angels interacted.

Angels and Antediluvian Civilization. The flood narrative clearly states that the "sons of God" or "divine ones", i.e., angels, got illegitimately involved in sexual intercourse with human females toward the end of the antediluvian civilization and produced a strange form of human being called the "nephilim" or "fallen ones" (an early form of genetic engineering?--Gen. 6:1-4). We also know that during the antediluvian period angels had the power of capital punishment (Gen. 3:24). Angels may have acted as "rulers" in this period prior to the origin of the institution of human government after the flood which then carried over to post-diluvian civilization the connotation, rulers=divine beings (cf. Psa. 82). Perhaps it was through abuse of their authority that the interbreeding between angels and humans began. In any case, Peter and Jude report that those angels that were involved are today incarcerated in a special compartment of hell called Tartarus (II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).



As rulers the antediluvian angels may well have been involved in geological catastrophes between the curse of Genesis 3 and the great cursing of the flood in Genesis 6-8. After the general curse upon the ground in Genesis 3, God further cursed the ground due to Cain's sin in Genesis 4:10-12. Recently, Gentet, a creationist author, has noted that:

***“the punishment was directed at the earth itself. There is no mention of God using capital punishment prior to the Flood event. People seemed to automatically understand that God personally took revenge for sin by increasing the penalty (the Curse) on the earth. . . . It was a world of terror, violent people, and violent ecological disasters from the hand of God, ending in total human destruction at the [Genesis Flood Event] except for those in the Ark. . . .<sup>8</sup>[Emphasis original]***

The antediluvians, living as they did in an arrangement involving interaction with angels and physical nature, looked forward to relief from these judgments. The relief came when God promised in the Noahic Covenant that He would not *curse* the ground *any more* (Gen. 8:21). Judgment henceforth was to be turned over to the new divine institution of human civil government (see discussion in Part II of this series).

***“The pre-Flood world was a time of exceptional Divine interventions upon the earth. Even in post-Flood times, when God takes a strong hand to show His displeasure over sin, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, plagues, etc., are cited in Scripture. . . . When God dealt with ancient Israel as a theocracy, He stressed that punishment on the Covenant people would be given with increased intensity. . . (Lev. 26:14,18,21,24,28,32). This increasing degree of punishment in order to bring about repentance seems indicative of how the Lord has acted in history towards sin. The account of the pre-Flood world is brief in Scripture, but Divine activity appears to have been even more forceful in the pre-Flood world before God sanctioned human government to act on His behalf in dealing out punishments.”<sup>9</sup>***

Angels were profoundly involved in the antediluvian civilization in ways we do not understand. They functioned as armed guards around Eden, lived closely enough with mankind to become sexually involved (obviously possessing the capability of manifesting in corporal physical human bodies as they did in Genesis 18-19), and probably ruled in some sense through the physical environment.

<sup>8</sup> Robert E. Gentet, “The CCC Model and Its Geological Implications,” Creation Research Society Quarterly, XXXVII (June, 2000), 1, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

The Angelic Conflict. Angels, including Satan, are creatures made by the hand of God. After creation all the angels worshipped and praised God (Job 38:7). Sometime after the creation Satan and some angels rebelled and originated evil. The primeval history of this fall is revealed in prophecies against the rulers of Tyre (Ezk. 28:11-19) and Babylon (Isa. 14:3-23). (Note the association once again of angels and political rulership just as Yahweh and the Israel's king are linked together.) From these passages we learn that behind the King of Tyre was Satan himself who once stood in Eden as the anointed or "messianic" cherub, the most beautiful of all creatures (28:12-15). In judgment God will eject him from His Presence (28:16-19). Satan's rebellious attitude is revealed as a lust to be at the same level as the Creator, above all the created order (14:13-14). *That defines the heart of sin.*

Ever since his fall Satan has gathered around him an organized kingdom of angels who fell with him and who are intent upon struggling against God and the righteous, unfallen angels (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:4,7). Satan's program includes blocking evangelism (Matt. 13:19), persecuting believers on earth (I Pet. 5:8); accusing them in heaven (Job 12; Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10), weakening the nations (Isa. 14:12), and ruling the cultural and spiritual environment of civilization (John 12:31; Eph. 2:2; II Cor. 4:4). His strategy hinges on casting God the Creator as an unjust, unloving liar (note the implicit accusation in Gen. 3:1-5; Job 1-2).

Against this cosmic angelic struggle in the background of human history, what effect does Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and session have? If the angelic conflict is included in God's judgment/salvation, what has been accomplished? Just as the flood of Noah judged the earth and the Exodus judged the land of Egypt, so the finished work of Christ judged the angelic realm of Satan that stands behind the physical cosmos (John 12:31; 16:11; Col. 2:15). In what manner? Here we come to one of the great neglected truths of the work of Christ that is revealed in connection with his ascension and session.

The pictures we see in Psalms 2, 68, 110, and in Daniel 7 all point to a conflict that lasts until some future time when the Son of Man / Son of God is given victory and makes His enemies His footstool. Who are these enemies? The nations? Yes, but more than human societies are involved. We've just studied that angels and Satan have been "behind the scenes" of the world's power structures since at least the initial paganization of the Noahic civilization. During His incarnate life, Jesus was tempted by the Satanic offer of rulership over the nations (Matt. 4:8-9). The OT pictures cited above show that once seated at the Father's right hand, above all principalities and powers, the Lord Jesus receives the authority to rule over the nations. It's no longer Satan's to offer! Satan lost that total authority once Jesus Christ was seated in heaven.

Nevertheless, Satan is still called the "god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). And the OT pictures note that the ultimate victory has not yet come about. How can it be that Jesus Christ has all authority over all things, including hell and death (Rev. 1:18) and can open historic doors of ministry defying all political power (Rev. 2:7-8), and yet not have the total victory? *The answer is that the angelic conflict has been strategically transformed.* Prior to the session the conflict was primarily in the

spiritual realm between the fallen and unfallen angels as God played out His plan with the nation Israel. The contending angelic forces worked in and through human rulers, the nations against Israel, and inside Israel the corrupt kings and false prophets against the Davidic line and the godly prophets following Moses. *After the session, however, a member of the human race, a category of creation made at first lower than the angels but made for eventual dominion under God (Psa. 8), finally fulfilled the ultimate design of ruling all of nature including this background spiritual realm of angels.* Man, not Satan, now holds the “high ground.” Satan’s ethical claim to supremacy over man through the fall is undone.

As the Last Adam, the head of the new human race (Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:45), Jesus Christ has taken dominion from Satan and already has “judged” him (in the sense of John 16:11) by earning the right to reign through His perfect obedience. Jesus accomplished the mission of the human race where Adam failed. Moreover, Satan cannot contest Jesus’ obedience as not being that of a true human because of the doctrines of the hypostatic union and kenosis which we studied in Part V of this series. Table Two shows why Jesus’ obedience qualifies Him to reign and why Satan cannot appeal His supreme position. From this “high ground” of strategic conquest, Jesus Christ now wages a war that transforms the angelic conflict. No longer is it simply “the good angels and God” against “the bad angels and Satan.” The spiritual forces of evil have lost all hope of attaining the throne because it’s already occupied by One Who possesses credentials that can never be challenged.

Name of the Doctrine	Content of the Doctrine	Satan’s Possible Appeal Refuted
Hypostatic Union	Undiminished deity and true humanity united forever in one person without confusion	True humanity is what historically and perfectly obeyed the will of God; Creator-creature distinction not violated at any time
Kenosis	As God-man, Jesus Christ gave up the independent use of His divine attributes and accepted a 100% creature (dependent) existence during his mortal life	Jesus’ obedience was by faith in the same manner as any other member of the human race; He never used His divine power to avoid trials and temptations (as Satan indeed tried to get Him to do)

***Table 2. – The basis for Jesus Christ permanently attaining the Throne that Satan tried to attain and failed.***

This war that Jesus wages, however, is an unusual one. It doesn’t involve a direct strategy of one power against another, Jesus directly against Satan in a spiritual version of “OK Corral.” It is a war of maneuver and indirect strategy

that manifests the archetypical wisdom shown by the best military campaigns of history.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is slowly unseating Satan and his hordes by eradicating their ethical claim upon fallen men. Like David of old, once anointed King, Jesus bides His time, waiting for the undoing of Satan's kingdom just as David waited for the fall of the dynasty of Saul. Anointed king but not able to reign as king, David gathered the nucleus of his army out of Saul's kingdom. "Everyone that was in distress, . . . in debt, . . . discontented, gathered themselves unto him and he became captain over them" (II Sam. 22:2). As we shall soon see in this study, Jesus, too, is gathering the nucleus of his royal family, the future administrators of His kingdom, out of the present kingdom of Satan. He has been taking an ever growing number of prisoners of war (Eph. 4:8).

Lesson 161

Satan can no more protest the acceptance of fallen humans--sinners like himself--by a holy God than he could protest the credentials of Jesus Christ. In his foolish attempt to stop Jesus from gaining the throne, Satan unintentionally carried out the keystone in man's salvation, the substitutionary blood atonement of the Cross. With the Cross now allowing the holy God to forgive sin without compromising His holiness, a door of salvation opens for man that Satan cannot shut. As Table Three shows, in the light of the Cross and of the imputation of Christ's righteousness there can be no challenge to forgiven and justified men.

Name of the Doctrine	Content of the Doctrine	Satan's Possible Appeal Refuted
Substitutionary Blood Atonement	All grace is grounded upon total restitutionary satisfaction of God's just demands against sin	There is no unavoidable contradiction between God's holiness and His acceptance of sinful creatures covered legally by the SBA
Imputation	God credits Christ's righteousness to the account of those who believe	The righteousness that is credited is that of Christ whose credentials have been accepted permanently at the Father's Throne.

*Table 3.—The basis for permanent translation of human beings from Satan's kingdom into the Kingdom of Christ.*

If Jesus' session was the strategic victory, then each time when a person believes the gospel and is justified a further tactical victory occurs in this cosmic angelic conflict. Satan suffers the loss of a creature on his side. Each time a believer is restored through confession of sin (see discussion of restoration in Part III of this series), the central legal basis of salvation is affirmed. Each time a believer chooses to trust the Lord over against Satanically-inspired doubts and temptations, the reputation of God is vindicated against Satan's impugning

<sup>10</sup> Note the discussion in Part III of this series under the Conquest in which I quote the famous military historical B. H. Liddell-Hart who demonstrated that indirect strategy has always been used by the best military captains of history.

assaults. This ongoing battle establishes the fifth characteristic of God's final judgment and salvation.

## APPROPRIATION BY FAITH

In both the flood and Exodus those who were saved were those who exercised personal faith in God's Word, whether that Word promised an unprecedented global cataclysm or a surgically precise death sentence on first born sons. Indeed, if there is a Creator-creature distinction, if there is a universal fall and condemnation of all mankind, and if salvation requires God's intervention 'from outside', then the only appropriate response can be faith.

Tactical victories in the angelic conflict cannot be won by human works that originate in the fallen impulses of sinners. "Human good" carries no credit when it originates from an inherently evil motive of self-justification. Satan could then claim that such works would not be fundamentally different from anything he and his hordes could produce. Satan could well make the complaint: if God doesn't save angels, how can He justly save men on such a basis?" What defeats Satan and glorifies (vindicates) God is faith in His Word. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17).

## SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the first grand event in the establishment of the Church in the inter-advent period. With Christ's acceptance at the Father's right hand, mankind has begun to reach its created goal of dominion over all. The "last days" have begun as the countdown of God's judgment/salvation starts. Reaching further back into the structure of creation, the session of Christ deals with all of creation, including the shadowy (to us) "background" of the angelic conflict. It enlarges the scope of concern beyond a mere Near Eastern ancient drama. Now all the universe is involved.

From this "high ground" at the Father's right hand will come the next strategic surprise: formation of something called the Church, an entity that is not a nation, not a race, and not the Kingdom itself. Yet this strategic maneuver moves history forward so that the Kingdom can come as promised. The inter-advent age is not a static holding period or a historical "time out." To the contrary, God's program is advancing inexorably toward its foreordained goal. More details of how it is doing so and our role as believers in it will follow in the next chapters.

## CHAPTER 2: THE EARTHLY ORIGIN OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 167

The previous chapter showed how the Church ultimately originated in heaven when the Lord Jesus Christ was seated on the “high ground” at the Father’s right hand. Between His first and second advents, He guides history to progressively complete the final judgment/salvation work of God. Christ has become the great “divider” of mankind and the conqueror of the principalities and powers. And the Church is centrally involved in this process.

When in His humanity Jesus Christ was given the supreme rank over all angels and men, He immediately took steps to begin the Church on earth. While both the Father and Son in heaven were thus ready to begin the Church, further work was needed. The unanswered question of the disciples in Acts 1:6 had to be answered. What about the coming of the Kingdom promised in the OT now that the nation Israel had rejected Christ? What about the role of Israel in this new situation? How long would the inter-advent age last? To deal with these questions and to found the new body of believers, the Father and Son “sent” the Holy Spirit to planet earth on a unique mission.

The Holy Spirit began this mission on a special day in the divinely-designed calendar of Israel, the day of Pentecost. Just as the advent of the Son was a complicated event involving many OT prophecies, a divided reception among the Jews, and a “stretching out” of history into a new age, so the advent of the Third Person of the Trinity similarly became a complicated event. This chapter will trace the Spirit’s Pentecostal work and show how the Church began amidst a time of tumult in Israel. We will follow the same method we used in the previous section regarding the ascension and session of Christ. First, we shall study what actually happened on the day of Pentecost over against what many think happened. Then, we’ll look at how that event was interpreted by the early church. Various unscriptural interpretations of this event will be answered. Finally, we’ll look at some doctrinal consequences that follow from this miraculous historic happening. To prepare for this study, please read Acts 1-3.

### THE DAY OF PENTECOST: HISTORICAL OBSERVATIONS

The advent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was no less of a historical event than the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like the Lord’s ascension and session, however, it could only partially be observed in its total workings. Certain physical phenomena were observed but what happened spiritually had to be interpreted by the early Christians through the grid of the OT scriptures and subsequent revelation to the Church in the NT scriptures. Let’s look first at what happened and then at when it happened.

## WHAT WAS OBSERVED AT PENTECOST?

The narrative in Acts 2:1-13 describes the miraculous happening on the day of Pentecost, but it must be understood in the context of prior events going all the way back to John the Baptist at the beginning of the gospels.

The Gospel Background. The Lord had commanded the disciples to remain in Jerusalem until they received the baptism of the Spirit promised by John the Baptist (Acts 1:4-5). As the author of Acts, Luke also chronicled the ministry of John the Baptist in Luke 3:1-22. In that passage Luke records the announcement of the Messianic coming which we studied in Part V of this series. Clearly, John the Baptist repeatedly cited OT passages that spoke of the Kingdom of God that was prophesied throughout the history of Israel (see previous Parts in this series). Part of his message concerned three baptisms—a water baptism of repentance which he administered, a Spirit baptism administered by the Messiah, and a Fire baptism also administered by the Messiah (Lk. 3:16).

John acted as the “king-making” prophets had in the OT in that he was called to authenticate and anoint the king that God was raising up for the nation. Included in this preparation for the Messianic king he was also to prepare the nation to receive Him. Since the Kingdom of God would admit only saved individuals, it was necessary that the people be challenged to believe on the Messiah. Those who did would constitute what OT prophecies referred to as the faithful “remnant.” There had to be a “judgment” upon the nation to separate believers and unbelievers. The believers were asked to submit to a water baptism which usually was a practice the Jews used to admit Gentiles into their communities. In other words, the faithful remnant underwent a cleansing ceremony that identified publicly the need for forgiveness of sin prior to entrance into the Kingdom.

It is very important to recognize John’s activity as a key marker, historically, of the imminent coming of the long-awaited Kingdom. Jesus said that if Israel had accepted Him, John would have been the prophesied Elijah who was to come just prior to the great judgments of the Kingdom on earth (Matt. 11:14-15; cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5). John the Baptist was given further revelation (Lk. 3:2) concerning the Messiah’s work in installing the Kingdom. He would administer two baptisms: one of the Spirit and one of fire. These baptisms—which could only be done by the Messiah Himself, not a prophet like John—refer, respectively, to the saved and the lost under the metaphor of the wheat and the chaff (Lk. 3:17). At harvest time, farmers would separate the wheat from the chaff by pitching the mixture into the air to have the wind blow away the lighter chaff while the heavier wheat fell back to the ground. In similar fashion, only the unsaved will be removed from the earth prior to the installation of the Kingdom so that it begins with only the saved.

This gospel background provides the meaning behind Jesus' words in Acts 1:4-5. Note that Jesus mentions only the baptism of the Spirit because He addresses only those who have already believed. During his earthly ministry he had given further revelation concerning this coming of the Spirit (e.g., the Upper Room Discourse in John 14-16). Jesus revealed that after His ascension and session, He would petition the Father to send the Spirit to the disciples, a petition that the Father certainly would grant in recognition of His authority (John 14:16; 16:7).

The Lord's Further Revelation. The disciples' reaction in Acts 1:6 clearly shows that they immediately identified the Spirit baptism with the Kingdom yet to come. Jesus' response is very important and forms the core of the book of Acts. *He loosens the association of the Spirit baptism with the Kingdom by insisting that the Spirit baptism would come shortly whereas the time when the Kingdom would come was not necessarily so imminent (Acts 1:7-8).* Here is another instance of the same phenomenon we have noted repeatedly in this series. God's plan for history includes "surprises" which generally consist in fulfillment delays. In Eden Eve assumed that the Promised One would come as one of her immediate children. In Daniel's day, it was assumed the captivity of 70 years would be followed immediately by a total restoration of Israel and advent of the Kingdom. So now with the rejection of Christ by the nation Israel we observe the "surprise effect" of an inter-advent age.

By the time of the Lord's ascension and session the disciples knew a lot more about the details of the Kingdom than any OT saint. They now knew who the Messiah was. They knew that the two Messianic roles—the Suffering Servant and the glorious Son of Man—were going to be fulfilled in one Person, not two. They also knew of His rejection by the nation and that this rejection had to be dealt with prior to the Kingdom being restored to Israel. In addition to these Kingdom details, they also were aware of Jesus' detailed briefings on the coming of the Holy Spirit to them. They thus faced Pentecost with many pieces of the puzzle in hand that had been unavailable to OT saints, but they also were not able to "put them together" into a coherent picture.

Happenings on Pentecost Morning. Three miracles are reported in the Acts 2 narrative. First, there was a noise similar to that of a hurricane or tornado. It sounded like it was coming from above, from heaven. The amplitude was so great that it dominated the whole structure where the disciples, probably many dozens, were seated (Acts 2:2). The second miracle consisted of a strange visible phenomenon that resembled the brilliance and movement of fire, glowing "pieces" shaped like human tongues that split apart. Each of the "pieces" came to rest on a disciple so that everyone in the place had a piece come upon him (2:3). The third miracle was an instantly received capability in each disciple to speak a language foreign to that disciple (2:4).



The third miracle of language was observed by two groups of people, each with a differing interpretation. One group consisted of Jews from throughout the Diaspora attending Pentecost festivities in Jerusalem—Jews from many different cultures and speaking many different home dialects (2:5-8). At least 12 different cultural regions are mentioned (2:9-11). Initially attracted by the noise of many languages being spoken by the disciples, these visiting Jews quickly discovered that the disciples were speaking in all their native dialects. And the content of the conversation was apparently centered upon the recent works of Jesus Christ. They were amazed, mystified, and wholly focused upon what was happening. A second group distinct from the visiting Jews, apparently native Palestinian Jews, did not understand the foreign languages. They interpreted what they were hearing as drunken mumbling (2:13).

These three miraculous happenings on Pentecost had to be explained in the context of what the disciples knew from Jesus' previous ministry and from the OT Kingdom revelation. Peter does just that in his first major address of the Church age. Before studying his explanation, however, we must note something about the day of Pentecost.

## WHAT WAS SPECIAL ABOUT PENTECOST

Lesson 167

What is not well known is the significance of the day of Pentecost in Israel's calendar. Christian teachers unfamiliar with the OT hastily conclude from an isolated observation of Acts 1:4 that the Holy Spirit came only because the disciples "tarried". The application is often made that we believers in the inter-advent age should similarly "tarry" in order to receive the Spirit. Did this event occur on the particular day of Pentecost, then, merely as an accident of the disciples' waiting, or did it happen on Pentecost because of a deeper design?

Israel's Calendar. God's chosen nation had a unique calendar system. The calendar is given in the following OT passages: Exodus 12:1-30; Leviticus 16:1-34; 23:1-44; Numbers 28:16-29:40; and Deuteronomy 16:1-17. In the Spring portion of the annual calendar four events occurred: (1) Passover; (2) Feast of Unleavened Bread (7 days); (3) Firstfruits; and (4) Pentecost. In the Fall portion, three events occurred: (1) Trumpets; (2) Day of Atonement; and (3) Tabernacles (7 days). What do these events signify?<sup>11</sup>

Lesson 168

Unlike pagan calendar systems, Israel's calendar was God-ordained and prophetic. Each feast commemorated aspects of God's plan with Israel (not the Church) that set it apart from the rest of the nations. The Passover looked at Israel's unique origin, its redemption by blood during the Exodus judgment/salvation in Egypt. Recall in our discussion in Part III of this series, Chapter 3, that Israel's origin was supernatural: it wasn't caused by human

<sup>11</sup> I am indebted for this interpretation of Pentecost to Terry C. Hulbert, The Eschatological Fulfillment of Israel's Annual Feasts (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary Th.D. Dissertation, 1965).

political maneuvering nor revolutionary war; it was a supernatural happening that merited an everlasting remembrance. The seven day feast of Unleavened Bread stressed the break in culture between Egypt and Israel, reminding man that just as there was no continuity in leaven from Egypt to the new land, there was to be no continuity of religion from Egypt to Israel. Israel was a divinely-designed counter-culture to the paganized Noahic civilization. The day of Firstfruits commemorated the first harvest of the first Spring crop, a barley sheaf. It testified to God's power to continue producing the same kind of crop all the way until the Spring harvest was finished. It denied all pagan fertility beliefs by attributing crop production to Yahweh rather than deified "Nature." Pentecost came seven weeks and a day or 50 days after Firstfruits, and closed the Spring series of calendar events. Because Pentecost itself is often called "first fruits" like the day of Firstfruits proper, these two holidays must be carefully distinguished. Whereas on Firstfruits proper a *raw unprocessed sheaf of barley* was used, on Pentecost a *baked loaf* was used. Pentecost thus looked at the Spring harvest as actually realized and laid up for use. It reminded Israel to be thankful to the God of creation for His supply (cf. Paul's comment to pagans in Acts 14:17).

The Fall cycle of three events also had significance. The Feast of Trumpets featured the blowing of rams' horns which reminded Israel in the Fall of the two following events on her calendar. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) included prayer and sacrifice which pictured national repentance and confession, a spiritual preparation for what was to follow. Unlike pagan holidays that celebrate the works of man, it focused upon the sinfulness of man in need of atonement. On the Feast of Tabernacles the nation celebrated the end of the autumn harvest by living for a week in specially-prepared shelters or "tabernacles." This last event looked to Yahweh as Israel's final Provider and Protector Who would one day bring the nation into His rest. It therefore contrasted with pagan fertility celebrations that inevitably viewed history as cyclical, going nowhere. Such was Israel's ancient supernaturally-designed calendar.

The importance Israel attached to this calendar, and to the three major feasts in particular, is shown in the OT record of the Golden Era of Solomon. Solomon specifically directed that each of the three feasts---Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles be celebrated (II Chron. 8:13).

Historical Fulfillment. It is a peculiar fact of history that the Spring part of Israel's calendar, but not the Fall part, has been "fulfilled" by NT events. *Exactly on the day of Passover* Christ died—not before or after (see Part V of this series, Chapter 4, for a discussion of the date of the crucifixion). In fact Jesus Himself spoke of his coming death as His "exodus" (Luke 9:31). Hulbert comments upon the parallels between the original Exodus of Israel from Egypt and its potential exodus from Satan by the death of Christ.

***“The ultimate purpose of what took place on the night of that 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan was a release from the sovereignty of Satan. Just as the exercise of faith was necessary to obey God’s command to apply the blood that night, so faith in the means of appropriating deliverance from Satan’s hold in all the ages.”<sup>12</sup>***

This series has repeatedly pointed out the parallelism between God’s judgment/salvation in the Exodus event and the judgment/salvation centering upon the death of Christ (note the language in John 1:29; I Cor. 5:7). Now we see both events happened on literally the same calendar day, testifying to the One Who controls history! We must also mention, however, that the nation Israel does not now enjoy the saving benefits of Christ’s atonement due to unbelief (Rom. 11:7-12) although it could (and eventually will) if (when) it repents and believes in the dying Messiah (Rom. 11:22-29).

The next event, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was “fulfilled” in the provision Christ made for independence from the world, the flesh, and the devil. He provided a new life utterly separate from that of unredeemed Adam. Paul uses the unleavened bread as a type of this new life in I Corinthians 5:6-8. This provision of a new life, like that of Christ’s death, is not Israel’s today as a nation because of its rejection of the Messiah. Nevertheless, it is available to Israel theoretically if it would “repent. . .and turn again. . .so there might come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

The third Spring event was the day of Firstfruits. Significantly, Christ rose from the dead as the first fruits of the resurrection *on exactly this day* (cf. Lev. 23:11; John 20:1; I Cor. 15:20). Just as the barley sheaf had reminded Israel of God’s ability to complete the Spring harvest, so the resurrection of Christ “gave personal assurance that every believer in that nation would be raised from the dead”<sup>13</sup> just as Daniel 12:1-3 prophesied (see Part V, Chapter 5, of this series). As in the case of the day of Passover, so in the case of the day of First Fruits: the special calendar days seem to be “markers” on which Christ executes a fulfillment of the plan of salvation.

The final Spring event, of course, was Pentecost. *Exactly on this day* the Holy Spirit came down to earth (Acts 2:1). Did this advent of the Holy Spirit “fulfill” the picture of the feast of Pentecost? Hulbert suggests that just as the baked bread pictured the Spring harvest that organically united the grain which had started becoming available on the previous day of Firstfruits into an eatable form (bread) for practical use, so the advent of the Holy Spirit made practical the resurrection life of Christ.<sup>14</sup> Israel could have nationally enjoyed Christ’s resurrection power if it had accepted Him as the Messiah. Pentecost, Hulbert says, marked the giving of all spiritual provisions to live the life of the Kingdom under the New Covenant—if the King were accepted.

<sup>12</sup><sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

What of the Fall calendar cycle involving the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles? The NT writers report no events that fit these special days. This fact has already been noted in the Appendix of Part IV of this series. The Spring cycle has been “fulfilled”; the Fall cycle has not. The implication of Scripture is that the Fall calendar, too, will one day be “fulfilled”. Some future event will answer to the Feast of Trumpets. On some future Day of Atonement Israel may nationally confess its sin and recognize that Jesus, after all, really was the Messiah (cf. Isa. 53). During some future Feast of Tabernacles, Israel may enter its promised rest as the millennium finally begins.

Table Four pictures the calendar and its NT “fulfillments”. Compare Table Four with Figure One of the previous chapter. A parallel emerges between Christ’s career and Israel’s calendar. The Spirit’s arrival on the day of Pentecost appears to have provided Israel with every spiritual blessing the nation would need for Kingdom living. Standing in the way was Israel’s national rejection of Christ that is addressed by Peter in Acts 2 and 3. The background of Israel’s calendar provides valuable insight into the significance of what happened on the particular day of Pentecost in Acts 2:1.

Calendar Event	Picture Given	Historical “fulfillment”
Passover	Judgment/Salvation exodus from Egypt via the judgments and the blood on the doors	Christ’s Judgment/Salvation exodus from Satan’s dominion via the Cross
Unleavened Bread	No continuity between the pagan culture of Egypt and Israel	No continuity between the old life in Adam and the new life in Christ
Firstfruits	Assurance of a future, full harvest by the first barley crop.	Assurance of a future, full resurrection by Christ’s resurrection.
Pentecost	Harvest realized and laid up for use.	Christ’s resurrection power ready for national use by the Coming of the Spirit
Trumpets	Reminder of the following two events	None yet
Day of Atonement	National repentance and confession	None yet
Feast of Tabernacles	Enjoyment of God’s finished harvest	None yet

**Table 4.—Israel’s supernaturally-designed calendar as an outline of history.**

So far we have studied the historical observations of Pentecost happenings in Acts 2:1-13. We have also looked at the special significance of this day in Israel’s calendar. Now we are ready to examine the interpretation of these happenings given in the NT.

## THE DAY OF PENTECOST: THE NT INTERPRETATION

Lesson 170

It will be convenient to study the NT interpretation by looking at two apparently different streams of thought put forward by Peter and by Luke/Paul. Peter's interpretation of the event occurred within minutes and is recorded for us in Acts 2:14-36. It primarily concerns the nation Israel. On the other hand, Luke portrays a longer historical perspective spanning the years described in his book of Acts from Pentecost to the imprisonment of Paul in Rome. As the close traveling companion of Paul, Luke undoubtedly reflects Paul's view of *the origin of the Church and the gradual realization of its existence as an entity separate from the nation Israel.*

### PETER'S INTERPRETATION

In Acts 2:14-36 Peter addresses Jewish observers of the Pentecost happenings. Whereas Peter and his companions had experienced a tempest-like noise, strange fire-like tongue-shaped glowing masses, and the ability to speak in foreign languages, the Jewish observers had experienced only one of these three miracles: the supernaturally-enabled foreign language speaking. They had seen nothing else--no geophysical or astronomical phenomena. Nevertheless, Peter cites an OT prophecy of the coming Kingdom of God that includes many elements, including geophysical and astronomical phenomena (Joel 2:28-32).

Clearly, Peter saw the Pentecost event as something prophetically anticipated in connection with the coming Kingdom. Is he saying that the speaking in foreign languages wholly fulfills Joel's Kingdom prophecy? Or is his argument more oblique, more about the King than about the Kingdom? Let's follow his line of reasoning. He first cites Joel 2:28-29 and inserts a comment at the end of Acts 2:18 "and they shall prophesy" which is not in the Joel text. This comment shows that Peter is emphasizing the aspect of new revelation coming through ordinary "lay" Jews. Not only has the silence of God since the close of the OT canon been interrupted, but the new revelation is now occurring with multiple Jews instead of with one or two special prophets as in ancient Israel. The citation in Acts 2:17-18 emphasizes the "pouring out" of the Spirit of the Lord, a phrase that refers to a teaching or revealing ministry.<sup>15</sup> Joel foresaw this phenomenon as something that would occur just prior to the coming judgment of God and establishment of the long-awaited Kingdom.

Peter then cites the rest of the Joel passage (2:30-32) that speaks of "wonders" and "signs" which would also precede the coming Kingdom. The problem here is that whereas the wonders and signs prophesied by Joel are geophysical and astronomical, few if any such wonders and signs had occurred in that period of NT history.<sup>16</sup> Peter's meaning, however, is shown by his remarks in Acts 2:22 where the terms, "wonders" and "signs" refer to the miracles Jesus did during His life on earth only a few of which might qualify as geophysical in nature (e.g., Matt. 8:23-27). As it unfolds, Peter's argument links

<sup>15</sup> Note the meaning of "pour out the spirit" in Prov. 1:23 where it is equivalent to "make words known."

<sup>16</sup> Some commentators speculate that this sort of phenomenon may well have occurred in connection with the crucifixion (cf. Luke 23:44) but others seize upon this passage to "prove" that OT prophecies need not be taken literally.

ever more explicitly both the pouring out of the Spirit and the miraculous signs to the King Himself, Jesus Christ. Before we mistakenly conclude that Peter is claiming that all of the Joel prophecy has been fulfilled on Pentecost, we must follow the flow of his preaching.

From verse 23 to verse 32 Peter meets the Jewish disbelief that a dead man could be the Messiah who brings in the Kingdom. He utilizes Psalm 16:8-11 to show that David as an OT prophet (verse 30) foresaw that the Messiah could not die and fulfill the Davidic Covenant (see Part III of this series). The resurrection, Peter insists, is implicit in the Davidic vision of Messiah. Following closely upon the resurrection, of course, is the ascension and session, and Peter finally centers his preaching on this last event in Jesus' journey.

In verses 33-35 Peter cites the ascension and session as the explanation for the pouring out of the Spirit. Pentecost's miraculous languages are empirical evidence that Jesus had arrived at the Throne of God and accomplished what He had promised earlier, viz., He would "ask of the Father" and "send the Spirit" (John 7:39; 14:26; 16:7). In other words, Peter's emphasis throughout this address is to show forth the Messiahship of Jesus Christ and the need for Jews to believe on Him.

What, then, is Peter's interpretation of Pentecost? What is the rationale of his preaching? The logic seems to be anchored in a set of prophetic assertions:

- the OT foretold a new work of the Holy Spirit prior to the Kingdom which included new revelation coming through many different Jews and miraculous disturbances in the natural environment;
- the OT foretold that the Davidic Messiah would not succumb to death;
- Jesus foretold His ascent into heaven and dispatching of the Spirit to earth.

The logic then refers to actual historical events:

- Jesus performed miracles that disturbed some parts of man's natural environment (in most cases the natural environment of his body);
- new revelation was given through miraculous language on Pentecost.

The logic finally deduces that Jesus Christ is the King of the Coming Kingdom because:

- as ascended and seated Messiah He now stands in the role of Yahweh in sending the Holy Spirit to the believing Jews;
- as incarnate God He performed miracles of enough magnitude to qualify as the One Who will one day perform the specifically prophesied miracles in the Joel passage which bring in the pre-Kingdom judgments.

The bottom line of Peter's interpretation of Pentecost is that Jesus Christ is now in the role prophesied of Yahweh with respect to the OT Kingdom promises. He sends the Spirit. He does miracles. *So Israel must deal with Jesus Christ in order to enter the Kingdom they longed so for.* Note verses 37-40.

Shortly after Pentecost Peter gave another address in which he again made the point that Israel would have to submit to Jesus Christ in order to receive the “times of refreshing”, i.e., the Kingdom rest (cf. Acts 3:12-26, especially verse 19). As Alva McClain pointed out years ago, this era of history in and shortly after the day of Pentecost was characterized by continued Jewish anticipation of an imminent Kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

***“[Peter’s] hearers could have drawn only one conclusion, namely, that the restoration of the long-awaited Kingdom to Israel was still a possibility in their own generation. That the Jewish converts did so conclude seems to be indicated by their immediate course of conduct. First, there is absolutely no record of any break with the Jewish Temple worship, but on the contrary they continued daily with one accord ‘in the temple’ (Acts 2:46) where, according to Old Testament prophecy, all worship would be centered in the future Kingdom (Isa. 56:7).”<sup>18</sup>***

In fact, Peter in Acts 3 appears to be offering the Kingdom to Israel once again after the first offer of John the Baptist and Jesus. That the OT Kingdom would be offered twice is revealed in the parable of Matthew 22:1-7. Two calls are sent out by the king for a marriage feast for his son. The second call announced that the dinner is “prepared” and “all things are ready”. This latter terminology, according to McClain, is:

***“certainly a reference to our Lord’s finished work of redemption at Calvary. Such a call could not have gone out until after the Resurrection. But again the call is rejected, this time by actions which help identify it in Biblical history: some Jews would turn away with contemptuous indifference, according to the parable, while others would mistreat and kill the messengers (vs 6). This points to the post-Pentecostal offer, as described in the Book of Acts, when the officials of Israel did exactly that. During the gospel period not an official disciple of Christ was killed by the Jews, but during the period of Acts the terrible persecution and killing of the messengers began. There is no third call for this generation of Israel, but judgment falls: the King sends forth his armies, destroys the murderers, and burns their city—a parabolic prediction of the awful destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (vs 7).”<sup>19</sup>***

Peter’s interpretation of Pentecost is that the OT Kingdom is still a hypothetical option for Israel if the nation would whole-heartedly trust in Jesus as their Messiah. The Church is not in view. The equal footing of Jew and Gentile isn’t seen. The believers’ union with Christ, their constituting of the new Temple of God, and the new life outside of the Mosaic Law have not yet been realized.

<sup>17</sup> Alva J. McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), pp. 397-406.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 402.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 406.

## LUKE'S (PAUL'S) INTERPRETATION

As the author of Luke and Acts, Dr. Luke reflects Paul's thinking as his traveling companion. He wrote after many years of observing what happened after Pentecost. Unlike Peter's first few sermons, Luke's account benefits from seeing the overall trend in God's working. He reports on Peter's own enlarging view about the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke can, therefore, put Pentecost in a larger perspective. Likewise Paul reflects further revelation given in the years following Pentecost. Let's observe how these two authorities interpret the day of Pentecost.

Subsequent "Mini-Pentecosts". Luke reports three events that occurred after Pentecost but which showed certain parallels with that event. In Acts 8 after the martyrdom of Stephen (in which Paul as Saul was involved), a deacon colleague of Stephan, Philip, left Jerusalem and headed into Samaria with the gospel. After many Samaritans believed, the apostles came from Jerusalem to pray that these new believers would "receive the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:15). Luke reports that as the apostles laid their hands on the Samaritan believers the Holy Spirit came upon them, presumably in some form physically recognizable as at Pentecost.

A second such event occurs in Acts 10. In this case Gentiles receive the Holy Spirit in a clear analog to Pentecost: they speak in foreign languages. Peter spots the similarity. He identifies the phenomenon as that of Pentecost (10:47). Luke makes the connection very obvious by noting that God had to prepare Peter beforehand so that he would be open to the possibility that non-Jews who were viewed as "far" from God would receive the Holy Spirit.

Finally, a third "mini-Pentecost" occurs in Acts 19:1-7. This third event is striking in that Luke isn't with Paul at this time. Thus Luke's narrative depends completely upon Paul's report. And Paul's report uses the vocabulary of the previous events, showing that terms like "receive the Holy Spirit", "languages", and "prophesying" are used in exactly the same way by Luke and Paul. The implication is, therefore, that *the vocabulary of Acts and Paul's epistles regarding Pentecostal phenomena share identical meanings*—a very important point in NT interpretation as we shall see below. Moreover, in this third event the disciples of John the Baptist are integrated into the Church, showing that the Church age believers are different than OT saints. These disciples were Jews that lived outside of Israel—Jews of the Diaspora.

The Text	The Event	The Implication
Acts 8:1-25	Samaritans receive the HS	Witnessing spreads to Samaria
Acts 10:1-48	Gentiles receive the HS	Witnessing spreads to Gentiles
Acts 19:1-7	John's disciples receive the HS	Witnessing spreads to OT saints of the Diaspora



***Table 5. The pattern of post-Pentecost “mini-Pentecosts” showing fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy of Acts 1:8.***

If we take Luke’s account of these three “mini-Pentecosts”, we detect a pattern to the work of God during those years given in Table Five. The pattern fits precisely the prophecy of Jesus in Acts 1:8! In that prophetic dialog Jesus carefully distinguished the restoration of the kingdom from the work of the Holy Spirit Whom He would send once ascended and seated at the Father’s right hand (Acts 1:6-8). The witness to the gospel would spread outward from Jerusalem not because the early Christians were so zealous of missionary work but because God decreed it would happen. Careful attention to the text of Acts shows that *in most cases the spread of the gospel was forced upon the Church by adverse circumstances and overt persecution rather than being the result of deliberate missionary planning.* Luke’s literary work of Acts, then, records God’s faithfulness in doing specific things which He had promised just as the OT historical narratives had done centuries before.

Lesson 174

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit. As we learned above, John the Baptist in introducing Jesus as the Messianic King to Israel prophesied that He would baptize with the Holy Spirit. John sharply distinguished this Spirit baptism from water baptism (Luke 3:16). It was something new that would happen to those who welcomed Messiah in preparation for His kingdom. Jesus continued the revelation about Spirit baptism in Acts 1:5, prophesying that it would happen on Pentecost.

The word “baptize” carries the meaning of “identification” and can refer to a wide variety of events, some wet but most dry. Spirit baptism is obviously dry. What particular meaning does “baptism” have when used in the phrase “baptism of the Holy Spirit”? On the day of Pentecost and immediately thereafter Peter grasped that it meant a new work of the Spirit that could usher in the long-awaited Kingdom of God.

Paul and Luke, however, became aware that it meant something more than that. They understood it to refer to creation of something entirely unforeseen in the OT. They could see this new thing only after Peter’s challenge to Israel to accept the Messiah was completely and clearly rejected by the nation’s leadership. Whatever Spirit baptism was, it wasn’t to be thwarted by man. Further information was revealed to Paul on the Damascus road by Christ Himself when He said that to persecute believers after Pentecost was to persecute Him (Acts 9:4). By now it had become obvious that post-Pentecostal believers were somehow united with the ascended Christ in heaven. This new thing had a heavenly origin (see title of the previous chapter). It also had an earthly origin at Pentecost after the Session of Christ. It was something never before seen, never prophesied in the OT, and not recognized until some time after Pentecost.

In I Corinthians 12:13 Paul reveals that *Spirit baptism enters one into the Body of Christ, the Universal Church*. Christ in heaven is the Head but only the Head. He must be “completed” by acquiring a Body. Now the mystery of the OT prophecies that we studied in the previous chapters (Dan. 7; Pss. 2 and 110) becomes clearer. These OT texts looked forward to the Son of God / Son of Man / Messiah as being officially accepted by God yet not ready to reign (note Figure 1). We mentioned that in Daniel 7 the Son of Man figure represents not only the king of the fifth kingdom but also the people of that kingdom. Paul adds to the OT revelation by noting that the ascended Christ has begun to build His body.

This new thing, the Church, is to Christ what David’s mighty men were to him (see II Sam. 22). In both instances the king has been officially anointed by God’s prophet (David by Samuel, Jesus by John) yet must bide his time waiting for the status quo to change (the dynasty of Saul to exit, Satan’s rulership to end). In both instances the king attracts defectors from the other side (David attracts Jews defecting from Saul, Jesus calls believers to defect from the god of this world).

Spirit baptism unites believers retroactively with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1-7; Col. 2:11-12). It totally “transfers” in some way believers from the status of being in Adam amidst a cursed world to the status of Christ amidst a perfect heavenly environment. These truths we will develop later. Here it is appropriate only to mention them as later revelation of what the Holy Spirit began on the fateful day of Pentecost. *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit marks His Advent as Indweller of every believer*.

Languages, Prophesying, and Miracles. Another line of revelation developed by Luke and Paul concerns the unique phenomena that accompanied this coming of the Holy Spirit--miraculous speaking in languages unknown to the speaker, revelation of things present and future unknowable to ordinary human beings, and amazing works of bodily healing. These phenomena were signs to authenticate the new message about Jesus that would penetrate all of human civilization (note Mark 16:17-18).

Miraculous language-speaking authenticated the universal nature of the gospel and assured that human linguistic diversity brought on by Babel in Genesis 11 would be no barrier. If speaking in foreign languages could successfully publish the gospel, writing in languages other than Hebrew and Greek could, too. Unlike the Koran and Book of Mormon the New Testament puts no premium on its “original language.” It belongs to all people groups everywhere regardless of their language. Its inerrancy is not abrogated by translations of its text (see Part IV, Chapter 5 for discussion of this textual issue).

Prophesying authenticated *the continuity of the NT with the OT that had been a product of Moses and subsequent prophets after him*. There was the same supernatural revelation behind both of them and therefore the same infallible authority. The message of the gospel was shown to be the direct product of the Holy Spirit (cf. II Pet. 1:19-21). Healing miracles authenticated *the authority of the risen, ascended Christ over man's natural environment*. Christ is dramatically shown by these events truly to have authority over heaven and earth (cf. Matt. 28:18).

These supernatural abilities, however, were never universally present in every believer. Only some believers exercised them, notably the apostles and those closest to them. They continued for a time in Church history as part of the set of spiritual gifts given to the Church. In Paul's discussion of I Corinthians he clearly declares that the Spirit distributes individual gifts as He wills and no gift is universally shared (I Cor. 12).

Not only were these particular authenticating gifts not universally shared with every believer in the NT era, they have not been shared across the centuries of Church history. Mark 16:19-20 points out that these miraculous capabilities began only after Jesus sat down at the Father's right hand and had apparently ceased by the time he wrote this text (past tense verb "confirmed" in 16:20). The author of Hebrews also reports their cessation in Hebrews 2:4. Toward the end of his ministry Paul had apparently lost the apostolic capacity to heal (cf. Acts 19:11-12 with Phil. 2:27; I Tim. 5:23). In fact, Paul taught that these particular authenticating gifts would eventually cease (I Cor. 13:8-10). They would cease when their role became unnecessary, which happened when the NT had been written at the end of the first century.

Protestants have generally been "cessationists" on this matter because these gifts, including that of apostle and prophet, were part of the necessary foundation gifts of the Church (Eph. 2:20). Once that foundation had been laid, they were no longer necessary. The completed canon of Scripture once completed is left as the sole authority in history for the Church (*sola scriptura*). Over against this cessationist position is that of certain cults such as the Mormons and of the Roman Catholic Church, both of which insist upon a continuing apostolic-like authority and periodic post-NT revelation. Although they generally adhere to the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*, Pentecostals also open the door to post-NT revelation by their insistence upon the continuation of the authenticating sign gifts.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For a documented discussion of these issues see Thomas R. Edgar, *Satisfied by the Promise of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1996). At stake in this debate over "cessation" is *the final authority of Scripture as the standard of knowledge of Jesus Christ*. Either Scripture is the final authority, or something else (such as a continuing apostolic-like authority of church offices, prophesying, etc.) usurps Scripture as the final authority. Protestantism argues against the Romanist claim of a continuing oral tradition from the apostles that complements the written Bible because the organized church has showed itself repeatedly throughout history to be corruptible and to promulgate false doctrines contrary to the Scripture. See related discussion in Part IV of this series concerning the origin and authority of canonical Scripture. Relinquishing *sola scriptura* through Roman Catholicism, the various cults' "bibles", or direct prophecy is to say that the Bible is not the final standard in knowing Jesus Christ.

Fulfillment of the OT Covenants. It is remarkable that Luke and Paul throughout all their writings in the NT never state that the OT covenants—Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian (Land), Davidic, or New—have been fulfilled. While these writers admit certain benefits flowing to the Church from these covenants, such benefits come *indirectly* through union with Jesus Christ, not through the Church replacing the original covenant addressee, the nation of Israel.

The Abrahamic Covenant had promised a land, seed, and world-wide blessing to Abraham and his family. The subsequent biblical covenants with Israel amplified these three promises. The so-called “land” or “Palestinian” covenant (Deut. 30) revealed further details of the land promise to Israel. That unconditional covenant is not fulfilled by the Church. The seed promise is elaborated in the Davidic Covenant (II Sam. 7; Ps. 89), and Jesus Christ is revealed as the One Who will eventually reign on David’s earthly throne in Jerusalem. Until He does so, however, that covenant is not fulfilled.

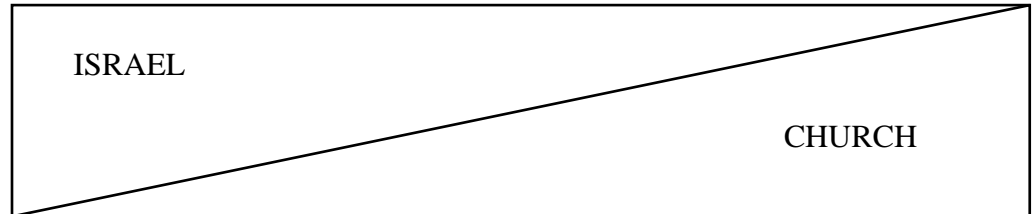
The New Covenant (Jer. 31:27-37; Ezk. 34:25-30; 36:22-38) is presented in the NT in a manner similar to that of the Davidic Covenant. Jesus Christ is revealed as the One Who establishes the covenant by accomplishing the founding sacrifice (Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25). Yet Israel nationally does not receive 100% regeneration, a complete regathering to the land, nor world-wide dominance. Until those conditions occur historically, the New Covenant cannot be said to be fulfilled. Some Protestant theologians, because of their commitment to Covenant Theology (see Appendix A), insist that the New Testament, while not explicitly saying that this covenant has been fulfilled, certainly implies it. Dispensational theologian Renald Showers replies:

*“Many Covenant Theologians claim that the New Covenant is being fulfilled totally in the Church today. According to this view, the literal nation of Israel forfeited any relationship to the New Covenant because of its unbelief and rebellion against God. The Church in the present age has replaced Israel in that relationship. Thus, the promises of the New Covenant which were presented in the Old Testament are to be fulfilled in a spiritualized Israel (Church) now. They are not to be fulfilled in the literal nation of Israel in the future. . . .*

*By contrast, Dispensational Theologians claim that since God promised to establish the New Covenant with the literal people of Israel (Jer. 31:31), since God intended the New Covenant to be unconditional in nature. . .and since God declared that He would fulfill the promises of the New Covenant with Israel, not because the nation would deserve it, but because of its disobedience (Ezk. 36:21-36), then the literal nation of Israel has not forfeited its relationship to the New Covenant because of its unbelief and rebellion against God.”<sup>21</sup>*

<sup>21</sup> Renald E. Showers, There Really is a Difference! (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc.), p 105f. Interestingly, advocates of “replacement theology” always have the Church receiving the promised blessings of Israel but not the promised cursings!

The interpretation of Pentecost by Luke/Paul enlarges the earlier interpretation by Peter. Luke/Paul see Pentecost as marking a major change in God's historical dealing with mankind. Whereas Peter correctly notes that Israel had a second chance to receive its Messiah and the promised Kingdom, Luke/Paul describe how a new movement of God appeared after the nation again rejected the invitation. The book of Acts "transitions" from an age of dealing with Israel under the OT covenants to a new age of dealing with something called the Church whose blessings come from those covenants through the rejected Messiah. Figure Two pictures this transition.



*Figure Two. Diagram of the transition in Acts from an Israel-centered program to a Church-centered program.*

## DOCTRINAL CONSEQUENCES OF PENTECOST: THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson 175

If the birth and subsequent career of the Lord Jesus Christ heightened biblical revelation of the Trinity, the advent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was an equally major addition. Never before in history was the Third Person of the Trinity revealed more clearly. In Part V of this series, Appendix A, we studied the doctrine of the Trinity. There were five propositions that expressed biblical revelation. Let's review them:

**God is Absolutely One:** *He cannot be divided into parts based upon some prior categories or qualities. He is fully each of His attributes.*

**God is Absolutely Three:** *God has an aggregative nature that is eternally threefold, which is itself the archetypical source of logic and number.*

**God's Threeness Refers to Modes of Being, Not Just Roles:** *The so-called "economic trinity" derives from a fundamental "ontological trinity".*

**The Subordination Within the Trinity Does Not Refer to Essence:** *There is a relationship among the three Persons of subordination from the Father through the "begotten" Son to the "proceeding" Spirit.*

**With Respect to the Salvation of Man the Triunity is Perceived With Both Threeness and Oneness:** *The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each have distinct roles in man's salvation, yet at the same time we worship the One God.*

Although no illustration comprehensively grasps the incomprehensible nature of God, there appear to be finite replicas within creation. Previously, we noted how the essential structures of the universe—things like space, matter-

energy, time—have an inherent threeness that coexists with oneness (length-width-height, energy-motion-differentiated motion or phenomena, past-present-future). Another finite replica has recently been noted by Vern Poythress.

Poythress explores the nature of human communication. He writes: *“We are familiar with instances of human communication. One person speaks to another, in order to produce some effect. By calling the Second Person of the Trinity ‘the Word’, John 1:1 invites us to understand the Second Person of the Trinity by analogy with human utterance. The Second Person of the Trinity is the Word spoken by a Person. Clearly, the speaker is preeminently the Father. To who is this Word spoken and with what effect? John 1:1 does not say explicitly. But since the speaking takes place from all eternity (John 1:1a), it is not merely a matter of God speaking to human beings or speaking to some other created thing or even to the created world as a whole. In the beginning was God alone. Hence, we infer that God speaks to himself and finds satisfaction in himself.”*<sup>22</sup>

Poythress further notes that:

*“in the realm of [redemption], the Spirit of God is operative. . . is instrumental in the impact of the word on our hearts: he writes the word on our hearts. To engage in all these operations, the Spirit must himself understand the purpose of God. And so we find places in the Bible that represent the Spirit not only as active and initiating, but as receptive of the truth of God. . . (John 16:13. . . I Cor. 2:10).”*<sup>23</sup>

In this survey of the person and work of the Holy Spirit we first must view what is revealed about His Person in the Trinity. Then we will move on to some of His work that is unique to the Church age.

## THE THIRD PERSON OF THE TRINITY

That the Holy Spirit is as much a “Person” of the Trinity as the Father and Son are, is a truth that has been denied repeatedly since Pentecost. Appendix A of Part V lists the various heretical perversions of the Trinity, all of which denied or are still denying His Personality. Perversion of the Trinity and denial of the Personality of the Holy Spirit can occur not only through outright apostasy but also through friendly negligence. Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, put the matter well:

*“For want of extended and constructive teaching with respect to the Holy Spirit, the Christian church is, for the most part, in the same position as the twelve disciples of John the Baptist whom Paul found at Ephesus. Their statement—sincere and free from pretense—was, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost’ (Acts 19:1). . . Almost*

<sup>22</sup> Verne S. Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til’s Idea of Analogy,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995) 200f.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

*every error or disproportionate emphasis upon some aspect of doctrine on the part of a few is caused by the neglect of that truth on the part of the many. The Pentecostal errors with their misuse of Biblical terms and their assumptions would never have developed to any extent had the full and right doctrine of the Holy Spirit been taught generally in its right proportions.”<sup>24</sup>*

To do justice, therefore, to the NT revelation of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost, we’ll examine His “Procession” in the Trinity and the revelation of His Person as distinct from the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit “Proceeds” from the Father and the Son. Just as the Son is said to be “eternally begotten” of the Father, the Holy Spirit is said to “eternally proceed” from both the Father and the Son. The statement that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son is called the Filioque in Church history.<sup>25</sup> It arose in the Western part of Europe (Spain) in the 6<sup>th</sup> century after a long battle with the heresy of Arianism. Arianism, of course, was a subordinationist heresy that upheld the deity of the Father but made the Son and the Spirit of sub-divine natures. Arius “distinguished the one eternal God from the Son who was generated by the Father and who had a beginning. He also believed that the Holy Spirit was the first thing created by the Son.”<sup>26</sup> Since the Son was not true deity in this heresy, He could not be the One on the same plain as the Father and as the Sender of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Spirit was said by the subordinationists as proceeding from only the Father but not the Son.

To guard against the subordinationist heresies, the Western Church added the Filioque to the Nicene Creed which had been written many years previously. The Eastern Church (Orthodox) resented this addition that was made without calling for a conference of both Western and Eastern churches. Left outside of the vigorous rejection of Arianism in the West, the eastern Orthodox churches did not sharpen their understanding of the Trinity and eventually fell into serious error that led historically to political tyranny in Russia and eastern Europe. How this happened is a fascinating illustration of the importance of Bible doctrine in the great affairs of mankind.

With a weak and undeveloped concept of the Trinity, the Orthodox churches sought a unifying principle in the Father alone rather than in all three persons of the Trinity. Rushdoony comments:

*“Because of subordinationism, the development of the state was furthered in the East. . . . Subordinationism gave primacy to nature, and hence to the natural ability of man. As a result, man becomes in effect his own savior, and grace is cooperating grace, but not prevenient. If the Holy Ghost*

<sup>24</sup> Systematic Theology (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), VI, 3f.

<sup>25</sup> “Filioque” is Latin for “and the son”. Latin was the official language of the western Church and was used to state theological doctrine and to compose the great creeds.

<sup>26</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, The Holy Spirit (Chicago: Moody Press), p. 112f.

*proceeds only from the Father, then the Holy Ghost, in a system which accords primacy to nature, becomes absorbed into nature. . . . The state is man's true order, and the church is the concentrated area in which the social process of deification occurs. . . . The kenotic Christ of Eastern [Orthodox] thought abandons His deity in the world.”<sup>27</sup>*

In other words denial of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son shows that the Son is not “God enough” to send the Spirit, i.e., the Son is no longer the God-Man of the New Testament. And this weak Christ view led historically to acceptance of tyrannical political powers by eastern European culture. To this day, for example, the Russian people who grew up in a culture saturated with Orthodox theology (the Russian Orthodox church is the only “true” church in their eyes) simply cannot find the strength to stand up to political abuse and tyranny.

In the West, however, the vigorous debates with heretics produced a deep searching of Scripture and a powerful articulation of the Trinity. The Son was seen as co-equal with the Father and therefore equally involved in sending the Holy Spirit. The Trinity as the One and the Many, the Unified and the Diversified, gave the West a model of human society in which unifying authority could co-exist with diversified authority. The state, the church, the family, and other diversified authorities could all function inside their respective “spheres” without each one trying to wholly dominate the others. Rushdoony points out that in the West the strong and balanced view of the Trinity led to a series of developments politically and religiously that were responsible for constitutionalism and liberty.<sup>28</sup>

The Holy Spirit is a Full-Fledged Member of the Trinity. He is both a Person and God. First, He is revealed to be as much of a “person” as the Father and the Son. He has intellect (Rom. 8:27; I Cor. 2:10-11) that teaches men (I Cor. 2:13); sensibility toward other persons (Eph. 4:30; Heb. 10:29); and a will of His own (I Cor. 12:11). He commands people (Acts 8:29; 13:2), guides them (Rom. 8:14), argues for the truth with them (John 16:7-8; Rom. 8:14), and is sometimes lied to (Acts 5:3). And He prays (Rom. 8:26).

Some have tried to deny His personality and turn Him into a mere “influence.” They cite the neuter gender of the Greek noun for spirit (pneuma). They fail to recognize that although the noun is neuter, when it is used by NT authors for the Holy Spirit it sometimes is accompanied by pronouns in the masculine gender (e.g., John 15:26; 16:7-8,13-14; Eph. 1:14). This violation of Greek grammar clearly shows deliberate intent by NT authors to assert the true personality of the Spirit over against the notion that “it” is a vague “influence.”

That the Holy Spirit is a true Person as much as the Father and Son are, is vital to the Christian life. As we shall note below, *He indwells each believer during the Church age moment by moment here on earth, watching our every*

<sup>27</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, The Foundations of Social Order (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), p. 125f.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-130.



*thought, word, and deed!* We either offend Him or please Him as the “on-scene” Director of our lives. The doctrine of His personhood, therefore, is not a trivial matter for academic theologians! It puts us on the front lines of our relationship with God Himself.

The Holy Spirit is God Himself. The Bible consistently ascribes to the Holy Spirit work that only God Himself can do. He did the creating work in Genesis 1 and the providential sustaining of creation thereafter (Gen. 1:2; Job 26:13; 27:3; Ps. 33:6; 104:30). He created the Scripture (II Pet. 1:21). He caused the Incarnation in Mary’s womb (Luke 1:35). He fulfills the same role of Comforter that Jesus did prior to His death (John 14:16). In the New Testament He “replaces” Yahweh in OT citations (Acts 28:25 cf. Isa. 6:1-13; Heb. 10:15-17 cf. Jer. 31:31-34).

One of the most glaring NT passages that points to His deity is Matthew 28:19. Here in the very center of the Great Commission is the Three-fold Name of God that includes the Holy Spirit. The Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit has divine attributes. He is omniscient (I Cor. 2:11-12), omnipresent (Ps. 139:7), omnipotent (Job 33:4), and holy (Luke 11:13).

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Lesson 176

Since we are discussing the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in connection with Pentecost, we need to focus on His work from Pentecost to the present day, i.e., His work in the present dispensation of the Church. One way to focus is to contrast His present work with His work prior to Pentecost. Jesus distinguished His pre-Pentecost work from His post-Pentecost work in John 14:17. Prior to Pentecost, Jesus said, the Holy Spirit was “with” the disciples. After Pentecost He would be “in” them. There is a dispensational shift in His work.

Prior to Pentecost, the Holy Spirit sustained the universe (Ps. 104:29-30), generated the Old Testament (II Pet. 1:21), and restrained sin (Gen. 6:3). He had a special role in the growth of Israel. He worked to empower Joseph as ruler in Egypt (Gen. 41:38) and Joshua as a key leader of the new nation (Num. 27:18). He gave special “natural” skills to workers on the Tabernacle (Exod. 31:3). He directed in a special way later leaders of Israel such as the judges, prophets, and kings (Jud. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; I Sam. 10:9-10; 16:13; cf. I Pet. 1:11).

Great as this work was, however, it was limited compared to the prophesied work associated with the New Covenant (cf. Isa. 59:21; Ezk. 39:29). It was limited to only certain Jews, not all, as the New Covenant promises point out. The Holy Spirit did not permanently abide with any of the OT saints: He could withdraw at any time (I Sam. 16:14; Ps. 51:11). The point to note here is that the Holy Spirit was primarily concerned with the nation Israel, not with individuals of that nation (Cf. Isa. 63:10-11, 14).

What separated this OT pre-Pentecostal work of the Holy Spirit from His post-Pentecostal work was the career of the God-Man King, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we noted in Part V of this series, Jesus Christ through the hypostatic union was true humanity united with undiminished deity without confusion in one person. His life, therefore, was utterly unique. We studied two doctrines concerning this unique life and said that they looked forward in time to the Church age. Now we will look at four doctrines about our relationship to Jesus Christ through the post-Pentecostal work of the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration. By this term biblical theologians mean the action of God, primarily the action of the Holy Spirit, in imparting eternal life to human beings (cf. John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It means “born again” in the true theological sense, not the in the often sloppy use of the term for the process of conversion. Conversion includes human actions and experiences; regeneration is confined to the work of God alone. It is instantaneous (John 1:13 and the birth metaphor in John 3:3-7), not a continuing process. It is as miraculous if not more miraculous than creation itself.

The life that is given, eternal life, is the inseparably related to Jesus Christ (I John 5:12). Until the Incarnation, therefore, eternal life could not have been given to OT believers. They received a similar work, “circumcision of the heart” that enabled them to live godly lives, but it wasn’t quite the same as regeneration for post-Pentecostal NT believers (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; cf. Col. 2:11). Eternal life comes out of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. During His time on earth, Jesus Christ lived out a perfect life in utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Even though He was undiminished deity, He lived under the “kenosis principle” (see Chapter 3, Part V). The doctrine of kenosis, you will recall, states that our Lord gave up the independent use of His divine attributes. He used them only rarely when it was the Father’s will and never to “cheat” against Satan’s temptations. Kenosis qualified Jesus to become our intercessory priest and judge because He knows what it is to live in this fallen world in complete dependence upon God the Holy Spirit. He lived with humble faith that the Holy Spirit would empower and protect Him as a human being in a world that has been given over to the Evil One. In the midst of such opposition, our Lord successfully accomplished what Adam did not but could have had he trusted in God’s character.

The life of Jesus Christ is also described by the doctrine of impeccability. That doctrine, you will remember, states that Jesus Christ was both “not able to sin” and “able not to sin.” His deity demanded that He was “not able to sin”, and his humanity demanded His temptability and being “able not to sin.”<sup>29</sup> As a result He *perfectly* obeyed God and completed His will for a human being. Never had this happened before in all of history.

The life and ministry of Jesus Christ thus began an escalation in spiritual warfare in which Satanic hatred and opposition would be addressed specifically against individual humans rather than against the nation Israel as before. Jesus’ life brought into actual existence what had only been promised prior to the

<sup>29</sup> Refer to the discussion in Chapter 3 of Part V for clarification of why these two statements are not in logical conflict and do involve subtle differences in the verb “able.”

gospel period. With His death, resurrection, and ascension this “completed humanity” attained final approval of God as that which is fitted for the final and eternal Kingdom of God. This life that began with Jesus Christ is known, therefore, as eternal life.

It is not the divine attribute of eternity; that would smear the Creator-creature distinction. Rather, it is a human attribute suited for eternal fellowship with God unshielded from His holy purity. It is a life that fits the final and permanent separation of good and evil. It can never fall again as in Eden. It shares, in other words, the impeccability of Jesus Christ. Through the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, this eternal life now lies outside the control of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Questions, however, arise about this eternal life. If that impeccable life is imparted by the Holy Spirit through the act of regeneration to every Church age believer, then are we believers today impeccable? Surely it seems not. We sin daily. John the Apostle even says that if we claim that we don’t sin or that we have no sin nature, we lie (I John 1:8, 10). Yet this same John also states that whoever has been born (regenerated) of God “does not commit sin, for his seed remains in him: and *he cannot sin*, because he is born of God” (I John 3:9, emphasis supplied). This certainly seems like an assertion of impeccability for believers! Is John contradicting himself?

Many Bible students attempt to skirt around this problem by understanding I John 3:9 to mean “does not habitually sin.” As NT scholar Zane Hodges points out, however, that strategy creates more problems than it solves.<sup>30</sup> If the present tense in I John always means “continuously” or “habitually” doing something, false doctrine immediately springs up elsewhere in I John. For example, I John 1:8 would then mean “if we say we continuously have no sin, we continuously deceive ourselves.” That makes 1:8 conflict with 3:9! Moreover, in I John 5:16 there would then be a case where a brother “continuously sins a sin” which also conflicts with 3:9 that says no believe can “continuously sin”.

The key to John’s perspective is found in the immediately preceding context. In 3:5 he writes that in Christ “is no sin.” John’s next verse continues with the thought that “whosoever abides in him sins not” (3:6). John is looking at the believer with his or her regenerate nature in view. Christ’s life was kenotic and impeccable. *Its impartation in the believer continues its kenotic and impeccable character.* Hence John writes in 3:9 that just as it was in Christ, it “cannot sin” after being imparted to a believer.

<sup>30</sup> Zane C. Hodges, The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1981), pp. 58-59.

Hodges points out that this perspective fits that of Paul in Romans. He cites Romans 7:20-25 and comments:

*“Here the Apostle achieves a self-perspective in which he can at once admit that he sins and yet still say that ‘it is no longer I that do it.’ His true self (‘I myself,’ verse 25) serves God’s law, even while he confesses that ‘with the flesh’ he serves the law of sin.*

*It is of great importance that this form of self-analysis precedes the solution to his problem that is given in Romans 8. To view sin as intrinsically foreign to what we are as regenerate people in Christ is to take the first step toward spiritual victory over it.”<sup>31</sup> [Emphasis supplied.]*

John’s perspective and Paul’s perspective are one. Both view the believer from his or her position in Christ, not from a position in Adam. The theological justification for why they are able to do this is found in Romans 5:12-21 which is a specialized study in itself. Basically, the idea is that there are two different human races during the Church age—one legally organized under Adam and the other legally organized under Christ. The fundamental identity of the believer is in Christ. He shares Christ’s life. He is “at home” doing God’s will. Of course, he can be deceived, led astray, choose to follow the lusts of his flesh, etc. When so doing, however, he violates his fundamental nature.

The Holy Spirit’s regenerating work, then, brings to the believer Christ’s life with its kenotic and impeccable characteristics. This new capacity or nature is his “real (new) self” because regeneration in effect “transfers” one from a legal position in Adam to a position in Christ. This imparted eternal life seeks to manifest the fundamental virtue of humility before God and courage before men. It can not sin. To sin, the believer must ignore and deliberately suppress his identity in Christ. And that is easy to do because as Paul observes in Romans 7 the new nature—apart from the Holy Spirit’s energizing power that gave it in the first place—lacks the capacity to subdue the flesh. Regeneration thus supplies eternal life, but for that life to break out and produce fruit the possessor must exercise faith in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit Who gave it just as Christ exercised faith under the kenotic principle.

Figure Three pictures the link between the ascended, seated Lord Jesus Christ Who “passed the tests” while on earth and the Spirit Whom He sent to create within Church age believers His ethical/spiritual nature.

**ASCENDED LORD JESUS CHRIST: *proven righteousness***



**HOLY SPIRIT CREATING WORK: *regeneration***



**CHURCH AGE BELIEVERS: *possessing eternal life of Christ***

*Figure Three. The propagation from the seated Lord Jesus Christ of his “proven out” human nature to NT believers through the Holy Spirit.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

The Church thus has both a heavenly and an earthly origin. And the new nature is the kind of life, ethically, that will characterize the eternal existence of the new creation to come. This side of eternity two dominions now exist: the old dominion given to First Adam at creation but lost to Satan at the fall; and the new dominion given to the Second Adam at His ascension and session. The new nature thus forms part of the New Universe which has already begun in the Person of the resurrected, ascended, and seated Christ. As such, eternal life means for the Church age believer that he knows God in Christ as the final step of progressive revelation about God's character; there are no major new truths about God's character to be revealed within mortal history (John 14:7-9; 17:3; Heb. 1:1-3). The work of regeneration carries the image of creation, specifically the creation of the New Universe.

We must also observe that this work of the Spirit derives from the prior work of the Son in carrying out the plan of the Father. The Son accomplished historic righteousness by His obedience under test which then became the source of imputed righteousness and justification. The order of the Trinity is the background structure for this work of the Spirit. In contrast, Roman Catholicism and charismatic theology insist upon putting the Spirit's work in the heart of man first and from that deriving acceptance before God.

Lesson 178

Indwelling. If the work of regeneration carries the image of creation, then the work of indwelling carries the image of a temple. The Temple of the OT golden era of Solomon was where God dwelt; He indwelt His Temple (I Kings 8; Part IV of this series). His glory physically shown from within the Holy of Holies (II Chron. 7:1). Before the Solomonic Temple, of course, God's glory indwelt the Tabernacle (Exod. 40:34). God's indwelling the Tabernacle and later the Temple enabled communication between Himself and Israel. It was the place where blood atonement occurred, where washing was performed, where incense burned, and where His light shown. In the New Universe, He will again dwell physically on earth (Rev. 21-22). From that future location a river of water will pour forth just as occurred in Eden (Rev. 22:1 cf. Gen. 2:10). Very important for our culture and time in which love of pluralism is a cloak for relativism, the temple—whether in ancient Israel or in the future New Heavens and Earth—is the sole designated location where God meets with man. It is His “meeting place” defined by Him, not by man. When prophesying of the eternal life that would be energized by the indwelling Spirit in this age, Jesus spoke in terms of this background imagery (John 4:14).

If regeneration is the creation of the spiritual life of the eternal future, and if the eternal future is marked by God dwelling with man, then it follows that the Spirit would naturally indwell the regenerate nature. One must note that the regenerate nature as that life emanating from Christ's humanity must be kept distinct from the indwelling Spirit; one is the creature and the other is the Creator. The proper relationship between the two may be expressed by saying that regeneration provides the vessel for the indwelling Spirit of God.

The indwelling of the Spirit after Pentecost differs from His indwelling during the age of Israel. Table Five lists the dispensational distinctions observed in the biblical record. First, let's compare the condition of believers in the age of Israel with believers in the Church age. Believers in the age of Israel possessed what the text calls "circumcision of the heart" (Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16) which was to characterize the believing remnant throughout Israel's history and which would become universal among all Jews in the Millennial age to come (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:25-27). While such spiritual circumcision was like regeneration in that both provide relief from the depraved, fallen flesh that rebels against God, it was oriented toward the specific program God had with Israel rather than being oriented, like regeneration, toward the universal program God has with the entire human race. Spiritual circumcision provided for a functioning nation; regeneration provides for a functioning new humanity. Spiritual circumcision was concerned with mortal history, looking forward to eternity; regeneration is concerned with eternity, making eternal life partially available today. Spiritual circumcision knew nothing of the finished work of Christ and His ascension; regeneration provides awareness of God's final revelation in Christ. Everything spiritual circumcision gave, regeneration gives and more besides. Thus Paul in Colossians 2:11-13 incorporates spiritual circumcision within the concept of regeneration.

Since the vessel for the indwelling Spirit changed after Pentecost, the nature of that indwelling changed also. In pre-Pentecostal times, Israel consisted of a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers. The kind of indwelling which occurred, therefore, was primarily to aid the mixed nation in fulfilling its historic calling rather than to bring everyone into immediate, individual, eternal fellowship with God. Builders of the Tabernacle and the Temple, for example, were indwelt for natural skills to produce these structures (Exod. 31:2-4; 35:31; I Kings 7:14). Israel's judges were indwelt at times for special acts of political and military deliverance (Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6). Even the evil prophet Balaam was indwelt (and perhaps his ass!) (Num. 24:2; cf. II Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14).

Not only was this OT Spirit indwelling centered upon nation-building and limited to a few, but it was temporary. The Spirit indwelt Saul, for example, after he had been anointed by the prophet Samuel for the role of dynastic ruler (I Sam. 10:9-10). When David was anointed to replace Saul, because Saul had been rejected, the Spirit left Saul (I Sam. 16:13-14). Apparently this possibility of the Spirit leaving one whom He previously indwelt is what prompted David

to ask God not to take His Spirit from him (Ps. 51:11). In so doing, David was asking, in effect, to remain as king.

<b>Pre-Pentecostal Indwelling</b>	<b>Post-Pentecostal Indwelling</b>
“job-centered” ministry to further the purpose of God for the nation Israel	“life-centered” ministry to make eternal fellowship with God a present reality (John 16:13-15)
limited to only some believers (and possibly unbelievers!)	universal for all and only believers (Rom. 8:9; Jude 1:11)
temporary (Ps. 51:11)	permanent (Eph. 4:30)
could be asked for (II Kings 2:9; Luke 11:13)	automatic (no NT command to seek indwelling)

*Table 5. Summary of pre- and post-Pentecostal Spirit indwelling.*

In contrast to the age of Israel, after Pentecost the Spirit came to establish God’s eternal fellowship with man. To do this task the Spirit now indwells all believers, not just a few. In this age if any man is not indwelt, he cannot be a believer (Rom. 8:9; Jude 1:11). Moreover, the Spirit now indwells permanently, not temporarily (Eph. 4:30). No Christian who knows the doctrine of indwelling can ever pray the prayer of David in Psalm 51:11 or the disciples’ prayer in Luke 11:13.

Lesson 179

As we have seen, God indwells temples. It is no accident, therefore, that Paul refers to the local body of believers as a temple (I Cor. 3:16) and calls the individual Christian’s physical body a temple (I Cor. 6:19). In this age the “house of God” does not refer to any church building; it refers to the group of believers who meet in such a building wherever their location on earth (John 4:21-24). It even includes those who have died in Christ and are now in heaven (Rev. 13:16).<sup>32</sup>

As the Temple of God in this age, the Church is where God meets man—where He reveals Himself and where reconciliation occurs. It is also the only place where God meets man for fellowship. The doctrine of indwelling with its temple imagery offends all advocates of religious pluralism by its dogmatic exclusivity. The Church is the only place of salvation on earth. Through it alone came the NT revelation as John notes in I John 1:1-3. Through it alone comes the message of reconciliation in the atonement of Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:18-20). In it alone is God illuminating hearts to His sanctifying light (Eph. 3:16; I Cor. 2:15-16; I John 2:20).<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> The majority of Greek manuscripts have “those who dwell in heaven” in apposition to “His tabernacle”.

<sup>33</sup> The pre-Vatican II “old” Roman Catholic dogmatism about the RC Church being the only location of salvation was right in making the exclusivistic claim but wrong in where they located this claim.

**Baptism.** The third work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost concerns His work of “baptizing.” Whereas regeneration imparts the spiritual life of the eternal future and indwelling establishes eternal fellowship with God, the baptism of the Holy Spirit separates and marks out the boundaries of the Kingdom of God. The particular imagery used in the concept of Spirit baptism comes from the work of judgment/salvation which we discussed in the previous chapter.

What does the term “baptism” mean in general? Translators of the English Bible tried to avoid controversy from those who believed in sprinkling and those who believed in immersion so they never translated the original Greek word “baptizo”. The Bible actually speaks of eight different baptisms—five are dry and only three are wet! Table Six shows each of the eight baptisms. The five dry baptisms involve agents other than water applied by God to the people baptized and can be called real baptisms. The three wet baptisms involve water applied by men to the people baptized and can be called ritual baptisms.

The dry baptisms include Noah’s baptism (the archetype of baptism in I Pet. 3:20-21 in which everyone in the Ark stayed dry), Moses’ baptism (I Cor. 10:2 in which everyone crossing the Red Sea stayed dry), the Christ’s baptism of the Cross (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50 which was dry), the baptism of fire prophesied by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:11-12 which will be very dry!), and Spirit baptism (Matt. 3:11-12; I Cor. 12:13), the subject of this section. God Himself accomplishes each of these dry baptisms, by-passing all human agents. They are real baptisms.

Real (dry) Baptisms	Ritual (wet) Baptisms
Noah’s (judgment/salvation from the antediluvian world into the postdiluvian world)	John’s (picture of judgment/salvation from the present world into the future Millennial Kingdom)
Moses’ (judgment/salvation from Egypt into the age of Israel)	Jesus’ (picture of judgment/salvation role of the Messiah)
Christ’s Cross (judgment/salvation work of the Messiah)	Christian (picture of judgment/salvation)
Fire (judgment)	
Spirit (salvation)	

**Table 6. The eight baptisms (including the archetypal flood in Noah’s day) given in the Bible.**

The wet baptisms always involve a human agent who represents God and uses water. They include John’s baptism (Matt. 3:5-11), Jesus’ baptism by John (Matt. 3:13-17), and Christian baptism (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:36-39; 9:18; 10:47-48). They are rituals that all utilize the water imagery of the global flood which so graphically portrays judgment/salvation. They are ritual baptisms.



Spirit baptism continues the imagery of judgment/salvation with emphasis upon salvation. As preached originally by John the Baptist, it was associated with the Messiah's delivering work in bringing in the long-awaited OT Kingdom of God. John the Baptist expected Jesus to separate Israel into two groups—the damned (“chaff” which would be removed prior to the Kingdom) and the saved (“wheat” which would be kept for the Kingdom). The damned would be removed like chaff by the baptism of fire; the saved would be transformed by the baptism of the Spirit. Jesus continued revelation about Spirit baptism just before He ascended in Acts 1:5. However, as we studied in Chapter One, He did so in the context of Israel's national rejection of Him as Messiah, a condition unforeseen by John the Baptist and which introduced the inter-advent age.

On Pentecost, therefore, the Holy Spirit came to give the spiritual provisions of the Kingdom to a nation that had rejected the King (cf. Table 4). Christ, from His new position in heaven, had begun separating the nation Israel into two groups. Upon those Jews who had accepted King-Messiah, came the Spirit to identify them. They were the godly remnant fit for the Kingdom. Instead of permanently judging those Jews who had rejected Him, however, Christ brought only a faint reminder of the baptism of fire when the phenomenon of tongues occurred. The tongues phenomenon although accomplished through the faithful remnant bore a judgmental warning to Israel as Paul notes in I Corinthians 12:21-22 when he cites Isaiah 28:11-12. The Jews who had rejected Christ were given another chance to respond. The baptism of the Spirit, then, occurred without its sister baptism of fire.

Spirit baptism accomplished something else unforeseen in the OT. Whereas the long prophesied Kingdom had been postponed, Pentecost came on schedule and opened a new chapter in the revelation of God's eternal plan. Spirit baptism created a new entity: the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Church is a new group of believers in history, an institution that would gradually separate from the nation Israel. This new group of believers is called the “first-born” among all other groups of believers, referring to its lofty position (Heb. 12:22-24). The Church does not yet reign with Christ, although she will when He does in the future Kingdom (I Cor. 4:8; 6:2-3; II Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21). The Church is the first contingent of Kingdom people and, therefore, constitutes the Royal Family of the Kingdom (Rev. 1:6; 5:9-10).

Since the early chapters of Acts show that people did not recognize that such a new entity had been created, how can one be sure that the Church originated on Pentecost? Roman Catholic and early Protestant theology never clarified exactly the origin of the Church in history, preferring instead to lump believers from all ages together into something loosely called “church.” Christian theologians and other writers variously located the Church's origin with Adam, Abraham, or even with Christ. What evidence points to Pentecost?

At least four lines of argument exist. First, Paul teaches that the Church is a “mystery” not revealed in the OT (Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 3:1-10; Col. 1:26). Therefore the Church could not have begun before John the Baptist. Second, Jesus taught that it was future to His time (Matt. 16:18). Therefore, it did not begin during the gospels. Third, the Church depends upon an ascended and

seated Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:8-11). Therefore, it had to originate after the Ascension and Session. Finally, Spirit baptism prophesied by Jesus to occur after His session (Acts 1:5) occurred for the first time at Pentecost (Acts 11:15-17) and this baptism creates the Church according to Paul (Rom. 6:1-10; I Cor. 12:13). Therefore, the Church began on the day of Pentecost.

Another point in the doctrine of Spirit baptism is that it repeats whenever an unbeliever is regenerated. Some Christians, particularly those influenced by Pentecostal theology, insist that after one believes, one still needs a post-salvation experience of “Holy Ghost Baptism.” They mean by this term that one should experience some sort of emotional experience involving speaking in tongues (defined often as a non-human, heavenly language). Such a position confuses clear Scriptural teaching.

A correct doctrine of spirit baptism cannot be generated from hastily compiling the divergent accounts of the original Pentecostal happening and its three follow-on occurrences in the book of Acts (cf. Table Five). While each of those events included speaking in tongues, the phenomenon did not uniformly occur before, at, or after salvation. No Acts-based model exists of the proper sequence. Moreover, speaking in a previously unknown foreign language is clearly revealed by Paul as a non-universal and temporary gift (I Cor. 12:30; 13:8). Spirit baptism, therefore, is not an empirically-manifest, post-salvation experience.

The correct doctrine comes from Paul’s teaching in Romans 6:1-10 and I Corinthians 12:13. It occurs simultaneously at regeneration and Spirit indwelling. It unites the new believer with Jesus Christ and with other believers both in heaven and on earth. It adds that new believer to the growing Body of Christ which when completed will be removed from planet Earth in preparation for the Second Advent (see Chapter Five ahead).

Sealing. A fourth work of the Holy Spirit concerns protection of believers for all eternity. A seal secures. The imagery of seals reveals his work just as the previous images of creation, temples, and the global flood revealed the other work of the Holy Spirit. Ryrie conveys the imagery well:

***“One of the best earthly illustrations of sealing is a piece of registered mail. When something is registered at the post office, it is sealed until delivered. Actually only two persons can open registered mail—the sender (if it is delivered back to him) and the recipient. In the case of the believer, God is the one who sends him on his way to heaven, and God in heaven is the recipient upon his arrival. Therefore, only God can break the seal of our redemption, and He has promised not to do so. . . .”<sup>34</sup>***

Three NT passages mention sealing: II Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30. According to II Corinthians 1:22 God the Father causes the sealing by the Spirit as part of His work through the Son. The proper order of the Trinity again appears. Ephesians 1:13 reveals that the seal is the Spirit. The Spirit seals

<sup>34</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), p. 82.

because He is the “earnest” or down payment of the believer’s final sanctification. His presence is the reality of eternity experienced ahead of time in the present moment. Ephesians 4:30 points to a very practical implication: when we sin, the indwelling Spirit-seal is grieved. We can’t avoid the collision between our fleshly sin and His holy presence in us!

The sealing work of the Spirit secures the Body of Christ and makes real the protection of the Father’s love. Paul can rejoice in that love from which we cannot be separated in Romans 8:35-29.

Lesson 181

Intercession. A fifth work of the Spirit closely parallels His sealing work. In order to accomplish the sanctification guaranteed by sealing, the Holy Spirit makes intercession for each believer. According to Romans 8:26-27, the Holy Spirit helps our “infirmity” by constant intercession. What is our “infirmity”? It’s our corrupt nature and cursed body (Rom. 8:18-25). The indwelling Spirit directly contacts our unsanctified, fallen condition so He “groans” along with the believer and all of nature (Rom. 8:22-23). This is as close as the Holy Spirit gets to the kenotic state of the Son during His earthly ministry. Being omniscient the Holy Spirit knows God’s perfect will for how a particular believer is to be brought into conformity with the image of the Son (8:29). From within, then, the Holy Spirit petitions heavenward about daily matters in the believer’s life. He operates as the “on-scene commander” of sanctification.<sup>35</sup>

The recipient of the Spirit’s petitions, according to Romans 8:27, is not the Father, as one might expect, but the Son. “He that searcheth the hearts” is a title of Yahweh in the OT (Pss. 7:9; 139:1; Jer. 11:20) and of Christ in the NT (Rev. 2:23). It is a title of Christ as judge. The Holy Spirit, it appears, takes note of a believer’s daily predicament, his greatest need for spiritual advance, and petitions Christ as Head of the Church to do His purging work to effect that change. Christ as Head of the Church purges and cleans it in order that it might be a pure Bride in the future for Him (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 2:18-23). Thus the Holy Spirit’s intercession for a believer is directly responsible for future events in that believer’s life brought in deliberately by the Lord to cause spiritual growth at exactly the right point. In this fashion the Spirit’s intercession keeps the believer secure.

Lesson 182

Spiritual Gifts. A sixth work of the Holy Spirit, and the last to be discussed here, provides every believer with at least one special ability to minister. Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts throughout the Church (I Cor. 12:11). These specific abilities define the type of ministry a believer will have (I Pet. 4:10). Paul informs us about spiritual gifts primarily in I Corinthians 12-14 but also in Ephesians 4:7-16. In I Corinthians 12-14 rather than presenting the Church in organizational terms after contemporary social structures of the Roman Empire, Paul speaks in anatomical terms of the human body. The Church completes Christ after the fashion of the imagery of Daniel 7

<sup>35</sup> Note that these petitions are said in 8:26 to be “unutterable” or “unspeakable.” Contrary to Charismatic distortions and misapplications of this passage to justify their version of the tongues phenomenon as gibberish, the passage teaches that these Spirit petitions are wholly inaudible to believers. The same truth is taught in II Corinthians 12:4 where inaudibility is due to heaven’s “security” rules. God refuses to share with sinful man certain things going on in heaven, even when those very things involve us personally.

discussed in the previous chapter: Head and Body together. Here we see again the design of God that is repeated throughout His creation on different scales. The human body exhibits a tremendous interdependency of one biological system supporting other biological systems. Similarly, says Paul, all Church-age believers constitute one unified body, each part interdependent with the others. The spiritual gifts define the “part” or “system” in which the believer functions.

Just as the human body survives and grows through the coordinated working of each system, so the Church survives and grows throughout history through the ministerial service of believers with different gifts. None of the gifts are universal, including especially the gifts of tongues (I Cor. 12:29-30). Nor does possession of a spiritual gift prove the spirituality of its possessor; the believer must choose to minister to the Body in love rather than misuse the gift in arrogance (I Cor. 13-14).

As we noted in the previous chapter, the Ascended Lord Jesus throughout the Church age interacts with the angelic conflict. A cosmic war is going on, and spiritual gifts are involved in it. The Lord’s indirect strategy unseats Satan and his fallen angels by eradicating their ethical claim upon fallen humanity. One by one men and women who receive the gospel become Jesus’ prisoners-of-war which He transforms, endues with spiritual gifts, and gives to the Church (Eph. 4:7-10; cf. Ps. 68:7-18). This picture taken from the OT martial imagery must have come to Paul after he reflected upon his Damascus Road conversion. Surely, if ever there was an enemy of Christ taken prisoner and turned into a gift to the Church it was Paul.

## SUMMARY

The event of Pentecost readily connects to the doctrine of pneumatology. Never before did the Holy Spirit play such a prominent role in God’s plan of redemption as He has done since the beginning of the Church Age. You now can thank God specifically for at least six of His works in your behalf.



## CHAPTER 3: THE HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF THE CHURCH

The previous two chapters have shown the heavenly and earthly origins of the Church. The two events of the session of the Lord Jesus at the Father's right hand and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon His fellow Jews who believed upon Him established the Church in history. Israel's rejection of Jesus as Messiah appeared to relegate this messianic movement to the ash heap of discredited religious cults, it actually opened the door of divine blessing to the world outside Israel. A new era of grace began that pushed forward in time the great prophesied day of judgment. Men and women from all tribes on earth were given the greatest opportunity to believe since their ancestors left Noah's Ark. Believers from each tribe on earth would be united into one new Body, never before seen.

Realization of what had actually happened at Pentecost, however, took decades to comprehend. At first, events looked like the series of stupendous and unexpected miracles—resurrection, ascension, and the Pentecostal phenomena--had occurred for Israel's benefit alone. Believers stayed close by the apostles in Jerusalem and continued to worship in the Third Temple. Nevertheless, it eventually became clear that God's working with believers after Pentecost differed significantly from the way He had worked in the OT.

Especially after Diaspora Jews and Gentiles joined the movement, the new entity called the Church began to challenge some of the most cherished customs of Judaism such as circumcision, Sabbath-keeping, and the second-class status of Gentiles. In spite of tremendous opposition by Jewish leadership the young messianic movement grew not only in Israel but in Diaspora synagogues throughout the Mediterranean area until it spilled over into major Gentile Greek and Roman cultural centers. Since Christ had engendered such resistance in Israel that He was crucified, it only followed that the expansion of Christianity was accompanied by must strife and disorder within Jewish circles. (In the next chapter we'll look at its collision with Gentile culture.)

This chapter describes the historical emergence of the Church from Israel as a distinct entity following a distinct set of divine commands. Associated with this emergence, the chapter also describes the work of the Son and the Father in creating the Church, work of the Triune God prior to and forming the basis of the work of the Holy Spirit that we studied in the previous chapter.

### SEPARATION OF THE CHURCH FROM ISRAEL

Lesson 184

The NT book of Acts is the central historical witness to the progressive separation of the Church from Israel. Ladd summarizes Acts well:

*“Acts outlines the steps by which the church gradually broke with the synagogue and became an independent movement. In fact, one of the central motifs in Acts is the explanation of how a small fellowship of Jews in Jerusalem, to all intents and purposes hardly distinguishable from their Jewish milieu, became a Gentile fellowship in the capital city of the empire, completely freed from all Jewish practises.”<sup>36</sup>*

For purposes of this discussion we will isolate five steps from the text of Acts.

### **STEP ONE: SPIRITUAL SEPARATION (Acts 2)**

In the previous chapter it was argued that the Church originated on earth at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. Although the Church’s origin was not immediately recognized, its existence surely began on that day. The Church was shaped by the Baptism of the Spirit which was essentially a separation of identity. Only that faithful remnant of Jews who had received Christ were Spirit baptized. Moreover, they publicly lowered themselves to the level of a Gentile convert and were water baptized.

### **STEP TWO: RECOGNITION OF GOD’S WORLDWIDE PLAN (Acts 6-7)**

The second step in the Church’s gradual separation from Israel occurred when Hellenistic Jews from outside of Palestine were incorporated into the Christian movement as recorded in Acts 6-7. To appreciate this second step, one must become familiar with the background of the Hellenic Jews of the Diaspora as well as their contribution to a revived appreciation of the worldwide role of Israel.

Diaspora Christian Jews. Diaspora Jews were a continuing community of Hebrew people that had remained outside the Land of Israel since the Exile. During OT times both the northern kind of the Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah had fallen (721 BC and 586 BC, respectively). Many Jews were forcibly relocated outside Israel during the Exile (see Section IV, chapter 4). Although some of these returned to Israel during the fifth century restoration, most remain scattered throughout the Gentile nations (see Section IV, Chapter 5).

In God’s overall program these scattered Jews performed a vital role in preparing for the evangelization of the world. They formed a vital cultural “beachhead” among the nations which Christians were later to use. As members of both the Israelite culture and the culture of their host nation, these Jews were bilingual ambassadors of biblical truth amid the sea of paganism. They carried the basic biblical framework into nation after nation with the completed OT canon. Concepts vital to understanding the gospel of Christ such as creation, the fall, and prophecy were widely disseminated.

<sup>36</sup> George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 354

Moreover, the Diaspora influence was not only directed toward Gentile paganism; it was also directed toward Israelite provincialism. Native Palestinian Jews had little vision of the world beyond their immediate borders. The Diaspora Jews, in contrast, had a bigger view of mankind and spiritual needs. When, therefore, Diaspora Jews joined the messianic movement, they provided the first real missionary vision to Christianity.

Acts shows the missionary effect of Diaspora Christian Jews in its overall outline. It is a well-recognized fact that Acts 1:8 gives an outline of the book: evangelization of Jerusalem occurs in chapters 1-7; evangelization of Judea and Samaria occurs in chapters 8-9; and evangelization of the uttermost parts of the world begins in chapters 10-28. It is noteworthy that the first section of Acts ends in chapters 6-7 with the introduction of Diaspora influence. From chapter 8 onward the Church becomes more and more clearly separated from Israel by its evangelistic orientation toward the nations.

Introduction of the Greek-speaking Jews with a Diaspora background into the Church gave rise in Acts 6:1 to an early change in Church organization with the origin of deacons. All seven deacons listed in 6:5 have Greek names and served the Hellenist Jewish Christian community. The synagogue where Stephen disputed was Hellenist (6:9). Judging from Stephen's subsequent speech (see discussion below), he was one of the first Christians to grasp the universal nature of the plan of God. Significantly, as Stephen was martyred, Saul was listening to his address (7:58)—the man who later would become Paul and the leading spokesman for the Church age.

The New Message of Stephen. Deacon Stephen seemed to grasp what believers in Acts 1-5 either could not or would not. Whereas the native Palestinian Christian Jews had remained in Jerusalem in spite of the Great Commission, Stephen correctly perceived that OT Judaism in Israel was only a means to a greater end; it was not an end in itself. To observe Stephen's breakthrough in understanding, his famous address in Acts 7 can be divided into three parts as follows:

I. Origin of Israel (7:2-16)

- A. God began revelation to the first Jew on Gentile soil (7:2-8)
- B. The early Jews opposed God's work, but the rejected man of God (Joseph) became the savior of the nation (7:9-16).

II. Origin of Torah (7:17-43)

- A. God revealed His faithfulness on Egyptian and Sinai soil (7:17-23, 30-34, 36)
- B. The Jews opposed God's work, but the rejected man of God (Moses) became savior of the nation (7:24-29, 35, 37-43).

III. Origin of Temple (7:44-50)

- A. God met Israel in a mobile tent (tabernacle) in the wilderness and refused to accept the fixed Temple in Jerusalem as sufficient (7:44-50)
- B. Implication: The Jews who mistakenly clung to the Temple in Jesus' day opposed God's work in the real Temple (Christ and His Body), but the rejected man of God (Jesus) has become the savior of the nation.



Stephen saw a general principle operating in God's plan which was not confined to Israel. God's plan began prior to Israel, and the two most celebrated Jewish institutions—Torah and Temple—not only originated outside the land but were actively opposed or misunderstood by major segments of the Jewish population. God's plan, in other words, was not based in Israel but in God Himself Who ruled all men, "the God of glory" (Acts 7:2).

By recalling this universal principle with Israel's origin in Abraham, Stephen had opened up for Christians the central role of the Abrahamic covenant with its statement that Israel had a worldwide role to bless all nations (Gen. 12:1-3 and Part III, Chapters 1-2 of this series). The viewpoint of the early church by the end of the Jerusalem phase ending in Acts 7 was beginning to orient to the larger, extra-Israel facets of God's worldwide plan of redemption.

In challenging the conventional view of the twin pillars of Judaism, Torah and Temple, Stephen risked a sharp counter-reaction. Not only did he challenge the popular view, he did so as an office-holder in the messianic movement of Jesus Christ. His listeners could not avoid sensing the immense authority of Jesus behind Stephen's Torah and Temple commentary. Their reaction was quick and violent (Acts 7:54-60). A sharp schism now existed between the followers of Jesus on one hand, and both

Diaspora and Palestinian Jews on the other. The separation of the Church from the nation Israel would come about, not from sociological and political causes, but from a deep theological difference concerning the role of God in human history.<sup>37</sup>

### **STEP THREE: INCLUSION OF GENTILES IN THE CHURCH (Acts 8-11)**

Lesson 185

Following the outline of Acts given in 1:8, one notes that the second stage, evangelization of Judea and Samaria, begins with Acts 8:1. As noted in the previous chapter, the Church did not consciously volunteer to carry out its missionary outreach. Rather, it was forced to spread outward from Jerusalem by persecution from the Jewish establishment in that city. Behind this persecution, however, was the sovereign Lord carrying out His decreed will for His Body. Two of the three "mini-Pentecosts" studied earlier confirmed the Lord's intent to include non-Jews in the Church.

<sup>37</sup> Liberal historians argue as W. H. McNeill does in his work *The Rise of the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) that mere global sociological forces insured the establishment of Christianity. Over against this typically naturalistic interpretation, the truth is that the establishment of the Church arose out of Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah—an event that must be seen in the context of our discussion in this and the previous two chapters.

Penetration of Samaria. According to Acts 8:5-25, Philip, a fellow deacon with Stephen (Acts 6:5) who was forced out of the city of Jerusalem by the persecution following Stephen's martyrdom, went northward into Samaria. Samaria was inhabited by descendents of peoples brought into the land after the fall of the northern kingdom in 721 BC (II Kings 17:24-41). As they interbred with the remaining Jews, there developed a peculiar Samaritan culture and mixed race. This Samaritan culture developed its own theology and rewrote the OT to justify their inclusion in the blessing of Abraham. Thus Jesus had to deal with their aberrant faith in John 4:5-42. When Philip evangelizes Samaria, therefore, we observe a major penetration outside the orthodox circles of Palestinian Judaism.<sup>38</sup>

After believing the good news preached by Philip, the half-Jewish, half-Gentile Samaritans were water baptized (Acts 8:12). They were not Spirit-baptized, however, until the apostolic delegation (Peter and John) arrived from Jerusalem (8:14-17). When the apostles formally identified with the Samaritan believers, the Holy Spirit caused one of the three "mini-Pentecosts" in the book of Acts. The Pentecostal coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 had earlier signified that all the spiritual blessings of the Kingdom of God had become available to Israel if the nation would accept the Messiah.

Now this "Samaritan Pentecost" signified that the Kingdom blessings were available to part-Gentile Samaritan believers alongside fully Jewish believers.

Fortunately, the conceptual framework for correctly interpreting this surprising work of the Spirit had been already laid by Stephen. The long-promised world-wide blessing of the ancient Abrahamic Covenant was now coming to pass. Jewish existence was a means to a greater goal: salvation for people from every nation on earth.

Penetration of Gentile Coastal areas. In first century Palestine the coastal areas were inhabited largely by Gentile populations. Acts 9-11 describes the westward movement of the Apostle Peter from Jerusalem to this coastal area and his evangelization of the first pure Gentile.<sup>39</sup> Note that in Acts 9 Peter has no idea what awaits him on the coast, a story that doesn't begin until the next chapter. Clearly we are observing the Holy Spirit as the "on-scene commander" of the Church taking the initiative in her growth independently of how well Christian leadership understand the situation.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Readers should follow this account on a map of the biblical lands in the first century. Such maps can usually be found in most of the study editions of the Bible.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 8:26-39 describes the conversion of the Black Ethiopian official, but the remark in 8:27 about his travel to Jerusalem to worship suggests he was a Gentile proselyte, i.e., a Gentile who had already openly identified himself with Judaism and thus was not looked upon quite in the same way as Gentiles outside of Judaism.

<sup>40</sup> Sometimes it is said that one of the proofs of God's existence is survival of the Church through the centuries without a national or organizational identity, a universally-acceptable doctrinal creed, or political power to overcome persecution!

Acts 9:32 reports that Peter came to visit believers at Lydda (site of the modern David Ben Gurion airport outside of Tel Aviv). At this point he is very close to the sea coast city of Joppa (now a suburb of Tel Aviv). Eventually, through being called to heal a Christian woman in Joppa, Peter arrived at the coast (9:38-39). While at Joppa, Peter lodged with a tanner (9:43), an important step forward toward the encounter with Gentiles. A tanner worked with carcasses, and carcasses were unclean to Jews according to Leviticus 11:39-40. Someone was preparing Peter for walking among unclean Gentiles.

The stage was now set for one of the most dramatic encounters in Acts. Peter has been led to the right place and put in the right circumstances. The Holy Spirit using angels and visions draws Peter to the Roman Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10:1-22). A vision prepares Peter by showing that he must eat ritually unclean food (10:9-16). By the dietary portions of the Mosaic Covenant the visionary animals Peter saw were prohibited to all Jews (Lev. 11; Deut. 14:3-20). Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit's vision-voice sets aside these dietary prohibitions. He does so apparently to smooth the coming contact with unsaved Gentiles since social contact inevitably involves eating together (note 11:3).

The Holy Spirit chose Cornelius as the first officially recognized Gentile believer with very specific credentials that would reveal the larger intents of God's plan for the Church age. He was a Roman, emphasizing his position in Daniel's fourth kingdom (see discussion in Part IV of this series, Chapter 4). He was an officer-soldier, emphasizing the most physically visible manifestation of Gentile power. He was a member of the Italian Cohort, emphasizing his native background as being close to the city of Rome.

As soon as Cornelius responded to Peter's gospel presentation, this Gentile of the Gentiles was immediately Spirit baptized in the second "min-Pentecost" of Acts. God hereby clearly revealed that the gospel would really go into all the world, especially right to the heart of Gentile power, Rome itself! In fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 22:1-10 the Kingdom of God was coming to non-Jews as the Jews increasingly rejected the Messiah (see discussion in Chapter 1 above).

#### **STEP FOUR: OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF GENTILES IN THE CHURCH (Acts 15)**

Whereas the Holy Spirit took the lead in bringing Gentiles into the Church, the Church's human leadership had to come to a conscious, official recognition of that fact. A major part of that recognition came about in the great Jerusalem council meeting in Acts 15:1-29. This council had to deal forthrightly declaring the spiritual status of the increasing numbers of Gentile converts.

A debate of major theological importance ensued. In one sense it was a continuation of the old debate that Jesus had engendered before his death. Jesus had insisted that salvation was by grace through Him rather than by works through obedience to the Mosaic Law. Jesus maintained observance of the Law for His disciples, but they were not to place their hope for salvation in their successful obedience. As the Church expanded throughout the Diaspora Jewish community, it raised this issue again and again. Was salvation by trust in Christ's work or by successful obedience of the Mosaic Law?

Now, however, the debate had taken a new turn. With the influx of Gentile converts the further issue was raised whether these converts were to express their faith by maintaining obedience to the Mosaic Law as their Jewish fellow-believers were doing. Were these Gentile converts to follow the traditional pathway of Gentile converts prior to Pentecost, i.e., that of coming to God indirectly through Judaism? The OT left the impression that Gentile culture was unclean and that only Mosaic Judaism enjoyed God's sanction. If God's Kingdom was now about to come, did it not seem reasonable that Gentiles could enter only by first coming to Judaism?

GENTILE → JUDAISM → KINGDOM OF GOD

Contrary evidence, however, appeared with God's acts recorded in Acts 8-14. Had not the Samaritans and Cornelius' household enjoyed the very same Pentecostal experience as the original Jewish disciples of Acts 2? Had not Peter been instructed to ignore the dietary regulations of the Mosaic Law? God's Kingdom blessings seemed to be available to Jew and non-Jew alike (11:34-35). It seemed from these data that the Gentiles could enter directly into God's Kingdom without first becoming Jewish proselytes:

GENTILE  
JEW → KINGDOM OF GOD

The original debate over grace and works, therefore, became enlarged to one over the whole purpose of the Mosaic Law in the plan of God. Did the Mosaic Law apply at all to Gentile converts? If it did not, what was God's law for Gentile converts in the Church? We'll now consider these three questions in light of the Jerusalem council of Acts 15:1-29.

The Purpose of the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law instituted obligations upon Israel to be a "kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (Exod. 19:6).<sup>41</sup> Because the Mosaic stipulations exceeded the capacity of sinful human nature, they intentionally forced Israel away from trying to live a holy life in the energy of the flesh and toward a moment-by-moment trust in God's gracious enabling.

<sup>41</sup> See Part III of this series, Chapters 2-4 for more details concerning Israel's mission to produce a godly counter-culture for the world and concerning the Law's role in supporting that mission.

From the very beginning of the Mosaic Covenant, God expressed doubt that the nation would really trust Him to enable it to obey Him (Deut. 5:29). Jesus later confirmed that the Law struck to the very depths of the human heart in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). The Mosaic Law, then, while “holy, just, and good” in itself (Rom 7:12), was incomplete without any enabling power (Rom. 8:3). As revelation of God’s will for Israel, it could only expose Israel’s sin along with the sin of any Gentile onlookers (Rom. 3:19-20) and only point ahead to a still future work of God (Gal. 3:19-25; Heb. 6:6-10:18).

If the Mosaic Law was not to save, then what was it for? It was to drive Israel to anticipate gracious salvation from God, salvation which had now become available in Christ (Gal. 3:19-25). It was a foretaste of life in God’s presence to show Jews their need for preparation before the Kingdom of God became permanently established among men. We should not, therefore, downplay the Law’s physical, political, economic, and social details. Human life includes all of these details so that God’s righteous behavioral standards necessarily apply throughout the entire social fabric of civilization. When God gave the Law code through Moses, He claimed that it expressed standards superior to those of every other nation on earth (Deut. 4:6-8). The Mosaic Law expressed righteousness and justice more clearly than Egyptian precepts, the Code of Hammurabi, and other ancient legal systems. *Its purpose was to reveal in unavoidable detail God’s righteous will for human life—all of it.* Through its witness all nations everywhere were to sense their sin (Rom. 3:19-20; I Tim. 1:9-10).

Lesson 186

The Mosaic Law and the Gentiles. The influx of Gentile converts forced the Church’s leadership to decide whether the Mosaic Law applied to these converts. Granted that the Law did not save anyone, was it in force in any sense over the Gentile converts? Clearly, the Jerusalem council answered no (15:19-21; cf. 21:25). It was *not* necessary to circumcise and to command them to keep the Law of Moses (cf. 15:5). We must also observe the reason why the council did tell Gentile converts to observe some of the Law’s rituals. Gentiles should do it not because the Law expressed God’s will for them but because Diaspora Jews throughout the Gentile cities would be offended (15:21; cf. 21:21-26). If social offense was the reason behind the council’s ruling, then the council must have not seen the Law as applying at all to Gentiles.

A puzzle immediately results. If the purpose of the Law was to reveal God’s will for human life individually and socially, how could it not apply to Gentiles outside of Israel? Some non-dispensational, covenant theologians try to protect the integrity of the Law by denying that the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 abrogated the Law for Gentiles. Greg Bahnsen, for example, objects:

*“It would be a great misunderstanding of the Jerusalem Council’s decision to see it as abrogating the Mosaic law except in a few select points; the council only depreciated the law as a way of justification for the Gentiles (as also the Jews).”<sup>42</sup>*

Such covenantal scholars believe that the Mosaic Law can be divided into various parts and parts such as the “ceremonial” laws were done away with Christ’s work, the other parts remaining in force. (See Appendix A for further discussion on the difference between covenant and dispensational theology.) The problem with this attempted solution to the puzzle is that it violates the unitary nature of a covenant. Everyone agrees that the Law had a moral core (the Ten Commandments), judicial code, and ceremonial directives. Ironically, it is the covenant theologian who gloss over the fact that all of these parts together form one covenant that addressed ancient Israel. Rejection of any part of it would repudiate the whole as James notes (Jas 2:10). Even covenant theologians have to admit that part of the Law’s moral core, the Ten Commandments, has been changed (the Sabbath day). The early Church in Acts gradually recognizes that something fundamental about the Law has changed.

We find the solution to the puzzle in the dispensational changeover from the age of Israel to the inter-advent Church age. The OT Mosaic Law with all its parts constituted a treaty structure that defined God’s relationship with the His elect nation Israel in a particular place over a specific historical interval. The tribal Aaronic priesthood administered that Law. Jesus came from another tribe, Judah, and could not belong to the Aaronic priesthood. Jesus began His own priesthood fashioned upon the pre-Israelite priesthood of Melchizedek (see discussion in Chapter 1). This change in priesthood necessitated a change in law as Hebrews states (Heb. 7:11-18). The same immutable God gave both the OT Mosaic Law and the revelation of the NT so there is rational and ethical unity behind this changeover. However, what He wants of the nation Israel and of the inter-advent Church differs in details. The Jerusalem council of Acts 15 in recognizing Gentiles as full members of the Church also exposes the change in the role of the Mosaic Law.

God’s Law for Gentiles. If the Mosaic Law was not binding upon Gentile believers, what were their obligations to God? Were they, in this dispensational interpretation of Acts 15, left in antinomianism? Not at all. Christ had already established the New Covenant (Matt. 26:26-28) in line with the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34. This New Covenant was to replace the Mosaic Law in its entirety, including social law as well as individual law. The difference from the Mosaic Law would not be in its scope but in its root. This New Covenant depended upon regenerated human nature. Thus the abrogation of the Mosaic Law did not signal a lawless antinomianism.

<sup>42</sup> Greg L. Bahnsen, Theonomy in Christian Ethics (Nutley, NJ: Craig Press, 1977), p. 225.

The Messiah's rejection by Israel, as we have seen in these two chapters, complicated the manner of revealing the New Covenant. Like Spirit Baptism, certain promised things could not come to pass due to the Messiah's rejection. Other hitherto unrevealed things came to pass instead. From His throne at the Father's right hand, Christ could not reveal all the New Covenant law details for society or the world at large. While the NT has many detailed commands for the individual, for marriage, for family, and relationship to rulers, it has very few commands that apply to the social and political realm. The lack of judicial, political, and social welfare commandments to replace the Mosaic Law, therefore, comes not from an antinomianism on God's side but from antinomianism on unbelieving humanity's side.

Gentiles who believe are given enough NT commands to honor the moral foundation of Israel's Mosaic Law while living in an utterly distinct historical situation. As Gentiles descendants of Noah they know the moral demands of God (Rom. 1:32) and as instructed Christians they know the specific commands of the Lord Jesus for His Church. The new revelation is even called the "law" of Christ (Gal. 6:2) and the "law" of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2). What Gentile believers can do as responsible citizens for their society outside of the Church is discussed in Appendix B.

Lesson 187

## **STEP FIVE: THE CHURCH CENTERED AMID THE GENTILE NATIONS (Acts 16, 21, 28)**

Once the Gentiles had a recognized position within the Church and the Jews increasingly opposed the gospel, it was only a matter of time before the Church was located primarily within the Gentile nations. The story of that transition from Jewish to Gentile soil is given in the last half of the book of Acts. In Acts 16 Europe receives the gospel. In Acts 21 Israel openly rejects Paul and the Christian gospel. And in Acts 28 Paul arrives in the capitol city of Rome.

Europe Receives the Gospel (Acts 16). The famous Macedonian vision of Paul that directed the Church expansion into Europe. Although European Diaspora Jews along with their Gentile proselytes participated in Pentecost (Acts 2:10), Church leaders made no attempt to evangelize European communities. Nevertheless, the sovereign purpose of Acts 1:8 would prevail. The Church had to become God's witness "to the uttermost part of the world." While working in Asia Minor, Paul was clearly directed to penetrate European territory with the gospel (Acts 16:9-10).

To discover the profound implications of European evangelism, we must recall three major truths studied in Parts 2, 3 and 4 of this series as well as in Chapter 1 of this part. First, this present civilization follows the structure of Noah's family. All mankind have descended from Noah's three sons---Ham, Shem, and Japheth. According to prophecy, Shem was to be the spiritual channel of blessing to the world. Japheth was to be the expansive conqueror but in so doing he had to "dwell in the tents of Shem." He would have to rely in some way upon Shem's blessing (Gen. 9:25-27). Since the Japhetic nations

constitute Indo-European culture (cf. Gen. 10:2-5), it follows that as Europe receives the gospel it will rise to worldwide influence as never before. Coincidentally, the two main languages of the Bible, Hebrew and Greek, come from Shem and Japheth, respectively.

The second major truth taught previously that reveals the significance of Acts 16 is the prophecy of the “times of the Gentiles” given in Daniel 2,7 (cf. Luke 21:24). According to this prophecy the Gentiles culminating in the European Romans will dominate the international scene after the fall and exile of Israel. God transferred potential political supremacy from Israel to the Gentiles (note the domain in Dan. 2:38). Each of the four Gentile kingdoms which will control the land of Israel and Jerusalem will have had exposure to the Word of God from believing citizens dwelling in them (cf. Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Acts). The gospel entrance into Europe and advance into Rome belongs to this design. It indicates that spread of the gospel will not require Israelite dominance of Jerusalem and the Temple area.

The third truth vital to appreciation of Acts 16 is the nature of the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:19-20. When Christ ascended and received all power and authority from the Father, he became de jure King over all nations. Chapter One pointed out, however, that he did not become de facto King because of several factors: He needs a people identified with Him; Israel needs to repent and invite Him back; and an angelic conflict must be won. The Great Commission instructs Church leadership to disciple “the nations”, leaving open the issue of how much influence they will have within the various people groups. Europe thus figures prominently in history as the recipient of the Great Commission and as a place where culture will be most influenced by the Word of God.

Acts 16, therefore, narrates an event of tremendous importance for subsequent European history. The gospel will forever leave its mark on Japheth’s heritage of Western civilization. Significantly, the major missionary outreach of the Church in history has come from Japhetic believers.

Israel Rejects Paul and Christianity (Acts 21). After Paul entered Europe the transition from Jewish to Gentile soil continued. In Acts 21:27-30 Paul is nearly killed by a Jewish mob in the Temple precincts. This strong rejection of Paul and the gospel by Jews in their capitol city and Temple signaled the complete national rejection of Christ by Israel. This event fulfills the parable of Jesus in Matthew 22. In Matthew 22:4-6 the king sends a second set of servants to tell the people of his kingdom that the marriage feast is imminent—it is about to happen. The people, however, resort to violence against this second set of servants. The king’s response is to destroy their city.



Luke reports how Jewish mob violence against the gospel increases throughout the chapters of Acts until this climax in Acts 21. He carefully narrates the details of how it happened. The Jerusalem church at first rejoiced in the news of Paul's successful evangelization of Gentiles (21:19-20a). However, they had a problem. "Many thousands" of Jewish believers existed in Jerusalem (some have suggested that by this point nearly 30% of Jerusalem believed in Jesus as Messiah). "All" of these thousands were "zealous of the law", and they thought Paul had been teaching Diaspora Jews to leave the Law (21:20b-21).

They were so emotional about Jewish tradition that they misunderstood Paul's real teaching. What he had taught was that the Law did not save and could not sanctify (see Galatians for a correct version of his teaching). The Law, in Paul's teaching, was not a universal absolute. It did not apply all to Gentiles--a point the Jerusalem Church earlier recognized in Acts 15 and which they here reaffirmed in 21:25. Because it could not provide salvation or sanctification, it also was also no longer mandatory for Jews in Christ (Gal. 5:6). Christian Jews could continue observing the Law if they wished but not as something that controlled their status with God. The Jewish believers of Jerusalem, however, insisted that the Law was still mandatory. Such thinking betrays a profound ignorance of the gospel that infected the Jerusalem church all the way up to the highest levels of leadership in James the Lord's half-brother.

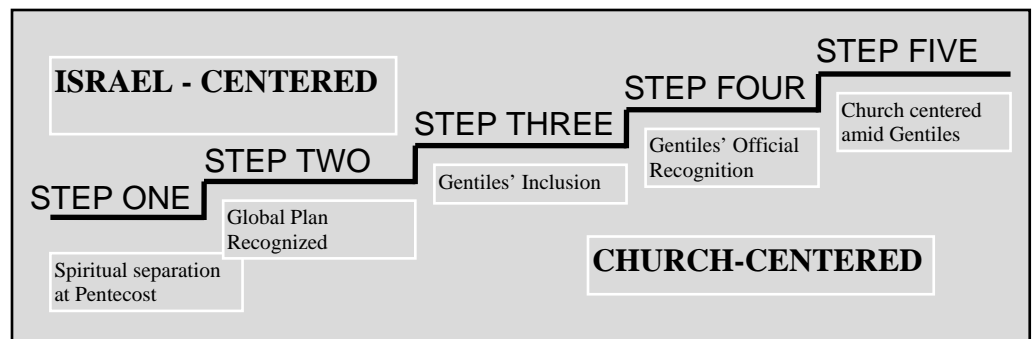
Fearing a mob confrontation of Jerusalem Jews (many of whom were genuine but immature believers), James and the other leaders hatched a plan they hoped would appease the local Jewry. They urged Paul to put on a public demonstration to show that he adhered to the Law. He was to aid four Jewish men who had taken a vow according to Numbers 6 (21:23-26). To complete these vows Paul apparently was to accompany them inside the Temple precincts and help them pay for the various offerings. Instead of clarifying Paul's teaching, the plan tried to deny it (note "that all many know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing" in 21:24). The church leadership feared to stand up for the Word of God under mob pressure.

The plan backfired. Jews from Asia Minor who had opposed Paul directly in those cities knew very well what Paul had taught. They didn't fall for the cover-up. They incited the very mob violence that the Jerusalem church leadership had tried to prevent (21:27-30). Luke here presents divine irony. In Jerusalem Gentiles could not enter the physical Temple, yet elsewhere in the world they daily entered the spiritual Temple of the Body of the Messiah! Moreover, Luke reports that Gentile Roman military power saved Paul (21:31-40). Even after Paul tried to clarify to the mob the true gospel message and was nearly assaulted again, the Roman military protected him a second time (22:24-30). From this point onward Luke recounts Paul's gradual exclusion from Jerusalem and Israel for a trip to Rome itself. Between chapters 21 and 28, Luke reports that Paul repeatedly, publicly, and officially defended his gospel ministry. Never again does the narrative trace any work of God through the Jerusalem church!

The Gospel Reaches Rome (Acts 28). The book of Acts ends with the arrival of Paul in Rome with the gospel completing the full journey from Jerusalem in Acts 1:8. Jesus' prophecy has been fulfilled. The Church has been established as a functioning entity on Gentile soil. The closing notices in Acts 28, therefore, set the tone of the new church age that has clearly begun.

After arriving in Rome, Paul met with Jewish leaders there to again present the gospel (28:17-24). A special meeting was called with Jewish leaders so that Paul could expound from Moses and the prophets why Jesus was the Messiah and why they must believe on Him. In spite of the extensive day long discussion the Jewish leaders did not en-mass accept Paul's reasoning. Paul then announced that the gospel would thenceforth go to the Gentiles and that the Gentiles would favor it far more than the Jews (28:25-31). Paul is last seen preaching the gospel in the capitol city of Gentile power unhindered and free from the mob violence he faced in Israel.

Again following the parable of Jesus in Matthew 22, note that there was to be a third invitation after the destruction of the city of "those bidden to the wedding". Now the invitation was to go "into the highways", to a different group of people (22:8-10). The pattern of Jesus' parable foretold the period from the Gospels through the end of Acts to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and beyond. Figure Four summarizes the separation of the Church from Israel through the five steps we have now completed.



*Figure 4. – Step-by-step separation of the Church from Israel as the New Elect Instrument of God.*

## DOCTRINAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE CHURCH'S EMERGENCE

We have looked so far at the doctrinal clusters we can link to the ascension and session of Christ and to Pentecost. In this chapter we examine the doctrines associated with the Church's position in Christ. These doctrines like those of the previous chapter reveal the work of the Triune God of the Bible. The previous chapter presented the Person of the Holy Spirit and His work in establishing the Church on earth. We studied six of His works: regeneration

(image of creation), indwelling (image of a temple), baptism (image of the separation of judgment/salvation), sealing (image of a security seal), as well as His intercession for us to our Head and His distribution of spiritual gifts to position each of us in the Body.

Reversing the usual order, we move from the Third Person back to the Second Person and then back to the First Person to complete a survey of God's total work in creating the Church. Six works each of the Son and the Father will be listed. These twelve works added to the previous six of the Holy Spirit reveal much of the Church's position in the eternal plan of God. They depend in no way upon our daily ups and downs—they're always there for us to trust and be motivated by.

It is well to remember an aspect of the Trinity to help put these eighteen blessings into a coherent whole. The words that the Triune God chose to use in Scripture direct us to think of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in terms of a speaker, his message, and the effects of the message upon the listeners. The work of the Spirit which we studied in the previous chapter centers *upon the historical effect of establishing the Church on earth among men*. Believers in this life have a recreated human spirit, a residency of the Holy Spirit inside them, a spiritual identification as belonging to the saved, a secure protection from all assaults from evil, a communications link directly to the Head of the Church, and a position of ministry in the Body. We turn now to the works of the Son and then to those of the Father.

## THE WORK OF THE SON

Lesson 189

Following out the biblical guidance we've been given, we can think of the work of the Son as centering *upon content and meaning of the Church in God's eternal plan*. Each of the following six works, therefore, shows the supra-historical character of the Church as a redeemed creation.

Imputed Righteousness. Back in Part III of this Series in connection with the call of Abraham, we learned about the doctrine of justification. There we noted that originally God required perfect obedience of Adam and Eve. They, as the first humans, were to produce tangible and intangible goods and services which could be "priced" or evaluated. They were to be finite replicas of God Who created the heavens and the earth and whose works glorified Him. The works of man were to be what God wanted: blessed, productive fruit. Such production would be evaluated in a way similar to how we today economically credit or *impute value*. Although mankind lacks the knowledge and the inclination to impute correct value, God does not. And the ultimate value of a life can be determined by God.

After the fall, however, a serious problem arose. Rather than produce good fruit, fallen man in a cursed physical environment could only produce thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18-19; Prov. 24:30-33; Heb. 6:7-8). Now the “pricing” problem is compounded. First, sin brings forth evil which is a negative value. Second, forgiveness alone can only eradicate the negative value, bringing it back to zero. But a valueless state this side of Eden cannot exist. That probationary period in the Garden is over. We have to somehow get where Adam should have been with positive obedience. Our price tag must go from zero to a positive number due to actual historic obedience.

When we studied justification in connection with the call of Abraham, we discovered the meaning of justification from passages like Deuteronomy 25:1. The judge was to declare the accused one either guilty of breaking the law or justified by obeying the law. When God justified Old Testament saints such as Abraham, there must have been a historic obedience in order to be able to justify them. Not only did there have to be historic obedience, but that obedience had to be perfect. Where did such perfect, actual obedience come from? Certainly not from OT saints (note Paul’s remark in Romans 3:20 which is taken from Psa. 143:2)!

The missing righteousness appears in the life of Christ recorded in the Gospels. Christ solved the mystery. Justification of sinful human beings could occur if somehow Christ’s righteousness could be credited or imputed to their account. In fact that is exactly what happened (Rom. 3:18-19; II Cor. 5:21). Justification can occur on the basis of Christ’s righteousness imputed. Imputed righteousness, therefore, is a major work of Christ that stands at the very center of God’s redemptive program. The Church, unlike believers in previous dispensations, knows the historic basis of its justification in clear fashion. It has less excuse to drift into various legalisms that seek to exalt human works. Imputed righteousness is the historic content behind justification.

Death and Resurrection. Paul takes great pains in his epistle to the Romans to lay out in detail the doctrine of our co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ. Most of us find it hard to understand and even harder to trust in the midst of everyday circumstances. Yet it constitutes a vital part of our position in Christ and radiates God’s amazing provision for our lives.

Before he expounds this blessing, Paul first lays the groundwork by going back to Adam. Adam’s sin is the only ethical reason for everyone dying (Rom. 5:12-14). The guilt of Adam’s sin in some way comes upon every man, woman, and child. All mankind is “in Adam” (5:15a, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a). However, bad as this news appears, Paul says that Adam is analogous to Jesus Christ in this matter of federal headship (5:14b). Jesus Christ is a “second” or “last” Adam (cf. I Cor. 15:45-49). Those “in Christ” share the credit for His historic obedience, His righteousness, just as those “in Adam” share the credit for Adam’s historic disobedience or unrighteousness. The respective obedience and disobedience are not theological abstractions or Platonic Ideals; they are actual historic roles. But they are historic only to Adam and Jesus, not to all others

who share them. To the others who share the obedience and disobedience, they are, again not abstractions or Ideals, but imputed qualities. As imputed qualities, they form the basis for divine evaluation or “pricing” of lives. Thus Paul starts his discussion of co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with imputed sin and imputed righteousness.

As unbelievers, and therefore legally represented by Adam our father, we exist in a state of doomed mortality. We all must die. No scientific breakthrough will ever thwart this divinely-imposed sentence. There is no magic “death gene” or other biochemical component that can be overcome. The only apparent part of humanity that doesn’t participate in this death state is the ovum.<sup>43</sup> Judgment in the form of physical death must come upon us in our Adamic existence just as the flood had to come upon the antediluvian world in Noah’s day and upon Egypt in Moses’ day. Unlike those judgments, however, our physical death occurs individually as our lives are terminated in a multitude of different ways.

Now Jesus Christ did not die as we die (see Part V of this Series). He gave His life as a sacrifice for sin. Yet He did die, and He did translate from mortal to immortal, resurrected existence. Jesus Christ completed his individual portion of mortal history in such a fashion that He qualified for immediate resurrection to eternal life. He created a “pathway” from mortality to immortality (note Paul’s discussion in I Cor. 15:50-58). When we are joined to Him through the Baptism of the Spirit, we share that historic translation from this life to the next in a certain way (Rom. 5:3-5).

Obviously, our bodies don’t translate to resurrection bodies (although the terminal generation of the Church will experience just that!). They are the “stuff” of Adam that continues under his sentence. However, the Baptism of the Spirit, by aligning us with the other Adam, “partitions” us as regenerated beings. He distinguishes what is damned—our physical bodies—and what will eventually go into the immortality of the resurrection unto life. Paul identifies this “partitioning” as something emanating from Christ’s pathway out of this world, i.e., His crucifixion and resurrection (Rom. 6:6-14).<sup>44</sup>

Unlike saints of previous dispensations, Church-age believers live with the consciousness of a historically-completed deliverance. OT saints viewed the resurrection as something far in the future at the end of history. They had no

<sup>43</sup> For over 500 pages of medical discussion, see Arthur C. Custance, *The Seed of the Woman* (Ontario, Canada: Doorway Publications, 1981). This is no small peripheral fact; it involves the nature of the promise in Genesis 3:20 and the virgin birth of Christ.

<sup>44</sup> Notice that co-crucifixion and co-resurrection are not post-salvation experiences to be sought after as special “add-on” blessings. Rather they occur along with the other numerous facets of God’s saving work at the point of believing the gospel. What is required, however, is prayerful searching of the Scripture so that the Spirit can convince us of these truths and thus enable us to walk by faith. And this process of realization of a past work of God can indeed be a post-salvation experience.

historical record of a resurrection and knew little about it. Church-age believers, on the other hand, not only know the resurrection by its historic occurrence in Jesus but they also are universally able to experience the conflict between flesh and spirit caused by their union with the resurrected Jesus. Co-crucifixion and co-resurrection give the basis and meaning to Spirit Baptism.

Eternal Life. We touched upon eternal life briefly when we discussed the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration in the previous chapter. There we noted that Christ as God-man lived a perfect life under the conditions of kenosis and impeccability. As perfect humanity Jesus Christ had to rely totally upon the indwelling Holy Spirit to empower Him against every category of temptation. He was "able not to sin." As the Second Person of the Godhead Jesus Christ could not sin. He was "not able to sin." Thus he perfectly succeeded in living amidst the fallen world brought about by Adam's fall and successfully met the worst that Satan could throw at a member of the human race.

Of all the NT writers, the Apostle John was the most insightful in teaching us about eternal life. He records Jesus' words about eternal life likening it to bread (John 6:51). He recalls Jesus' pronouncement that this eternal life is what eventually will emerge into truly "abundant life" (10:10). Eternal life, says John, appears analogous to the unending stream of water flowing out from God's very throne that characterized Eden and will also characterize the New Universe (cf. 4:14; Gen. 2:10; Rev. 22:1).

Although the Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner and thus imparts eternal life, that life is the life of the Second Person of the Trinity, not that of the Third Person. The situation is analogous to the conception and virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The Third Person worked out the historic reality of the incarnation, but the incarnation itself was of the Second Person. The incarnation, the God-Man, was the "message"; the virgin birth was the initial historic "effect." So, too, eternal life is the "message"; regeneration (and subsequent spiritual growth) is the "effect".

No OT saint could envision eternal life because no one had yet seen a perfect life suitable for sinless existence forever with God. Eternal life was part of the glorious future at the end of history but not something meaningful in the present. NT saints of the Church age, however, have heard the biographical history of Jesus as they have heard everything else in their memories. The actual first-time appearance of eternal life has now occurred. NT saints, unlike OT saints, know Jesus Christ as the historically-manifested, living, Word of God (John 17:3). To be in union with Jesus means to share that Perfect Life just as being in union with Adam meant sharing his fallen life.

Lesson 190

Priestly Intercession. A fourth work or function of the Second Person concerns the role of a priest. A priest mediates between God and man by

representing man before the very Presence of God.<sup>45</sup> We learn much in the OT Mosaic Law about the true priestly role. Under the Law of Israel a priest had to be appointed by God in order to gain access to His Presence. No one “ran for office” of a priest. Only God-ordained men could come near to His Holy Place. A priest’s central role was to offer sacrifices on behalf of men to God. Such sacrifices could be bloody and non-bloody, depending upon the reason for them under the stipulations of the Law. Besides offering sacrifices, a priest made intercession in prayer for men before God. As the cleansed representative of the nation Israel, a priest literally spoke to the Presence of God in the Holy Place.

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfills a priestly office and role more encompassing than that of the OT Aaronic Priesthood of Israel. He certainly fulfills the functions listed above which characterized the Aaronic Priesthood, but He fulfilled a priesthood of larger scope: the priesthood of Melchizedek. This pre-Israelite priesthood existed after the flood in Noah’s day and functioned during the re-population and colonization of the planet. Melchizedek combined within himself two roles: that of a priest and that of a king. Both roles occurred prior to God’s rejection of this civilization’s spiritual life when a priest and a king could minister universally. As we studied in Chapter One, the Melchizedekian priesthood was a foretaste of the future Messianic priesthood centering on Jerusalem but global in extent (Ps. 110). Jesus represents all races and people groups before God. Eventually, He will also exercise the kingship that goes along with the priesthood. In the present inter-advent period, however, He appears only to exercise the priesthood. The priesthood is the means through which He conducts the angelic conflict which we studied in Chapter One.

As priest Jesus presents a sacrifice for those whom He represents. Unlike all other priests, though, Jesus is both the One Who offers sacrifice and is the Sacrifice Himself! Roman Catholics and Protestants sharply differ on the nature of this sacrifice. Romanism insists that Christ offers a perpetual sacrifice in heaven before the Father which is represented on earth by the mass. Protestants insist that the sacrifice was completed on the Cross (cf. past tenses in Heb. 1:3; 7:27; 10:14). OT priests repeatedly offered sacrifices because they were enacting a ritual ordained by God to teach men how they are saved. The ritual itself did not save and so had to be repeated over and over. Unlike the ritual, Jesus’ atonement on the cross was the real thing that happened in a moment of history and was finished. Jesus does not “re-offer” Himself eternally before the Father. What He does do, is present the results of his once-for-all sacrifice throughout the age of grace until history ends. As we studied in Part Five of this series, Christ’s atonement is the basis for all grace whatsoever that the Father extends to fallen mankind. During the age of grace the Father postpones judgment and does so on the basis of Christ’s atonement. As priest, therefore, Jesus Christ represents all mankind covered from final judgment until the end. He also represents the saved remnant of mankind covered from final judgment forever.

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<sup>45</sup> A priest’s role contrasts with that of a prophet whose role is to represent God before man by bringing announcements from God to man by the spoken and written word.

This discussion of Jesus priesthood and its sacrificial offering provides the basis for appreciating his priestly intercession (cf. Rom 8:34; Heb. 7:25). As our representative before God, our Advocate (I John 2:1-2), Jesus Christ prays for our protection and spiritual growth amidst Satanic accusations against us. Note Satan's role as the "prosecutor" in Job 1, Zechariah 3:1-5; and Luke 22:31-32. Every believer needs a "defense attorney" in the court of heaven who can offer an unanswerable defense of our righteous standing before God. Here again, as we noted in Chapter One, the angelic conflict forms the backdrop on what happens in the Church age. Christ won a place for humanity before God by his perfect life in a contest with Satan. As heavenly priest, Christ now testifies to Satan's loss of claim against men who have trusted in Christ's finished work for their eternal salvation. His priestly intercession continually covers believers' sins and lack of obedience on the basis of His once-for-all substitutionary sacrifice and imputed righteousness.

No OT saint could enjoy such promised advocacy as something that was historically grounded upon a finished work. They gained their sense of security from trusting that somehow, someday the Lord would fulfill the promise He had made long ago to Eve (Gen. 3:15). From a human viewpoint on earth, the object of their trust was in a sense "contingent" upon the future Messiah victoriously completing His mission. NT saints have the additional revelation of the work of Christ on the Cross to look back upon as a completed act.

Lesson 191

Heavenly Direction. As Head of the Church Christ directs its history and disciplines its members (Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). The book of Acts testifies to His leadership from heaven through the Holy Spirit acting for Him on earth. By itself the Church did not pursue its mission of being a witness to the uttermost parts of the earth. It was through the ebb and flow of spiritual conflict (angelic conflict again as Satan tried to persecute the Church) that He guided the Church faithfully toward its assigned mission. It was also through this same ebb and flow that He takes "prisoners of war" and turns them into gifted men to be added to His Body (Eph. 4:7-13).

The book of Revelation reports that the Lord Jesus inspects local churches in various geographical regions (Rev. 2-3). He critiques their spiritual state, administers discipline, and provides logistical grace. He shakes up the historical Church whenever it drifts doctrinally and disobeys the NT teachings.

The relationship between Christ's heavenly direction and priestly intercession on one hand and the Holy Spirit's intercession on the other appears in diagrammatic form in Figure Five. The Church on earth exists in a hostile environment under the god of this world who hates believers as much as he hated Christ (John 15:18-27; Eph. 2:1-3). Since living members of the Church require sanctification, Christ consistently outmaneuvers Satan's attacks so that instead of destroying the Church, they actually further its growth and the sanctification of its members (see next Chapter). The Holy Spirit intercedes from earth to the Son in heaven as Head of the Body (Rom. 8:26-27). The Son





fellowship such as the alleged lack of strength against temptations of the world, flesh, and devil. Jesus lived in the same environment and relied upon the Holy Spirit's enabling power in the same fashion as every believer. He will purge our phony good works from our record, leaving only the residue of those works done in the power of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 5:10-11).

In addition to judging individual believers in the Church, the Seated Lord Jesus judges the Church corporately. John pictures the Lord as present amidst the historical church in its various geographical locations in Revelation 1-3. John reveals that the Lord issues "inspection reports" as it were, complete with commendations and condemnations.

Such judgment by a human of members of the human race was utterly unknown in OT times. It is a new thing with the dispensation of the Church because the Messiah succeeded in His mission and has been installed as the Son of Man (see Chapter 1). Together with the other five works of the Son, the judging constitutes a six-fold revelation of the role of Christ and His Church in the Father's eternal plan. Whereas the six-fold work of the Holy Spirit which we studied in the previous chapter implemented that plan, the work of the Son stands behind the Spirit's work and is the reason for it.

## THE WORK OF THE FATHER

Lesson 192

Thinking again in terms of the speaker, the message, and the effects of the message, we come to the work of God the Father. God the Father is the Personal Cause of all things. *In contrast to paganism which attributes ultimate cause to both impersonal Fate and Chance, the Bible insists upon the ultimate cause as the one personal will of the Creator.* As we learned in the call of Abraham event of Part III of this series, pagan unbelief inevitably conceives of a combination of impersonal nature forces and a restless, warring "committee" of gods and goddesses. No single god or goddess has the ultimate say in what happens. In the Continuity of Being the gods and goddesses themselves are trapped inside the vast impersonal cosmos. Over against this world view biblical faith rests for its ultimate cause in the infinite-personal Creator over all (Rom. 11:36). We now examine briefly six works, or we might say, decisions of the Father. Five of the six works appear together in Romans 8:29-30.

He Foreknows. In eternity past God "knew" each NT saint in Christ. This action expresses a divine choice about creation and history. Autonomous man hates to hear that God is the final cause of all things. Yet it follows immediately from the doctrine of creation. Ultimately, what happens in history—whether the fall of Satan, the fall of Adam, the rejection of Jesus Christ by Israel, or the final judgment—is a result of God's choice to make history the way it is playing out. Remembering our discussion in Part III, the (Q)uality of God's sovereignty has analogies and disanalogies with the (q)uality of human choice. In reasoning

about things like foreknowledge, election, predestination, etc., we must derive our logic itself from what God has revealed about the reasoning process. As Poythress has shown in much detail, the very laws of logic must be understood biblically as deriving from the Trinitarian revelation of God.<sup>46</sup> In that light, we can think of Jesus Christ during His incarnate ministry on earth. As true humanity, He possessed choice which was revealed in the doctrine of kenosis. He was “able not to sin.” He chose to give up the voluntary use of His divine attributes and instead submit to the Father’s will when to use them and when not to. By implication and by additional NT revelation, He chose to rely upon the Holy Spirit in the same fashion as we are to.

Nevertheless, as undiminished deity He could not sin as elucidated in the doctrine of impeccability. He was “not able to sin.” Thus the Trinitarian revelation of God demonstrates that the (Q)uality of divine sovereignty and the (q)uality of human responsibility co-existed in the Person of the God-Man. It follows then that the meanings of the term “sovereignty” and the term “human choice” are not logically contradictory in the sense of the logic God used to create human history. Since God’s logic is the model of human logic, it follows that those who claim the two qualities cannot coexist must be using faulty logic.

Poythress notes that old Greek pagan ideas still control many peoples’ use of logic. He traces the problem back to Aristotle’s brilliant articulation of univocal, abstract categories that apply to both God and man, i.e., the pagan ground idea of Continuity of Being. On this Aristotelian view of logic “causation” and “choice” must be the same for God and man. The Creator-creature distinction is ignored at the start. Users’ of Aristotelian logic, therefore, see a “contradiction” in the biblical revelation of divine sovereignty and human choice. The trouble lies with the pagan notions they have imported into the discussion, not with the biblical Trinitarian revelation.

To return to the matter of the Father’s foreknowing those in Christ, we interpret revelation in Romans 8:29 and I Peter 1:2 as referring to the Father’s sovereign design of the plan of salvation in eternity past. Sometimes the term foreknowledge is mistakenly interpreted to mean that God knew before hand who would believe and who would not believe. Then, based upon those foreseen choices of man, God elected those who would believe. However, this idea runs into trouble with passages like Matthew 11:20-24 where the circumstances that give rise to faith fall under God’s sovereignty. God, not man, is the final cause. Another clear example is the unconditional election of Abraham and his seed. According to the Abrahamic Covenant there will be a continuous line of believers in history from Abraham to the Messiah. Nothing can stop this sovereign covenant. Its outworking solely rests upon God’s sovereign design of history. There will certainly be those who believe. No man or group of men can refuse or will refuse in such a way to block its fulfillment. Two further examples of the final sovereignty of God in human choices are the

<sup>46</sup> Vern S. Poythress, “Reforming Ontology and Logic in the Light of the Trinity: An Application of Van Til’s Idea of Analogy,” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 57 (Spring, 1995), 187-219.

two Gentile rulers, Pharaoh and the Persian king Cyrus. God hardened Pharaoh's heart yet Pharaoh himself chose to reject the Word of God through Moses (Exodus 7-14; Rom. 9:17). With Cyrus God worked in the opposite manner. He circumstantially blessed Cyrus that he would come to know God (Isa. 45:1-4). In the cases of Matthew 11:20-24, the Abrahamic Covenant, Pharaoh, and Cyrus it was God's sovereign control that in the final analysis that moved them one way or another.

Foreknowledge means more than omniscience. It means specifically-focused attention to a personal relationship. Every believer in Christ in this dispensation has been specifically at the center of God's attention for all eternity! If this truth were occupying Christian minds, we wouldn't see the problem of bad "self esteem" so prevalent in the Church! It is the basis of every promise of the Word of God to the believer. In Romans 8, verse 28 stands upon the ground of verse 29. These promises are not mere "offers"; they are guarantees. The Father's foreknowledge of each of us establishes the reason for the work of Christ that we studied above. It is the reason why the Holy Spirit came to earth to implement the many applications of the work of the Son on our behalf.

He Predestinates. This second work of the Father follows foreknowledge. Like foreknowledge it reveals the specifically-directed Personal Cause behind the plan of creation and redemption. Whereas the emphasis in foreknowledge points to the Father's eternity-past view of His personal relationship with us, predestination focuses upon the Father's design of the "context" of that personal relationship. Ephesians speaks of being predestined to an adoption and inheritance in Christ (Eph. 1:5,11-12).

Our destiny is inseparable from the Son. None of the revelation about foreknowing, predestinating, or electing ever occurs as something distinct from the Second Person. He is the Word spoken by the Father. The Father's works, therefore, set up the Son's work. Figure Six attempts to show something of the relationship between the works of the Father and the Son and between the Son and the Spirit. Predestination would have been fruitless apart from the incarnation and successful life of Jesus Christ which qualified Him for His eternal reign over the Kingdom of God.

He Calls. The third work mentioned in Romans 8:29 is the Father's calling. Theologians sometimes refer to God's "efficacious call" intending to distinguish this particular call of God from His other calls. This call functions like Jesus' call to Lazarus in the grave (John 11:43). Paul likely had in mind God's call that brought him to salvation on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:4-5; 22:6-10; 26:13-18). God's call stands behind the power of the revelation of the Son, the gospel ministry of the Church, and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. These works by the other Persons of the Trinity give meaning to the Father's call and make it effective in history.

He Justifies. This fourth work of the Father we have studied several times previously (Part III under the call of Abraham, and above under the Son's work of Imputed Righteousness). Whereas imputed righteousness reveals the legal basis in Christ's victorious life on earth, justification focuses upon the Father's goal which is to apply that righteousness to the account of the believer. Christ's righteous life is the means for carrying out the Father's plan. But the cause behind having Christ live a perfect life is the decree of the Father to make righteous, sinful men.

He glorifies. The fifth work of the Father centers upon creating the resurrected, completely-saved state of the believer in eternity future. Here we review our study in Part V of this series regarding the doctrinal result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Resurrection takes the human body from mortal history and puts it into immortal history where it is everlastingly immutable. Immortal history features mankind at last in the state God decreed as its ultimate destiny.

The Father's work of glorifying us includes the acquisition of Christ's eternal life in the human spirit (regeneration), sanctified fruit of godly choices in this life (verified by the judgment by the Son), and the eventual resurrection body. This work causes all those results to take place in our life!

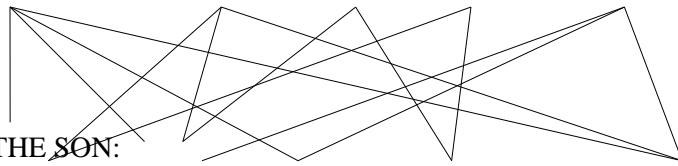
He chastens. The last work of the Father to be studied here involves His disciplining nurture of every believer (Heb. 12:5-6). The author of Hebrews references Proverbs 3:11-12 that shows the role of God as the Father who disciplines His children. As wisdom literature Proverbs expounds God's disciplinary activity throughout every area of life from physiological to the economic.

As Figure Six shows, the Father's disciplinary work causes things like the Son's managerial severity of His Body. Note how the language of Revelation 3:19 parallels that of Hebrews 12:5-6. This disciplinary work of the Father undoubtedly leads the Holy Spirit to make intercession for it as part of His ministry in our lives. By including this work of the Father in our purview of our position in Christ, we prevent a subtle fatalism from infecting our soul by over-emphasis of foreknowledge and predestination. Those works of the Father cannot be separated from His righteousness and justice that demands a certain ethical content in eternal life. Those works, therefore, imply that the Father will take various means to guarantee that His final goal for us is reached.

An illustration might help. When a young man enters military training, especially in basic combat skills, he faces both “predestination” and “chastening.” The military training system can’t afford to allow needless casualties on the battlefield. Drill sergeants set forth the desired end goal: an adequately-trained soldier. That is the “predestination” of an entering trainee. The drill sergeant yells at his charges, “at the end of this training, you all *will* be in shape!” Yet to ensure that such “predestination” is accomplished, the drill sergeant throughout the course administers strict and intense discipline. The “chastening” is implied in the “predestination.”

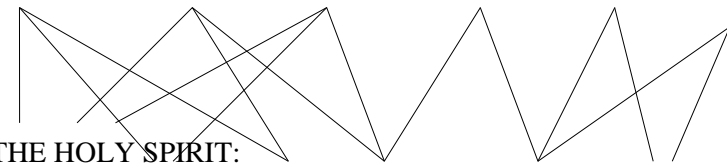
**GOD THE FATHER:**

foreknowledge predestination calling justification glorification



**GOD THE SON:**

righteousness death/res eternal life intercession direction judgment



**GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT:**

regeneration indwelling baptism sealing intercession sp.gift

Figure 6. The integrated work of the Trinity on behalf of the Church

## SUMMARY

The historical emergence of the Church from Israel revealed the dawn of a new dispensation in the outworking of God’s plan. The Church would become the King’s royal family and would constitute the historical defeat of Satan as it is assembled one person at a time out of his kingdom of darkness.

## CHAPTER 4: THE HISTORICAL MATURING OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 193

After the Ascended Messiah through the Holy Spirit created the Church and separated it from the nation Israel, it began its own distinct history. As an unforeseen entity of the inter-advent age, the Church revealed a new administration (or dispensation) of God. This new dispensation features a new relationship between believers and God the Son. In this chapter we'll explore that relationship further.

It's important to clarify at the beginning of our discussion the term "fellowship" as it occurs in I John 1:1-3. Usually when Christians speak of fellowship we think of relating to other believers in our locality. The term has a much larger horizon. In the original text of I John, in fact, it means receiving the gospel message of the apostles that enables us to have fellowship across spatial and temporal boundaries with the apostles! Since the Church is one Body existing across the centuries of time we need to expand our fellowship horizon so we can learn not only the Word of God that originated with the apostles but also the lessons learned by previous generations of saints. The formal name of that study is historical theology. Although this chapter is far too short for any substantial presentation of historical theology, hopefully it will open the door for a new dimension of fellowship across the centuries of the Body of Christ.

Toward that end we will review the stages of growth encountered throughout the nineteen centuries since Pentecost. Each stage reveals God's pedagogical administration through the headship of Jesus and the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we will examine the divinely-designed processes of Christian growth that make use of the positional work of the Trinity that was taught in the previous chapter.

### COMPLETING THE CHURCH'S FOUNDATION

The first generation of Christians witnessed the infant stage of Church growth. Although Infancy doesn't last, it's absolutely vital for latter growth. During the infant stage the foundation was laid on which all subsequent Church growth depended. Often we romanticize this early stage, expressing our nostalgia to "get back to the early church." We must be careful here. Normal healthy adults don't wish to return to their infancy. Whereas infancy does possess certain desirable traits, the stage itself should not be an object of desire. The early Church indeed possessed praiseworthy characteristics but it also was exceedingly immature, doctrinally unprepared to meet Satanic deceptions and opposition, and as full of strife and discord as it is today. Let's look at the Church's infancy to see what God accomplished during those years and at the same time to see what infantile features needed to be changed.

## SENSE OF DISTINCT IDENTITY

As we learned in the previous chapter, it took over a generation for the Church to realize that it wasn't part of Israel. In the days immediately following Pentecost, the period most romanticized in Christian imagination, believers kept close fellowship with each other and with the Lord. In fact the grammatical construction in Acts 2:42 indicates that the term "fellowship" meant eating and praying together. Apostolic teaching prevailed, wonders and signs occurred, great trust and harmony permeated the group, and many unbelievers were coming to faith (Acts 2:43-47).

The context of this fellowship, however, was entirely Jewish and centered upon the Temple precinct of Jerusalem (Acts 2:46). The Church seemed to be nothing more than a subset of Jews within national Israel. Only after a series of painful adjustments to divinely-arranged circumstances did the Christian community expand beyond Jerusalem and emerge from the Jewish culture throughout the Levant. Rejection of the gospel in synagogue after synagogue eventually separated the Church from Israel. Not until the end of the book of Acts does the Church attain a sense of identity distinct from Judaism.

Lesson 194

## COMPLETION AND RECOGNITION OF THE NT CANON

In several ways the Church's infancy paralleled the Israel's Restoration period that we studied in Part IV of this series. Just as the OT canon finally was completed in the fifth century, B.C., when God began a four-century long period of public silence, so at the end of the first century, A.D., the NT canon was completed and God once again began a period of silence that so far has continued for over nineteen centuries. This topic of canonical scripture addresses several important characteristics of God's historical revelation.

Apocalyptic Revelation Closes the Canon. When the OT canon was nearing completion, God revealed the future in apocalyptic terms, that is, in vivid imagery given by vision and dream along with angelic beings who partially interpreted the imagery to the recipient. OT canonical apocalyptic literature includes portions of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Similarly, when the NT canon was nearing completion, God again revealed the future in apocalyptic terms to John on the isle of Patmos, producing the last book of the NT, the Revelation. In both cases, the emphasis of the apocalyptic revelation centers upon enduring hope against a hostile world. The imagery in both cases reveals that God will surely end the cosmic struggle between good and evil and usher in a paradise on earth for those whom He declares righteous.

Appearance of apocalyptic revelation to John on the isle of Patmos, therefore, signaled to those knowledgeable of God's ways that public revelation was drawing to a close. The time was ripe for collecting all available revelation into a canon.



Historically-Interrupted Revelation Requires the Canon. In Part III of this series we studied the doctrine of revelation in connection with the Mt. Sinai event. We noted then that biblical revelation has at least five characteristics: it is verbal (public language, not private mysticism), personal (personal response required, not academically “objective”), historical (only occurs at designated times, not continuously given), comprehensive (addresses every area of life, not confined to religious topics), and prophetic (speaks of what lies beyond man’s mental limitations in time and space). Here we wish to revisit the historical characteristic of revelation.

By saying that God’s revelation is historical we mean that He does not reveal Himself publicly to each generation of man. Since revelation does not occur in everyone’s immediate experience, God’s revelation must be preserved. When the canon of Scripture, therefore, is about to be finished, steps must be taken to preserve that revelation for future generations of man. God designated Israel as the custodian of Scripture (Rom. 3:2; 9:4). Even the NT came into existence through Jewish authors (with the possible exception of Luke). And the Jewish Messiah controlled the generation of the NT documents through these authors (John 14:26). The body of NT revelation Paul calls the “mind of Christ” (I Cor. 2:16).

While the apostles still lived, the Church contented itself with oral tradition (II Thess. 2:15). As the apostles died off, however, an obvious need for written documents arose. At first written and oral sayings of Jesus such as the fragment in Acts 20:35 circulated throughout the Levant. Paul distinguishes his instructions from those of Jesus’ sayings in I Corinthians 7:10, 12, 25.<sup>47</sup> In addition to these sayings, the early Church used lists of standard OT quotes to prove the Messiahship of Jesus (e.g., Pss 2, 16, 110). Eventually, various records and epistles began to appear (e.g., Luke 1:1-4; Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27; I Tim. 5:18; II Pet. 3:15-16).

The historic nature of God’s revelation thus requires existence of a clearly-defined record of it, i.e., the Scriptural canon. Israel’s function in human history once again caused the appearance of canonical texts. All the NT authors with the possible exception of Luke were Jews.

The Church Recognizes the Canon. Very early the Church recognized the OT books that the Jewish community thought of as canonical. These are the same books that we Protestants have in our Bibles. Unfortunately, a few other books written prior to the NT (e.g., I and II Maccabees, Tobit, etc.), were circulated for general reading in the churches although they were not intended as doctrinal authorities. These books, while useful in showing cultural and linguistic background of the centuries just prior to NT times, contain unorthodox doctrines such as praying for the dead. Eventually, the Council of Carthage in

<sup>47</sup> Scholars sometimes call these sayings of Jesus the *logia*.

A.D. 397 included these “extra” books in its list of canonical OT writings in addition to the standard Hebrew OT canon. This list establishes the OT collection of books today in Roman Catholic Bibles. Protestants later purged these extra books from the OT canon and re-adopted the ancient Hebrew list of books.

Recognition of the NT canon followed a similar path with a slight difference. By A.D. 366 our present NT canon was on the verge of definition. The famous bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, listed the books which were to be read in the churches and which “included all and only those that are recognized today in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches”.<sup>48</sup> The Council of Carthage officially affirmed the NT list.

Although the NT canon and OT canon (with a few additions) were both accepted by the end of the fourth century, A.D., the NT canon was not at first put on a par with the OT canon insofar as authority was concerned. NT books were recognized as divinely-written scripture (e.g., II Peter 3:15-16), but they were also seen as supplementary to oral tradition. Paul himself received oral tradition which he accepted as authoritative (I Cor. 15:3,11). He spoke of oral as well as written authoritative teaching (II Thess. 2:15). Both Roman Catholicism and the eastern Orthodox churches argue that the oral part of the apostles’ authoritative teaching continues within their churches and justifies the authority of church offices as equal or superior to the NT writings. We will return to the issue of authority later in this narrative of the historical growth of the Church. Eventually, the Church had to face the implications of NT canonicity for the proper location of authority.

The Disappearance of Certain Spiritual Gifts. The NT itself gives evidence that the miraculous “sign” gifts of the apostolic era were already dying away. These were discussed in Chapter 2 above.<sup>49</sup> Once the Church was founded, those gifts that had accomplished the work of founding were no longer necessary. Although it is somewhat controversial, the present author believes that the event which Paul said would render the sign gifts obsolete was the establishment of the NT canon (see I Cor. 13:8-10). Since the last NT book was written just prior to the end of the first century (Revelation), this identification implies that the reason sign gifts were disappearing in the first and second centuries, A.D., was that the NT canon had come into existence and was being recognized throughout the Church.

This pattern of a relatively brief period of sign miracles accompanying a cluster of high-profile events in God’s ongoing plan shows up several times in biblical history. Table Seven which is adopted from Dillow’s study pictures these three periods.<sup>50</sup> During the first period Moses and Joshua founded the nation of Israel and needed divine authentication of their role and

<sup>48</sup> John Hannah, Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> See pages 37-39.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph C. Dillow, Speaking in Tongues (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 139.

Era	Starting characteristics	Authentication of Messengers	Authentication of Message	Vivid Instruction
Moses and Joshua (1441-1390 BC)	God forming a new nation, Israel (Exod. 19:8;33:13;Deut. 4:6-8)	Moses (Exod. 4:1-9, 29-31); Joshua (Josh. 3:7)	To Pharaoh (Exod. 7:17; 8:19); To Israel (Exod. 6:6-7; 14:31)	Israel (Exod. 10:12; 14:13-14); Egypt (9:26; 11:7; 14:4); Nations (9:16; Josh. 2:9-11)
Elijah and Elisha (870-785 BC)	Decline and Fall of Israel not due to false religion (I Kings 17:1)	Elijah (I Kings 17:1; 18:36); Elisha (II Kings 5:8)	To Israel (I Kings 17:24; 18:36)	Prophets of Baal; People of Israel (I Kings 18:39; II Kings 5:15)
Christ and the Apostles (AD 25-95)	Separation of the Church from Israel	Christ (Mark 2:7; John 14:11; 20:30-31); Apostles (II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:4)	To Israel (John 10:37-38; Acts 3:1-8); To Church (Acts 10:44-48; 15:8-9)	To Israel (Matt. 8:26); To Church (Acts 5:1-11; I Cor. 5:3-5).

**Table 7. The Three High-Frequency Miraculous Periods of Biblical History (adapted from Dillow's work, *Speaking in Tongues*).**

of their message. Strict instruction during this early period in Israel's history was needed in order to generate a broad enough loyalty to the Word of God to support the founding of Israel. The second period in the days of Elijah and Elisha shows very similar circumstances. God was announcing doom upon the Kingdom because of apostasy and unbelief. It was necessary, however, to demonstrate that the decline and fall of the nation wasn't due to the superiority of false religion. Miracles proved that God was "alive and well" if only the Israelites would believe. These same elements appear again in the third era of high-frequency miracles during the time of Christ and the apostles. A new era was beginning with the inter-advent period and the rise of this new Body of Christ, previously unanticipated. The infant Church needed a powerful boast in history.

A survey of biblical data regarding sign miracles quickly shows that the signs were linked strongly to new revelation coming onto the historical scene. Such miracles were "attention-getters" primarily directed to Israel (I Cor. 1:22). The Bible, however, warns us about one restriction on our interpretation of miracles. Miracles done by heretics and false teachers have no authoritative force (Deut. 13:1-5). Thus the miracles themselves do not have authority equal to the content of the new revelation being given. Sign miracles existed to confirm revelation, not to divert attention from it or compete with it.

If the purpose of sign miracles was to confirm revelation, then it follows that after new revelation had been given and accepted, one would expect the

sign miracles to diminish. The NT clearly witnesses to the gradual disappearance of certain spiritual gifts that were of the sign-miracle category. Whereas in the earlier days Peter and Paul could heal at will (Acts 5:12-16; 19:12), in the latter days Paul could not heal certain individuals (Phil. 2:25-28; II Tim. 4:20). As Sir Robert Anderson wrote of this decline:

***“I know that if in the days of His humiliation this poor crippled child had been brought into His Presence He would have healed it. And I am assured that His power is greater now than when He sojourned upon the earth, and that He is still as near to us as He then was. But when I bring this to a practical test, it fails. Whatever the reason, it does not seem to be true. This poor afflicted child must remain a cripple. I dare not say He cannot heal my child, but it is clear that He will not. And why will he not? How is this mystery to be explained? The plain fact is that with all who believe the Bible, the great difficulty respecting miracles is not their occurrence, but their absence.”***<sup>51</sup>

Other spectacular signs ceased, too. The miraculous prison escapes stopped so that all the apostles, except possibly John, died as prisoners of the state. The sudden judgments such as those in Acts 5:1-11 and 12:20-25 diminished to the point where enemies of the Church like Alexander (I Tim. 1:19-20; II Tim. 4:14-15) and Diotrefes (III John 1:9-10) apparently were left unimpeded.

During this gradual disappearance of sign gifts, the apostles were dying off. This is not a coincidence. According to II Corinthians 12:12, the miraculous gifts were inevitably linked to the apostles. Along with the apostles dying off, Israel as a nation ceased to exist in AD 70. The physical and political counter-culture that God established as the conduit of revelation and custodian of Scripture went down. Along with the establishment of the canon, therefore, went the disappearance of its sources.

The infant stage of the Church came to an end. In I Corinthians 13:8-10 Paul predicted the end of infancy. The gifts of prophecy and knowledge—so necessary when the NT was being generated—would be cut off. The gift of tongues would cease in and of itself. This more mature stage of Church history would feature something Paul called “perfect” (13:11). Since this maturity is contrasted with knowing and prophesying “bit-by-bit”, it must refer to a state when all revelation is finished and available. From Paul’s vantage point at the time he wrote I Corinthians, he was not sure whether this maturity would be reached in an imminent rapture (see next Chapter) or over a prolonged period of time. As it turned out, of course, Israel continued to harden itself so the Church age had to go on for a long time.

Church history witnesses to the disappearance of the gifts that founded the Church. John Chrysostom (ca. AD 347-407) when he discusses I Corinthians exposition of sign gifts says that the passage “is very obscure: but the obscurity is produced by our ignorance of the facts referred to *and by their cessation,*

<sup>51</sup> Sir Robert Anderson, The Silence of God (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), p 27f.

*being such as then used to occur but no longer take place.”<sup>52</sup> Protestantism has always been cessationist because it places the supreme authority in the Bible, not Church offices and activities. The Westminster Confession of Faith puts the matter well:*

*“The whole counsel of God, concerning things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” (Chapter 1, Article 5)*

Those today in the Church who crave a renewal of sign miracles never seem to understand what they are really asking for. They desire a re-opening of the canon and a return to the infancy of the Church. They demean the finality of the revelation given once-for-all in Christ (Jude 1:3). They mimic Philip in John 14:7-10 who, not satisfied with the final revelation of God in Christ, wanted some flamboyant signs. Jesus’ answer to Philip is the answer to all who similarly seek such signs: “have you not known Me?”

Lesson 195

## CLARIFICATION OF THE TRINITY

Knowing God in Christ indeed is the mark of a well-founded faith. Along with the rise of a sense of distinct identity and the completion of the canon, the last characteristic of the founding era of the Church has to be its formulation of Who God is and Who Christ is.

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See Notes from Part V  
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By the first few centuries Christ had firmly founded His Church on earth. His promise of further revelation through the Holy Spirit had come to pass (cf. John 14:26). The revelational process ended. The NT canon existed. The Church had spread into the world outside of Israel. As it spread into the Japhetic culture of Europe, the Holy Spirit led the Church to delve more deeply into the Word of God over against heretical attacks against it. The first stage of theological maturation gave a clear understanding of the nature of the God Who Reveals Himself as a Trinity. At Chalcedon the Church arrived at a clear understanding of Jesus Christ as the God-man. Thus the Holy Spirit founded the Church with a clear grasp of both the revelation-source (the OT and the apostolically-generated NT) and the God Who gave it (Trinity and Christology).

## GRASPING WHAT REDEMPTION IS ALL ABOUT

People often think of the period from the fall of the Roman Empire (ca. 600) to the Reformation (ca. 1500) as the Medieval Period or Middle Ages. Anti-Christian historians, of course, call this period the Dark Ages out of their hatred of the gospel. Regardless of such negativism, the Middle Ages saw the gospel as the only hope in a very bleak Europe. During that period much effort

<sup>52</sup> Homilies on First Corinthians

was devoted to the task of clarifying the work of Christ as to its purpose and its result. For the sake of brevity I will refer to previous Parts of this Series throughout the discussion.

Early Church fathers continued the apostolic emphasis upon the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Their writings show true thankfulness to God for the Cross. The second century Epistle to Dignetus contains this passage:

*“O the sweet exchange, O the inscrutable creation, O the unexpected benefits; that the iniquity of many should be concealed in One Righteous Man, and the righteousness of One should justify many that are iniquitous!”<sup>53</sup>*

Clearly, the fathers rejoiced in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

[Lesson 196](#)

If the foundational stage of church history featured the completion of the canon of Scripture and exposition of the Trinity and the God-Man, the next stage of church history shows a maturing understanding of the work of Christ and its result in our salvation. The foundational stage basically settled two major issues against all competing views: the source of authority (divine revelation instead of human reason and imagination) and the nature of God (Triune and Incarnational rather than solitary monotheism of Unitarianism). These advances occurred primarily in the West, the European (Japhetic) portion of the Church. The eastern portion of Christianity did not so sharply distinguish the canonical Scripture from tradition nor did it wholly concur with the Chalcedonian Christology. This trend of clearer and more detailed doctrinal development in the West than in the East continued into the next stage of history.

Prior to AD 600 about the only concept different from the usual substitutionary blood atonement idea was that Christ’s Cross work paid a ransom to Satan. Historians question how widespread this strange idea was, but they generally trace it back to Origin (c185-254). The ransom-to-Satan theory of the Cross apparently arose out of reflection upon our release from his power as revealed in passages like Hebrews 2:14. However, it never became a major view. By the Middle Ages, however, powerful competing ideas of the Cross arose and had to be dealt with. As in the case of all doctrinal advance and maturation, growth came about only because of heresy and conflict.

## PURPOSE AND RESULTS OF THE CROSS

[Lesson 197](#)

We have previously discussed the issues surrounding the atoning work of Christ on the Cross in Part V. The great theologian of the Middle Ages, Anselm (A.D. 1033-1109), created the first grand synthesis of doctrine concerning the atonement in his work Cur Deus Homo (Why the God-Man). Anselm, you will recall, insisted

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See Notes from Part V

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<sup>53</sup> Cite in Hanna, p. 152.

that God could not arbitrarily forgive sin without jeopardizing His character. This is the Anselmic or Satisfaction Theory of the atonement. It assumes a restitutionary view of justice and includes the concepts of redemption (economic viewpoint), propitiation (personal viewpoint), and reconciliation (social viewpoint). The Reformers sharpened Anselm's Satisfaction Theory by specifying what in God's nature required atonement (His justice) and how that requirement was met (penal judgment). Obviously, European Christianity thought through the economic and legal metaphors of biblical revelation in linking the sinner, Christ, the Cross, and fellowship with God.

Against this Anselmic Satisfaction Theory, came the attack of Peter Abelard (1079-1142) who sought to explain the work of Christ by his Moral Influence Theory. He argued that the Satisfaction Theory made God into an ogre, demeaned His love, and obliterated the freeness of God to forgive mankind (i.e., that if God could only forgive on the basis of penal substitutionary atonement, then He truly wasn't free but bound by His nature). He argued that humanity's problem wasn't sin before a holy God but lack of love and selfishness. The purpose of the Cross, therefore, was to demonstrate love and selflessness. It generates a human emotional response in order to change human behavior. *This Aberlardian Moral Influence Theory has recurred again and again since the Middle Ages throughout Unitarianism, liberalism, and even in evangelical revivalism.*<sup>54</sup>

Fortunately, both Roman Catholic and the Reformers rejected Aberlard's view and agreed with Anselm. The Cross work aimed at resolving an objective God-centered and external to man rather than one internal to man alone. Nonetheless, Romanism denied the Protestant contention that Christ's atonement immediately justified those who believe and that its benefits pass to the believer directly. Romanism insisted that Christ's work, though objective and substitutionary, only provides the *potential* for justification and depends upon man's cooperation through the sacraments of the Church. We will discuss this Romanist-Protestant difference below. For now, we merely want to clarify that by the end of the Middle Ages the work of Christ on the Cross had been clarified as judicial, God-centered, and substitutionary. The opposing views had to deny God's just nature, had to trivialize the implications of sin, and turned the emphasis from God to man.

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<sup>54</sup> Early in the Protestant Reformation a few teachers, such as Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), left the authority of Scripture to embrace the authority of Reason. They rejected the Trinity and Chalcedonian Christology which led logically to a denial of the Anselmic atonement. Socinus wrote: "If we could get rid of this justice. . . that fiction of Christ's satisfaction would be thoroughly exposed and would vanish." (Cited in Hannah, p. 177). Note here how heresy starts at the beginning of the Church's doctrinal development—denying the authority of revelation and the Triune nature of God—in order to justify denial of those doctrines developed later and which depend upon the former. Such is true of all heresy and provides Bible-believing Christians with a handy analytical tool. The Socinian heresy was adopted in the early 1700s by the founders of Unitarianism in America.

In emphasizing the judicial nature of the Cross, we mustn't deny that it does exert a moral influence upon us as John 12:32 states. However, this moral influence exists only because the work is primarily judicial. If God's nature didn't require atonement for sin, then the Cross work would essentially be optional. Christ's work on the Cross would be unnecessary. Such is the nature of all unbiblical views of the death of Christ. All such unbelief must, in its very core, re-engineer God's nature to form a false idol to replace the God of the Bible Whose nature demands what unbelief deems unnecessary—viz., the Cross.

It behooves us today as Bible-believing evangelicals to ensure that the gospel remains true to the Scripture concerning the work of Christ. Emotional appeals to people that speak only of God's love merely reiterate Abelardian heresy. *Gospel presentations, in order to genuinely call sinners to God, must deal forthrightly and clearly with the judicial issues of fallen man before a holy God.* Something far greater than human psychology is involved here!

## RECEIVING THE BENEFITS OF THE CROSS

Lesson 198

Closely related to the purpose and results of the work of Christ on the Cross is the matter of how mankind receives the benefits of that work. Toward the end of the Middle Ages and into the Reformation period, further controversy occurred in the Church that focused on this matter. Note the inherent logic in the sequence of great debates throughout Church history: first, the matter of authority (reason, experience, or revelation), then the nature of God (Unity or Trinity, Christ as mere man, apparition, or God-man), then the nature of Christ's work on the Cross (merely a demonstration of love, or a substitutionary and vicarious atonement), now how man is saved by that Cross work. Note, too, how departure from the truth at one of these issues, implies departure from the truth at all going before. Abelardian views of the atonement, for example, stem from heretical views of the nature of God and before that heretical views of reason versus revelation. To answer such heresies successfully, therefore, we must not merely answer the apparent focus of the heresy. We must go further back and point out the background compromises and departures from Scriptural truth.

Early Church Fathers elaborated on their understanding of sin and grace only as they felt the heat of heresies. In the Eastern churches Gnosticism denied, among other things, the responsibility of man. The Eastern Fathers, therefore, came down hard on the liberty of volition. In doing so, however, they avoided delving into the implications of Adam's fall. Western Fathers went further in thinking about the implications of the fall. They saw the fall as corrupting man's volition but not destroying it. By corrupting it, they meant that volition after the fall was limited to only evil choices.

The most famous debate in regard to man's will and reception of salvation centered around two Christian leaders in the fourth century. One was a British monk who had come to Rome, Pelagius (AD 354-418?). The other was the North African bishop Augustine (AD 354-430). Hannah describes the controversy:



***“Pelagius. . .opposed the doctrine of Adamic unity and guilt by birth inheritance. The state of birth, as it relates to Adam, is merely that of a tendency to follow bad examples, which, for some reason, we voluntarily emulate. There is no unity in Adam’s fall, each person being born into the same state as Adam before the Fall and voluntarily falling from grace. . . .***

***Grace is an assisting gift from God if one chooses to avail oneself of it. . .***

***A corollary of Pelagius’s denial of human inability was the assertion that God’s election of humankind. . .was dependent upon His knowledge of the actions of the sinner if given a view of God’s grace.”<sup>55</sup>***

Augustine vehemently opposed Pelagius’ doctrine. Again Hannah tells the story:

***“Augustine argued that by Adam’s first sin, in which the entire human race participated, sin came into the world, corrupting every person both physically and morally. Everyone, being of Adam, is born into the world with a nature that is so corrupted that they can do nothing but sin. . . .For Augustine, the need for grace was central. Our disfigured condition is not so much that we are unable to choose Christ; rather, it is that humanity does not have a desire to know Christ. . . .Absolute inability on the sinner’s part necessitates a divine initiative and drawing mercies. Further, since humankind is unable to be aware of God’s grace, God could not have determined to save based upon a foreseen response of the sinner.”<sup>56</sup>***

Augustine’s views partially prevailed throughout later Church councils that condemned Pelagianism’s denial of original sin. However, inconsistently those same councils also rejected Augustine’s teaching of predestination that logically followed from human inability. Medieval theology up to the Reformation, therefore, was partially Augustinian and partially Pelagian.

With man unable to receive the benefits of the Cross apart from God’s gracious overcoming of his inability, medieval theology next began to expound the details of how God’s grace worked. A teacher in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, Peter Lombard (AD 1100-1160), advanced the Roman Catholic doctrine of the sacraments. God’s grace, Lombard insisted, came to man through the sacraments, bit by bit. The term “justification” came to mean a gradual infusion of grace via the sacraments, a meaning that Protestants preferred to label as “sanctification” rather than “justification.” (Watch the terminology here, or you’ll miss the heart of the Protestant-Catholic debate!) Following Lombard, the greatest of all Roman Catholic theologians, Thomas

<sup>55</sup> Hannah, 212.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 213. Note that Augustine lived over a thousand years before John Calvin and was saying these things long before the Protestant Reformation! Unfortunately, Augustine also taught that salvation came only through the Church at Rome. In later centuries, therefore, Roman Catholics selectively refer to Augustine’s teachings on the Church and exclude his teachings on inability and predestination. Protestants, on the other hand, selectively refer to his teachings on inability and predestination but avoid his teachings on the Church.

Aquinas (AD 1225-1274), continued the insistence upon God's grace as mediated to man through the Church via sacraments.

When Protestantism arose through Luther and Calvin, the issue of human inability and God's grace formed the heart of the controversy. Writing his Bondage of the Will, Luther insisted over against other Protestants such as Erasmus (who wrote Diatribes of the Freedom of the Will) that the fall's lasting effects are so profound that apart from God's grace no one can receive Christ's saving work. The sacraments, Luther held, are only symbols through which the Word of God works. They witness to man subjectively but have no objective function of mediating God's saving grace. Calvinist circles followed similar reasoning.

Protestantism forced Roman Catholicism to define itself doctrinally as it had never done before. In the Council of Trent (AD 1545-1563) what we call Roman Catholicism today was born. Trent affirmed the Adamic unity of mankind but also held that men could be cleansed from its implications by the sacrament of baptism. Trent insisted that:

***“If anyone denies, that, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in baptism, the guilt of original sin is remitted; or even asserts that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away. . . let him be anathema.” (5.5)***

After the sacrament of baptism, that is said to regenerate, the child is left in a state of innocence with a free will that, for some reason, still chooses sin. Trentine theology views sin as consisting of what we call personal sin but not consisting of what we call the sin nature.<sup>57</sup>

We should also observe that Trentine theology *views forgiveness as applying only to past sins, not past-present-and-future sins*. God's grace is dispensed bit-by-bit depending upon one's choice to obey and receive the sacraments. The Council of Trent, therefore, retained full organizational control over dispensing Christ's meritorious work on the Cross in the Roman church.

As Luther found with Erasmus, Protestants quickly found great debates internally in the movement. Protestantism spawned diverse movements within a century or two. Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) tried to alter classical Calvinism to blunt attacks being made against Reformed theology. The opposition to Reformed Theology thus took the name "Arminianism." Between Calvinism and Arminianism the issues centered upon the amount of human inability left by the Fall and the interrelationship of the sovereignty of God and the human volition. Arminianism held that some human ability remains prior to the operation of divine grace, that men are judged only for personal sins, and that predestination is based upon foreseen human response. Whereas Calvinism saw regeneration as the Holy Spirit overcoming a fallen will, Arminianism saw regeneration as a strengthening of man's natural abilities. Through John

<sup>57</sup> Roman Catholic theology, like Pelagianism and later liberalism, rejects the totality of effects of Adam's sin. The result follows that each of these systems fails to explain the universality of human sin.

Wesley, a modified Arminianism came to be expressed as Methodism and its offshoots, the Holiness and Pentecostal movements.

Along with Arminianism, came more radical departures from Reformed Theology. The Socinianism led to Deism and Unitarianism particularly in Colonial America and would eventually lead to liberalism and modernism in American religion. This movement consistently rejected orthodox Christian theology at nearly every point. Having rejected biblical authority, the Trinity, Chalcedonian Christology, and the judicial accomplishments of the Cross, it went on to redefine sin, salvation, and grace. Left with the inexplicable universality of human sin, this movement thought of sin as a mere tendency to follow foolishness that could be eradicated by education and moral example (Christ being a moral example). The logical implications of this unbelief for society and political activism will be seen in the next phase of Church history.

Meanwhile, the Eastern Churches had completely broken away from Rome (ca AD 1054). Outside of the Japhetic-European emphasis upon developing an organized body of doctrine, the Eastern Orthodox groups continued to mix tradition and Scripture as their authority, adhered to a weaker Christology (only the Father, not the Son, sent the Holy Spirit), and largely avoided discussion about the judicial nature of the Cross work. Regarding salvation, therefore, they conceived of it in terms of spiritual victory and its results. Justification is hardly ever discussed. Their view of the fall parallels Roman Catholicism's semi-Augustinian/semi-Pelagian doctrine. Hannah notes:

*“The Eastern tendency is to view the effects of the fall of Adam in the manner of the Roman Catholic Church; it has caused a loss of righteousness and a disordering of the senses but not a total corruption of the human nature and an inability to obey God. . .*

*.Humanity can cooperate with God to become like God, ‘partakers of the divine nature.’ Salvation is viewed as a process effected by the Scriptures, the sacraments, and the religious community of increased mystical union with God, not an identification with His essential being, but one of practical holiness. Whereas Western Christians would likely use the term ‘sanctification’ to describe this process, the Eastern churches speak of ‘deification’ or ‘divinization.’*

*The means of salvation in Eastern Orthodoxy bears a remarkable similarity to Roman Catholic views; that is, grace is apportioned through the sacraments. . . Postbaptismal sin, which causes the loss of holiness and life, is more grave than prebaptismal sin because the hopeful are viewed as having a greater ability to resist evil but have refused to do so.”<sup>58</sup>*

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 254f.

If we think of the Middle Ages as bridging the gap from Augustine's time through the Protestant Reformation, the central work of the Holy Spirit during this era in maturing the corporate Body of Christ was to stimulate far greater thought on what salvation is all about. The Scriptural revelation of the objective, judicial, substitutionary atonement became clear as well as the heretical nature of seeing only a "moral influence" in the crucifixion. Also, the Spirit made ever clearer that salvation occurs in response to God's initiative in eternity past, requires overcoming of the effects of Adam's fall in all men, and justifies immediately through imputed righteousness distinct from that righteousness infused in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

## **DISCOVERING THE PURPOSE AND GOAL OF THE CHURCH**

If the first centuries of the Church's existence saw the generation of the canon of Scripture and the clarification of Who God is, and the Middle Ages revealed deeper understanding of salvation—its basis in the work of Christ and its bestowal upon men in justification—, the last several centuries have witnessed the discovery of the purpose and goal of the Church in history. To perceive the place of the Church in the plan of God requires one to understand the nature of the Church and its connection with God's historic program.

### **THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

As we studied in the previous chapter, it took some time for the Church to realize it was an entity separate from the nation Israel. Throughout the Acts period and thereafter the Holy Spirit consistently moved NT believers toward the realization that they could not be defined by their nationality, by their gender, by their station in life, or

by any other convenient labeling device. Whatever the Church was, it wasn't an ethnic group or a political body. Early Christians identified themselves by participation in a group with belief in the NT gospel. They were a community that held a very particular faith in Jesus as the Messiah of Israel and the Creator of the world.

Besides holding to a common belief, the Church practiced a definite lifestyle of high moral character and utilized very specific ordinances of baptism and communion. In close association with the preaching of the Word of God to define the content of belief and with administration of the ordinances, the Church invested certain men with leadership positions called elders, pastors, or bishops. Acts 20:17, 28; I Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:5, 7; and I Peter 5:1 show that these terms were used interchangeably.

Throughout the Foundational and Medieval periods, the Church continued to be characterized by various ordinances and leadership offices which were becoming more elaborate and developed. The ordinances were gradually turned into sacraments. Whereas in the early period baptism, for example, was administered only after the candidate had been instructed in the faith, by the

Middle Ages baptism had become a sacrament through which forgiveness of sin came regardless of the faith of the candidate (e.g., infants). The Word of God receded into secondary importance to the ritual itself.

Communion or the Eucharist followed a similar path. In the early centuries Christ was thought to be present during Communion in a special way distinct from all other times. By the Middle Ages, the elements themselves were thought to become miraculously the material body and blood of Jesus. His Presence was not only spiritual but material also. This view led to the problematic result that Christ must be seen to repeat His sacrifice each time the sacrament is administered—a view that denies the once-for-all complete sacrifice on the Cross.

This changing nature of the ordinances logically connects to a changing nature of the Church. The Church by the Middle Ages had become a powerful organization, a state unto itself. It gained much of its political power from its religious power. After all, if the sacraments are the main channels of grace under the control of Church leadership, then the Church organizationally stands between God and all men. Besides baptism and communion, the Church by this point had increased the number of sacraments to seven: baptism, the eucharist, confirmation, penance, extreme unction, orders, and marriage. All of life was now under the thumb of Church leaders!

And how was this leadership organized? In the West, the bishop of Rome grew in influence and power. Bishops had earlier gained “rank” over other elders and pastors. They were associated with major cities. Since Augustine insisted upon the primacy of the bishop of Rome and the collapse of the Roman Empire left the Roman Church in a power vacuum that it quickly filled. The Eastern Orthodox bishops (the top four worked in Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem) rejected the claim of supremacy of the Roman bishop and along with other issues this conflict led to the rupture of the Church into Eastern and Western branches. In the West the concept of a “pope” arose as the Roman bishop came to assume power even over the secular kings.<sup>59</sup>

The Holy Spirit continued His “lesson plan” in maturing the Church. The pattern by now ought to be familiar. Doctrinal clarity and faithful submission occur only after falsehood has its day to stimulate a return to the authority of the Scripture. Besides clarifying the gospel and the means of salvation, the Protestant Reformation also began the clarification of the nature of the Church. The sola fide gospel sharply opposed the Roman/Orthodox sacramental theory. All grace comes independently of human practice except the practice of faith in the Word of God. Thus the preaching of the Word, not automatically-working sacraments, is the primary channel of grace. The early Protestants, however, never finished reformation of the nature of the Church.

<sup>59</sup> Hannah cites Boniface VIII (pope 1294-1303) claiming that he was “a God of Pharaoh, set between God and man, lower than God but higher than man”, p. 282.

Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist, and Anglican versions of Church order persisted within Protestantism. Each of these versions views the Church differently in its role before God, in its relationship to the world, and in its interaction with the state or civil authorities. Although strong differences appear among these four viewpoints, as Protestants they all reject the saving nature of the ordinances and the primacy of the pope. They all in theory affirm the primacy of the Word of God. Protestantism, therefore, effected a partial reformation of the Romanist error. It would take a centuries longer to complete the reformation, a reformation that requires clarification of the purpose of the Church in God's overall plan.

## PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 199

As we learned in Appendix A, Reformation theology essentially “froze” doctrine at sixteenth century levels, implying that the maturing ministry of the Holy Spirit ended with the Reformers and their immediate followers. The problem that remained,

however, was that you can't understand the true nature of the Church until you understand its place in God's overall plan. And to understand God's overall plan from eternity to eternity entails another doctrinal area called eschatology—the doctrine of last things.

Interestingly, the Holy Spirit since the sixteenth century has pressured the Church to clarify its eschatology through the rise of the secular nation-state and its grand aspirations. Pseudo-biblical, counterfeit eschatologies of political redemption have repeatedly seduced nations' leaders to assault the Church in one way or another. One thinks of the divine right of kings, the French Revolution, Marxism and its Communist dreams, Hitler and the European Fascists. Even today, Muslim extremists dream eschatological triumph over “Christendom.” All such movements are eschatological in focus. They envision a total remaking of society that supposedly rids the world of evil. In short, *they dream dreams of a Kingdom of Man that constitutes the purpose and goal of human existence.*

In each case the Church is challenged to meet the demand to explain where history is going. To do so, however, the Church must attend to its doctrine of last things. What is God's program for the human race? Where will history end? What role does the Church play in this cosmic drama? Sinful man impatiently rejects the gospel of believing in Christ for a future blissful existence. They want the Kingdom now.

/ Review Part IV Appendix /

Reformed Protestantism unfortunately failed to correct Roman Catholic and Orthodox amillennialism. Amillennialism sees history as struggling along between good and evil, making no ethical progress, until the end of the world with the Return of Jesus Christ. During the last two centuries unbelieving skeptics within organized Protestant circles have sought to redefine the purpose of the Church as the instrument on earth for bringing in “kingdom conditions” by various social engineering programs. This is why liberal clergy are often found in every movement for social change that happens to be viewed as ethically progressive. In Latin America even Roman Catholic theologians have embraced Marxist “liberation” movements.

In Colonial America, some notable Puritans in their optimism over American’s opportunities turned to postmillennialism.<sup>60</sup> Unitarian influences and later modernist teachers hijacked postmillennial visions and transformed them into vehicles of a “social gospel”. As Puritanism declined and Unitarianism increased, postmillennialism among conservatives nearly disappeared (although the greatest conservative theologian of America in the nineteenth century, Charles Hodge, advocated postmillennialism). In recent years postmillennialism has emerged again among conservative “reconstructionists.” Severe problems plague postmillennialism, however, viz., non-literal interpretation of prophetic passages of Scripture and the consistent failure throughout Church history of Christian communities to dominate their societies in any lasting fashion.

Premillennialism had long been associated with Judaism and extremist cults. Not until after the Reformation did the renewed interest in Bible study lead to a resurrection of this view that had dominated the first few centuries. By the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bible conferences began to emphasize the contrasts between Israel and the Church observed through a literal interpretative approach to the Scripture. It again received bad press when the Adventist movement sought to “date-set” the return of Christ only to be embarrassed by its non-occurrence in 1844. As Hannah notes:

*“After the Civil War, a type of premillennialism emerged that eschewed date setting but insisted on the imminent return of Christ. . . .The teaching of the any-moment return of Christ in a secret Rapture accomplished the same purpose in that it created expectancy. This form of premillennialism became increasingly popular through the Bible conference movement. . . .”*<sup>61</sup>

This Bible conference movement spawned what we call today dispensational premillennialism.<sup>62</sup> This comparatively recent form of premillennialism has had definite effects upon the Church’s influence and behavior over the past two centuries.

<sup>60</sup> Hannah lists as postmillennial proponents the English Puritan John Owens and the American Puritans John Cotton and Jonathan Edwards, p 321f.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>62</sup> Dispensational premillennialism represents a more detailed version of the earlier, vaguer premillennialism of early Christianity in that it systematizes the detailed prophecies found throughout the Bible. Early premillennialists had only the larger outline of things to come and did not research prophetic details.

Premillennialism has exerted a strong influence upon American culture and its foreign policy. By asserting a future for the nation Israel, premillennialism tends to be “Jew-friendly” whereas postmillennialism and amillennialism historically permits anti-Semitism to rise in societies where those ideas dominate. Thus most of Europe, dominated as it is by amillennial viewpoint among institutions historically identified with the Christian faith. A few European exceptions have occurred. Balfour the Englishman who approved the creation of a Jewish nation in Palestine (the precursor to the modern state of Israel) was a premillennial Plymouth Brethren.<sup>63</sup> In Germany during the rise of Hitler, premillennial Brethren were the first Gentiles to recognize the significant evil in the Nazi agenda.<sup>64</sup> Today, with the rising hostility to Israel by both the Arab world and Europe, America is the only country seriously supporting Israel’s right to exist. That base of support comes not from just the Jewish lobby but comes from both the Jewish lobby and the premillennial evangelical Christian influence.<sup>65</sup>

Premillennialism also has played an important role in the battle inside American churches between Modernists and Fundamentalists during the first few decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whereas liberal churchman could manipulate postmillennialism to further their socialist gospel among conservative audiences, they never could penetrate conservative circles which adhered to premillennialism. Eschatology, you see, defines how you see the mission and role and destiny of the Church. If the Church has replaced Israel, it must operate as a national entity directing its own politics and “converting society.” If, on the other hand, the Church is not a replacement for Israel, its role is not to Christianize the world. Its role is to reach out to unsaved society by showing grace in its lifestyle and primarily in its proclamation of the gospel—witnessing to the very heart of all grace in the finished work of Christ. It doesn’t directly bring about the Kingdom in history. That work belongs to the returning Messiah of Israel, not to the Church. Social salvation, like individual salvation, comes not from human works but from Jesus Christ. It comes not by natural sociology and psychology and education but by supernatural miraculous intervention.

Another effect of premillennialism, especially modern dispensational premillennialism, has been the missionary movement. Although scattered missionary work occurred over the centuries (e.g., Patrick in Ireland), the vast majority of missionary outreach and Bible translation has occurred from those societies where the Church has been heavily influenced by premillennialism, viz., Britain and the United States.

<sup>63</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Thomas Ice for his research on this historical background.

<sup>64</sup> Hal Lindsey tells the story of the evangelical, premillennial Brethren head of the German Army officers’ union in whose home the future leaders of the Third Reich (Hitler, Hess, Goering, Goebbels) met to try to secure his support to take control of the German government. Realizing he could not persuade the Nazi leaders to give up their “Final Solution” to their idea of a “Jewish problem”, he and his family at great financial loss fled to America. [The Road to Holocaust](#) (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), p. 2f.

<sup>65</sup> This evangelical-based influence is independent of political party and the effect of public opinion. It is rooted in an almost sub-conscious concept that Israel has a future, the fruit of premillennial preaching over the past two hundred years in this country.



Among premillennialists there is continuing debate over the details of the Return of Christ. Are the Rapture and the Return the same event or separate events? If separate, when does the Rapture come before the Return—prior to the Tribulational prelude to the Return or during it? If during it, midway or three-quarters? These are questions we will deal with in the next and last chapter of this series.

To conclude the matter of Church history: the Holy Spirit has not been idle since Jesus ascended into Heaven. Gradually, through all kinds of historical adversities, He has faithfully fashioned the Church's doctrine and through that process has called believers to ever clearer faith. The pedagogical sequence of the Spirit manifests the headship of Jesus Christ over His Body. May we continue to sense His work.

## OUTLINE OF OUR SANCTIFICATION IN THE CHURCH AGE

Lesson 200

If the Church differs from Israel and represents another stage in God's ongoing program, it would seem that sanctification doctrine for the Church Age might differ in some respects from that of the Old Testament. In this final section, we note the similarities and differences (see Table 8).

In Parts III and IV of this series we discussed sanctification under five headings: its phases, its aim, its means, its dimensions, and its enemies. We associated various historical events with this doctrine to give imaginative content for application in life: the Conquest and Settlement, David's career, and the decline of the Kingdom. Now we will again note these five headings but will also point out the features unique to the Church Age.

### PHASES OF SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification has traditionally been divided into three phases: sanctification completed at the point of saving faith (new birth), sanctification being completed from new birth onward to the end of one's life, and sanctification required to prepare us for eternity. Keep in mind that the term "sanctification" must always be distinguished from the term "justification". These terms must not be interchanged as in Roman Catholic theology.

Past Sanctification. As Table Eight shows, in the OT past sanctification could be pictured in terms of the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and Davidic covenants. These covenants spelled out the position of OT saints in their particular historical stage of God's ongoing program. Every Jewish believer in the age of

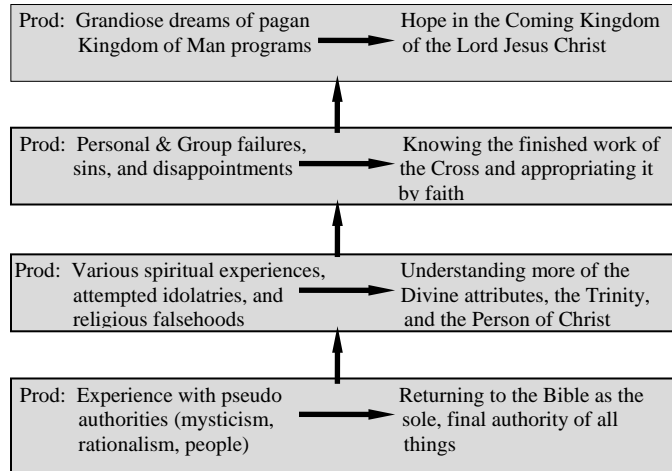
Israel, from the time he or she first believed, was a promise of the Abrahamic covenant, viz., he or she was an inheritor of the land, was part of Abraham's physical seed, and was involved in Israel's mission to be a channel of blessing to the world. After Moses' day, every Jewish believer also was a citizen of a special nation which had its national policy, laws, and unique relationship to the God of Creation. The will of God for his or her political, economic, and social life was spelled out in the Sinaitic covenant. For a special subset of such Jewish believers who carried the seed of David either through Solomon or through Nathan it was subject to a special will of God regarding its relationship to the Messiah. These covenants revealed the OT believer's position in God's plan, explained the meaning of their lives, and provided "operating assets" available during their lives on earth.

With the coming of the Church, however, each believer shares certain blessings of the New Covenant given through the Messiah especially for Gentile and Jewish believers living during the inter-advent age. The New Covenant itself, made with the literal nation of Israel, has not been fulfilled, but some of its provisions, such as universal regeneration, have become available. As Figures 5 and 6 show, at least six items for each member of the Trinity constitute the "operating assets" of the NT believer. Each of these items became true for the NT believer at the point of saving faith and applies to every believer regardless of stature in life, gender, nationality, or ethnicity.

Present Sanctification. From the time of saving faith forward until the believer's death (or Rapture, whichever occurs first), the Holy Spirit parentally trains each believer as a son/daughter of God. He initiates the circumstances, controls every detail of his/her life, and does so with the corporate nature of the Body of Christ in mind. As Figure 6 shows, the Holy Spirit grants spiritual gifts to correctly locate each believer in the universal Church and makes requests to the Son that are secure from satanic scrutiny. All the while the Son makes intercession to the Father to cover our sins and directs the Spirit's historical control of the Church. When necessary the Father carries out His individually-tailored discipline of each believer.

As we noted above, Church history offers us a clear picture of present sanctification at work. Most of the time, we learned, God has had to force the Church against its will to advance spiritually. Various trials, including political pressures and religious attacks, have prodded the Church to go back to the Scripture again and again to seek His will, to understand it better, and to apply it by faith. Church history even offers insight into the sequence of lessons learned. Figure Seven pictures God's "lesson plan" as observed so far in Church history. First, He brings us back to the Bible as our supreme authority when we try to replace its authority with our private experiences, mysticism, rationalism, and human organizations. Second, He leads us through various spiritual journeys in order to learn about what He is like and Who Jesus Christ really is. Only as we know Him can we worship Him as we should. Third, usually through our failures and sins, He renews our appreciation for what Jesus did for us on His Cross as well as the necessity to walk by faith without trying to impress Him

with our good works. Finally, He opens our eyes to His coming works, prophesied details of what He alone can accomplish to fulfill human history. He seems to utilize personal and political tragedies to restore our hope in the proper eschatology.



**Figure 7. From Church history we observe the pattern of spiritual growth under the direction of the Trinity.**

Future Sanctification. Whereas OT believers in Israel looked forward to the Messianic Kingdom in the land of Palestine, Church age believers look forward to enjoying an unbroken period in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:3) whether that presence be on earth or in heaven. Church age believers, however, soberly remember that they each face an evaluation before the Savior for the things done during this life to cleanse the record of our lives from counterfeit good works so that what genuine fruit produced will remain for eternity (I Cor. 3:13-15; II Cor. 5:10-11). The details of Church-age resurrection will be covered in the next chapter, but believers of this age have a spectacular personal resurrection (or translation for the terminal generation) ahead (I Cor. 15:23, 51-55; I Thess. 4:16-17).

## AIM OF SANCTIFICATION

As we learned in earlier Parts of this framework, the aim of sanctification is to produce loyalty to God and a life that produces righteous fruit. This aim antedates the fall of man so that sanctification should not be thought of as something to rid ourselves of sin. Ridding ourselves of sin, of course, is necessary, but as the sinless Lord Jesus showed, sanctification is required of all creatures, fallen and unfallen (Heb. 2:10; 5:7-8). The entire history of the OT witnesses to the aim of sanctification.

Sanctification's aim remains unchanged throughout the Church age. NT commands such as John 14:21, 23-24 make it clear. The precedent of the life of Christ makes it clear. Under no circumstances can talk of God's grace in the Church age be perverted so as to justify anything less.

## MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION

Lesson 201

As we also learned in earlier Parts of this Series, both law (in the general sense of verbally revealed commands) and grace are required means in sanctification. Without specific information on the will of God, no one can be sanctified because no one can know to what they are to be loyal. Thus each dispensation, including the Church Age, contains revelation of the will of God for that age. The NT epistles specifically address the post-Pentecostal Church with hundreds of imperative verbs. Not only are there commands but there also are statements about the Christian's position before God as we have just seen above. All of this revelation generated by the Holy Spirit sent by the ascended Lord is given for our sanctification.

Revelation by itself, however, is insufficient. Without a work of grace in regeneration to provide a new heart the carnal mind would continue to rebel (Rom. 8:6-7). Without a work of grace through the Indwelling Spirit to empower the regenerate heart, it would be powerless against the sin nature in the believer (Rom. 7:8-13). How does the NT indwelling accomplish this empowerment? He accomplishes it through illumination of the Person and Work of Christ. He bears witness that we are children of God in spite of times when we feel condemned (Rom. 8:16). He reminds us of our justification (Rom. 8:1-4). He causes us to understand and appreciate our position in Christ (Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21). He calls us to trust the Word of God. We become free to respond to His call in ways which we discuss in the next section.

## DIMENSIONS OF SANCTIFICATION

One very misunderstood area of sanctification concerns its two dimensions. Long-term growth is illogically mixed with the present moment's existential status. These two very different dimensions would become instantly clear if people would think in terms of physical life. Everyone knows that at any given moment one is either healthy or sick. Everyone also knows that over time a healthy person grows and matures. The first dimension is "either-or"; the second, is a durative concept.

The first dimension is implicit in every imperative verb. Imperative (command) verbs require a binary ("either-or") response. Either one obeys (responds) or disobeys (rejects). Thus NT commands to "abide" in Christ, to "walk" in the Spirit, to "be filled" by the Spirit, etc., all require an either-or response. And these either-or responses come out of imperative verbs addressed to believers, not unbelievers. They refer not to saving belief in the gospel at the point of justification and regeneration. They refer to believers changing status from carnality to spirituality.<sup>66</sup> In short, the first dimension of sanctification centers upon the existential present state of a believer.

<sup>66</sup> Here is where dispensational and non-dispensational theology collide. Non-dispensational, classical Reformed theology prefers to treat such imperatives as addressed to mixed groups of believers and unbelievers, warning the unbelievers in such groups to believe unto salvation. Dispensational theology tends to treat such imperatives as addressed to believers, urging them to walk with the Lord and not veer off into carnality and resultant divine discipline.

To be restored to temporal fellowship with God, a believer needs cleansing (II Cor. 7:1; James 4:7; I John 1:9). We learned with David's OT experience about the three step procedure of becoming convinced of sinning before God (not ultimately before men), confession, and receiving by faith God's cleansing. Confession involves re-submitting to biblical authority instead of rebelling in arrogance. Feeling sorry for oneself or the consequences of sin is not confession. Confession goes back to the heart of the gospel, viz., that Jesus Christ's atonement and advocacy is the only way of cleansing. See Table 3 above. Once cleansed, the believer enjoys the empowerment of the Holy Spirit through the regenerate nature to first understand the Word of God and then to submit to it in the circumstances of life.

The second dimension of sanctification is the durative aspect, i.e., long-term growth. Not to be confused with the existential state (either-or), the long-term growth takes time, can be flat or regressive, and is the result of many moments of having fellowship with Christ or not having fellowship with Him. As we have learned from Church history, usually growth occurs when God puts us under some sort of pressure or adversity (Figure 7).

## ENEMIES OF SANCTIFICATION

Here we encounter "the world, the flesh, and the devil." To deal with the world system and its carnal value system, we must encircle or envelop the particular issue with the framework of the Word of God. This series was designed to equip Christians to develop such a framework for handling a wide variety of issues properly with Scripture. To cope with the world system there is no solution other than working outward from Scripture to surround the problem.

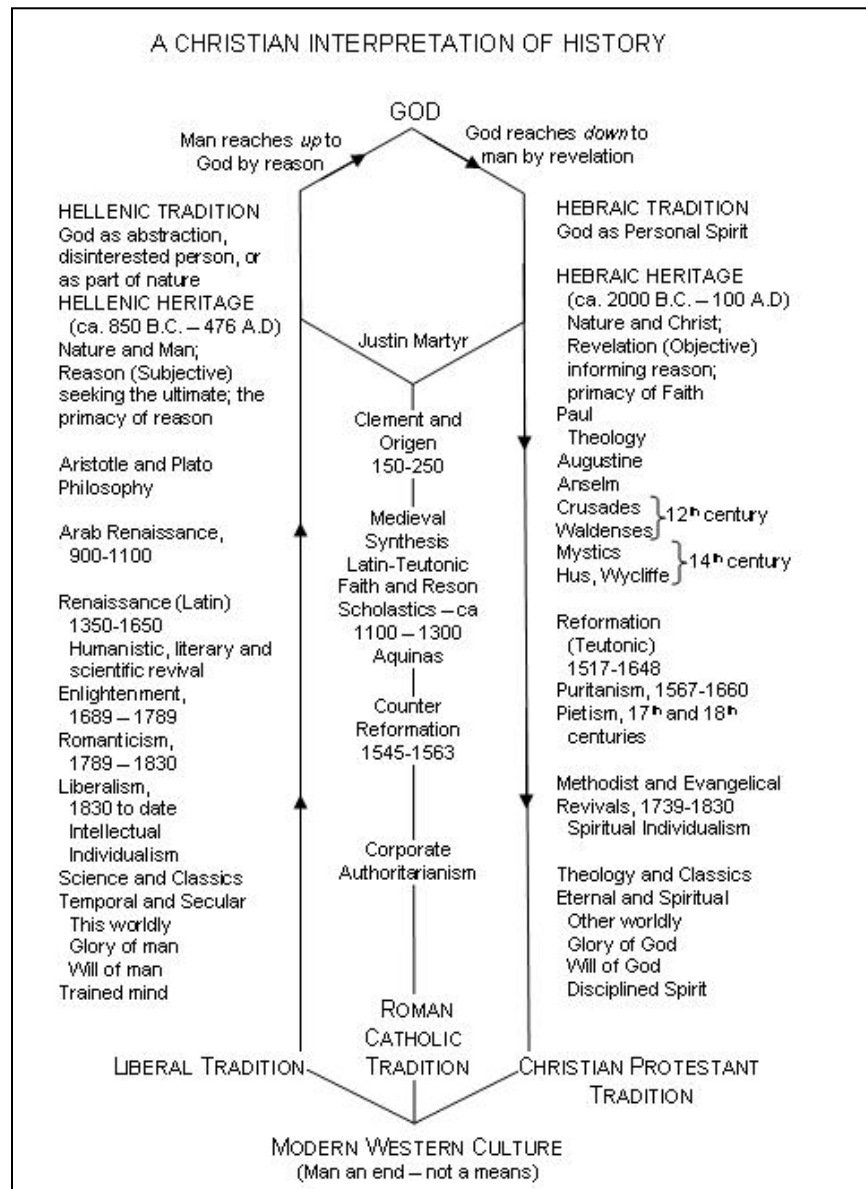
The flesh consists of physically (neurologically) established behavior patterns from previous acts of sin that become engrained in us. Just as the athlete through practice conditions his body to respond mentally and physically to a circumstance, so we condition our body to respond either carnally or spiritually to various circumstances. Romans 8 speaks of "mortifying" the flesh—literally killing these patterns off by "overwriting" them with replacement godly patterns.

The flesh, however, is more than a collection of mere behavior patterns. It also consists of a spiritual power of rebellion that characterizes fallen humanity according to Ephesians 2:1-3. Apart from the result of regeneration, we are depraved and must recognize anew our position in Christ to have any hope of escaping the old Adamic flesh.

The devil can oppose us through circumstances, disease, miracles, and deceptive thoughts and teachings.<sup>67</sup> Against him and his demonic hordes, we must respond the way Jesus did. Jesus wielded the Sword of the Word of God, the truths revealed, against satanic temptations (Matt. 4:1-11). Peter advises us to check for anxiety and worry, casting them upon the Lord in humility (I Pet. 5:5-9).

Lesson 202

Overall, the attitude of godliness against the enemies of sanctification is best illustrated by the conquest and settlement stories in Joshua and Judges (see Part III of this series). It is a warfare revealed in military metaphors throughout the Bible.



<sup>67</sup> For more background on the specific nature of Satanic attacks in the Church Age, see Chapter One above.

## CHAPTER 5: THE DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 208

This chapter ends not only Part VI of the Framework series but also the Framework itself. In this chapter we come to the grand destiny of the Church and with it the inauguration of the Kingdom of God in history. We finally see how the Church as the Body of Christ reigns throughout all creation and provides the authority required for the long-anticipated Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ. The diverse elements of God’s plan—the angels, the Gentile nations, Israel, and the Church—merge at last into the Kingdom of God.

Necessarily, we must deal with the doctrine of “last things” or eschatology. As we noted in the previous chapter, eschatology has been the doctrinal area under development since the Reformation period. We observed in Chapter Four that as in previous periods of Church history the Holy Spirit has again stimulated the Church to grow deeper in the Word of God by tests of adversity. Since the Reformation, believers have had to face assaults of a kind not seen since the days of Egyptian and Babylonian grandeur. They have had to cope with life in the modern secular nation-state with its heretical dreams of establishing a Kingdom of Man on earth. First, it was the Divine Right of Kings, then the French Revolution with its New Republic, then Communism with its Soviet Empire, and Fascism with its Third Reich. Now the Church faces a growing globalism that seductively masks its logical end of a pagan world-state.

As in previous periods of Church history, the Scripture as God’s revelation is sufficient to discern the will of God and to trust Him to supply all the necessary enablement for living by faith (II Tim. 3:16). In this chapter, therefore, we turn to the Scriptures to learn of our destiny. For only as we know our destiny, our end goal, can we have perspective on our present situation. We will examine the New Testament passages that reveal to the Church its final days. And in light of the many diverse views of eschatology, we will also study how the New Testament revelation to the Church fits with the Old Testament revelation to Israel.

Readers are once again advised strongly to review Part IV of this series, Chapter Four and the Appendix, before continuing with the text below.

### THE CHURCH “COMPLETED”

To grasp the significance of the Church’s destiny, we have to understand how the Church’s historical existence differs from that of Israel. Then we must see what features “measure” the “progress” of the Church so that its end point can be understood.

## HISTORICAL EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

The differences between Israel and the Church regarding historical existence fall into two broad categories: Calendar-based Existence vs. Non-calendar-based Existence and Earthly-Enemies vs. Heavenly-Enemies.

Calendar-based Progress. Unlike Israel that is regulated as a nation by the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants, the Church is directly regulated as a world-wide body of believers linked to the ascended and seated Lord Jesus Christ through NT revelation. Whereas Israel received news of its destiny in terms of calendar time, the Church's destiny isn't related to calendar time. Israel, for example, was told the length of its sojourn before the Exodus (Gen. 15:13), the length of its exile in Babylon (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10), and the length of its awaiting the Messiah and the final Kingdom of God on earth (Dan. 9:24-27). Nowhere, however, in the New Testament is the Church given any such "calendar" notices. It would have been foolhardy, anyway, since believers during the Church age live in many cultures that have no divinely-authorized calendar like that of Israel. The Church is not a nation with an official historical clock like Israel (although both Roman Catholic Church-State and certain Protestant state-churches made valiant attempts to become virtual nations).<sup>68</sup>

Earthly-Enemies vs. Heavenly-Enemies. Israel constantly struggled against surrounding nations, e.g., Egypt, Moab, Syria, Assyria, etc. Although the OT believers were aware of angelic powers behind earthly political rulers (e.g., I Kings 22:19-23; Isa. 14:12), the emphasis of OT prophecies was against specific, named-nations (note the "oracles" of Isaiah 18 and 19 as typical). The Psalms address nations (e.g., messianic psalm like Psalm 2 and the enthronement psalms like Psalm 96). The great question for Israel concerned her occupation of the Promised land. Israel could not be Israel in permanent exile. There had to be a restoration to . . .the land!

NT passages speaking to the Church, however, lack any such emphasis. No nations are named as enemies. The enemies of the church are not "flesh and blood" but the angelic spirits (Eph. 6:12). Even where the NT names individual human enemies, the text doesn't identify them in terms of particular nations (e.g., Alexander in I Tim. 1:20 and Demas in II Tim. 4:10). The struggle of the Church doesn't concern the Promised Land because the Church is located elsewhere, that is, "in the heavenly places, in Christ" (Eph. 2:6), not in the land

<sup>68</sup> For this reason "date-setting" the end of the Church and return of Christ is doomed to failure. All date-setting attempts arise from what theologians call "historicism", i.e., the view that biblical prophecy, chiefly the book of Revelation, is being fulfilled by Church history. Historicism became widely popular during the Reformation when Protestants saw themselves suffering under the Tribulation of Rome. Through historicism they were able to argue that the Pope was the Antichrist. Historicism reached a frenzied peak with Seventh-Day Adventism's founder, William Miller, who predicted Christ's return in 1844. This debacle and Protestantism's strengthened position led to the demise of historicism. Even today, however, confused prophecy students occasionally drift into historicism in trying to set dates for Christ's return. The problem here is that the Church isn't Israel and isn't regulated in the same manner God uses for Israel.



of Palestine. Rather than hoping for a time when all nations will submit to an earthly Temple in its midst, the Church looks forward to crushing Satan under its feet (Rom. 16:20) and judging angels (I Cor. 6:3).

Clearly, there is a distinct difference between how Israel and the Church function under God in history. The challenge of eschatology is to respect this difference, these two dispensations of God's working, while showing how both fit into the one single sovereign plan of God. Each has its own "end" or destiny under God's comprehensive design for history. Each is related to the Lord Jesus Christ. Each receives the gracious benefits of the substitutionary atonement. Yet each differ fundamentally from the other.

## MEASURES OF PROGRESS FOR ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Lesson 209

What can be said of the accomplishments of Israel and the Church throughout historical time?

Israel's Progress. Israel's history was clearly outlined from her beginning just after the Exodus. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, 30, 32 provide the basic details that were known in that day. So clearly is Israel's history outlined in these texts that unbelieving Bible critics have tried various "reconstructions" of the OT literature to "explain" how history was so accurately foreknown.<sup>69</sup>

Under the Mosaic Treaty or Contract with Yahweh, Israel would have to submit to His reign. Obedience would yield blessing; disobedience would yield cursing. Blessing would involve supernatural climate, political expansion, military victories, peaceful security, and economic prosperity. Cursing, however, would involve the mirror image: climatic adversity, political collapse, military defeat, insecurity, and economic deprivation. Ultimately, cursing would involve exile from the Promised Land (Lev. 26:33-34; Deut. 28:64-68).

So important is this Mosaic Covenant in controlling Israel's historical experience that we must spend time understanding how it worked. It, and its foundation in the Abrahamic Covenant, provides the context for interpreting key prophetic terminology such as "tribulation", "Day of the Lord", and the associated geophysical cataclysmic judgments. Table Eight compares four Mosaic texts' depiction of Israel's future history. Notice that details of future history do not appear, only a general framework. It is not obvious from any of these passages that there would be a "minor" exile in 586 BC and a "major" exile in AD 70 and corresponding "minor" restoration in 516 BC and a "major" one yet to come. Details of the future millennial kingdom do not appear, although the dynamics behind it are clear enough (repentance by the nation in order to enjoy the blessings fully). A clear pattern of God's working in history, however, has been revealed by this time of Moses.

<sup>69</sup> Naïve university students often fall for these "reconstructions" as fact just as they do for evolution as fact. Of course, in both cases the professors involved usually deliberately hid their anti-Christian agenda.

Israel's Historical Existence	Leviticus 26	Deuteronomy 28	Deuteronomy 30	Deuteronomy 32
origin	----	-----	-----	32:7-14
discipline & exile (includes both Babylonian & Roman conquests)	26:14-39	28:15-68		32:15-35
judgment (of nations) / salvation (of Israel)	26:40-45	-----	30:1-7	32:36-43
ultimate enjoyment of blessings in the land	26:1-13	28:1-14	30:8-10	-----

**Table 8. Divine outline of Israel's historical existence. God's covenants control how Israel's experience is to be interpreted.**

In the centuries following Moses the OT prophets guided by the Holy Spirit expanded upon this outline. By possessing the “word of Yahweh” they provided detailed interpretation of Israel’s existence, prophet after prophet, within this Mosaic frame of reference. The pattern described by Moses would recur several times in Israel’s history, each time adding more details that point to the ultimate, final fulfillment. We can trace progressive revelation of this pattern by surveying the prophets’ vocabulary and observing how it carries over into certain NT passages.

The OT terms, “tribulation,” “Day of Yahweh,” “Jacob’s trouble,” and “birth-pains.” In the original Mosaic context, the idea of a future age of *tribulation* occurs in Deuteronomy 4:30. By comparison with other passages such as those listed in Table Eight we can discern that that this tribulational period will bring about Israel’s final repentance and prepare the way for her long-promised blessing in the land. Because of the unconditionality of Israel’s election via the Abrahamic Covenant, the nation will ultimately be restored (see Deut. 4:30 and the texts cited in the fourth row of Table 8). Contrary to amillennialism, Israel has not been cast away. Her national repentance followed by a literal restoration to Palestine and enjoyment of peace, prosperity, and God’s Temple for the world is inevitable. Contrary to preterists, the destruction of the nation in AD 70 is not her final chapter in history.

In the progress of revelation just prior to the 70-year exile the classic OT writing prophets expanded upon the term *tribulation*. The exile would be a small-scale version of the final tribulation and so believing Jews had to be

equipped to survive it. God provided for them by revealing the ultimate outcome of history beyond the immediate circumstance. Good will eventually triumph. Evil will be judged. Such must happen for the Kingdom to come. The logic here reasons from the greater to the lesser. If the ultimate victory is assured, then the Jews could survive the exile of 586 BC. The future tribulation expands to include all nations beside Israel.

Already hinted at in Moses' texts (see row 3 in Table 8), Yahweh God will have His "day" (*Day of Yahweh*) when men of all nations will seek shelter in caves (Isa. 2:12-22) because of the great global geophysical judgments (Isa. 24). By this term, Day of Yahweh, OT prophets referred to special divine interventions into history involving judgments against nations. It could refer to God's indirect intervention through human armies (Babylon against Judah and Egypt as in Jer. 46:10; Lam. 2:1,21-22; Ezek. 7:19; 13:5; 30:3; Zeph 2:2-3 or Media-Persia against Babylon as in Isa. 13:6,9). The term could also refer to God's direct intervention geophysically (Isa. 13:10,13; Ezek. 30:3,18; Joel 1:15-20; Zeph 1:15). The future Day of Yahweh will encompass a complex of judgments following the model of earlier occurrences: geophysical, astronomical, and human armies.<sup>70</sup> Within that broad period there would be one particular divine intervention that came to be known as the "great and terrible Day of the Lord" when all nations would gather against Israel only to be defeated by the Lord in human form standing on the Mount of Olives (Joel 3:9-17; Zech 14:1-8).<sup>71</sup> Thus the term "Day of the Lord" can refer to multiple divine interventions but they all manifest the same pattern of God judging nations in righteousness.

Israel doesn't escape divine judgment in this future period. Just as she was judged in the OT by Yahweh using the human instrument Babylon, so she shall in the future be judged by Yahweh. Remember the outline in Table Eight: the future tribulational period also serves to bring her to repentance concerning the Messiah and her sin. Jeremiah spoke of the *Day of the Lord* as the time of *Jacob's tribulation* (Day of the Lord here used in its broad sense). Daniel, too, spoke of Israel's future tribulational period, and he added further revelation that at its end a resurrection will occur (Dan. 12:1). These terms must be set within their Mosaic frame of reference (Table 8). They refer to God's judgment prior to establishing the long-promised Kingdom of God on earth.

<sup>70</sup> That the Day of the Lord includes secondary human agencies of judgment under God's sovereignty is obvious from OT history. Marvin Rosenthal, therefore, errs in claiming that the future Day of the Lord cannot utilize secondary human agencies of judgment in his book, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1990), pp. 141-2,5. He tries to narrow the meaning of the term to only the moment of Christ's coming to judge the nations at the end of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week (the "great and terrible Day of the Lord" discussed above) rather than to keep its biblical broad as well as biblically narrow usage. To do so within his prophetic schema, however, he has to deny that the earlier Tribulational judgments involving human agencies can also be considered as part of a Day of the Lord.

<sup>71</sup> Interestingly, Jewish rabbis by NT times had already concluded that "this [great and terrible Day of the Lord] is understood to refer to the advent of the Messiah" as cited from *Shabbath* 118a note of the *Babylonian Talmud* by Renald E. Showers, *The Pre-Wrath Rapture View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2001), p. 163.

Another term used in the OT to refer to this future tribulational period is *birth pains*. The prophets used it often in characterizing a Day of Yahweh (Isa. 13:8; 26:17-18; 66:7-8; Jer. 22:23; 30:5-6; Micah 4:9-10). Price notes that there is a long Jewish tradition of identifying the eschatological tribulation as a time of giving birth:

*“In Daniel’s tribulation text (Dan. 12:1), rabbinic commentators interpreted the ‘time of trouble’ as a future eschatological time equivalent with the period known as the ch<sup>a</sup>valim (birth pangs). . . .So frightening was the prospect of encountering this time of tribulation preceding the messianic arrival that some sages hoped it would not come in their lifetimes. Among them was Rabbi Yochanan who exclaimed: ‘Let [the Messiah] come, but may I not see it!’ (Sanhedrin 98b).”<sup>72</sup>*

What is it that Israel gives birth to? The Messianic Kingdom! That is her ultimate purpose in history.

The duration of this future tribulational period was revealed to Daniel by the archangel Gabriel (Dan. 9:20-27). There are to be 490 years of calendar time to “finish the transgression” for the nation. From the rebuilding of Jerusalem at the end of the Babylonian captivity until the cutting off of the Messiah was to be 469 years (Dan. 9:25-26). Then there will be another period when the calendar time runs again, beginning with a treaty (covenant) making between many in the nation Israel and a “prince that shall come” (9:26-27).

This period is known among Bible students as Daniel’s “Seventh Week.” All seven years can be called a tribulation because it continues and brings to a conclusion the domination of Israel by Gentiles caused by her disobedience to the Lord. In fact Daniel speaks of “the” transgression (9:24) underlying these seven years, pointing to a particular sin which we can infer is the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. It fits with His closing remark to the nation “from now on you will not see me until you say, ‘blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” (Matt. 23:39). Thus the entire seven-year period constitute discipline and cursing upon Israel so that under the dynamics of the Mosaic texts they are a tribulation (cf. Deut. 4:30, Table 8). The birth-pain metaphor would seem to apply to the whole seven years. Most Bible students, therefore, call Daniel’s Seventh Week the Tribulation.<sup>73</sup>

Lesson 211

Israel’s Final Historical Milestone. From the above material, you can infer how to measure Israel’s progress in history. As a nation, Israel produced the Scripture and the Messiah. Her ultimate product is the Kingdom of the Messiah. Thus her final historic milestone must be establishment of that Kingdom.

<sup>72</sup> J. Randall Price, “Old Testament Tribulational Terms,” When the Trumpet Sounds, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), p. 71f.

<sup>73</sup> Later in this chapter when we attempt to synchronize the separate destinies of the Church and Israel we will note that there are those who refuse to label this seven year period as the Tribulation for a number of reasons.

Let's work backwards from that milestone, using the information we've gleaned so far from how God works within His covenants with that nation. To begin the Kingdom, the King must return. For the King to return, Israel must repent nationally from her rejection of the King when He first came. Israel won't repent nationally until she is subjected to extreme forms of discipline through human and natural mechanisms. These disciplinary actions climax during a time period called "Jacob's trouble or tribulation." The birth of the Kingdom historically requires a painful time of birthing. It will be a special period of intensified divine intervention, a "Day of the Lord" in OT terminology. As repeatedly shown in the OT, God judges and saves together. Israel's deliverance must involve a judgment.

The familiar characteristic of a calendar period—this time a seven year period—will appear to mark off the this time of tribulation. For the "prince that shall come" to make a treaty with Jews in the land concerning a Temple in Jerusalem, obviously Jews must be regathered in the land. For final deliverance from such a tyrant, Israel must experience an extraordinary divine intervention, a climatic event known as the "great and terrible Day of the Lord." There are more details than these which we will examine later. *For now it is sufficient to appreciate that Israel's progress toward her final milestone shows a pattern that originated at her origin under Moses* (cf. Table 8).

The Church's Progress. Unlike Israel, the "calendar-less" Church originates no new Scriptural covenants, produces no new Messiah, nor inherits a national position in the future Kingdom. There is no outline of historical progress like that Moses gave Israel; there is only the picture of gradual maturity in the face of a hostile world. Instead, the NT views the historical life of the Body of Christ by means of a number themes. Let's examine some basic ones.

First, there is the theme of the union between believers on earth and the ascended, seated Lord in heaven. Church-age believers are "seated with Him in the heavenlies" (Eph. 2:6). As the qualified ruler of "all things" the Father has given the Son as "head" to the church which is the "body" (Eph. 1:20-23). Christians thus have their ultimate citizenship "in heaven" (Phil. 3:20) rather than in a national entity such as Israel or a Gentile nation like Rome or the United States. The Third Person indwells the Church and keeps this union authentic.

Second, there is the theme of corporate growth. As we studied in the previous chapter, Church history reveals that this growth is largely doctrinal. One of the most frequent features of NT warning passages centers on the matter of maintaining true doctrine over against seducing spirits and apostasy. Not only did the Holy Spirit reveal new truths of the Church age to the apostles, but He has steadily throughout Church history engineered circumstances so as to stimulate deeper apprehension of these truths. This type of growth isn't seen as something having to do with political power or occupation of real estate. Nor is it seen to encounter a decline and an exilic period of history.

Third, there is the theme of global evangelization. Men in all people groups are to declare their allegiance to, or rebellion against, the seated King of Kings (Matt. 28:19-20). The gospel is to penetrate among “all the Gentiles” (Rom. 1:5; 15:20). Such evangelization is to occur throughout all generations of the Church age and will eventuate in the Body of Christ including universal representation of each people group (Rev. 5:9). The need to be truly a representative group of all humanity remains ever present.

Fourth, there is the theme of suffering from the onslaught of Satan. Just as Christ on earth was hated and attacked, so His Body is to be hated and attacked down through history (John 15:20; Rom 8:18-29). The NT casts the Church in a largely defensive role yet even in this role her identity with the Divine Warrior Yahweh emerges (Isa. 59:16-20 cf., Eph. 6:11-14). Nowhere does the NT picture the Church as a globally-dominating, politically-conquering entity.

Fifth, the theme of the Church’s immunity from the future wrath of God is strongly affirmed (Rom. 8:1; I Thess. 1:10; 5:9). The wrath of God to be expressed during the return of Christ comes in the context of the tribulational period and the Day of the Lord previously defined through Moses and later OT authors. It comes upon both Israel and all other nations for their rejection of God’s gracious way of salvation. The Church, by origin and therefore by character, accepts that way of salvation. Thus it does not share exposure to that future time of judgment. The Church is disciplined in a different fashion. According to Revelation 2-3, the Lord Jesus tailors judgments upon local congregations according to their particular sins. Yet with regard to the coming tribulation upon the whole earth, He will keep the Church from that time in history (Rev. 3:10).

Finally, overhanging all Church history is the imminency of the return of Christ for His Church. The term *imminency* means that Christ could come for His Church at any time—no prophesied event has to occur before it. A prophesied event might occur before it, but doesn’t have to. Throughout the numerous NT passages speaking of Christ’s return for His Church (distinguished from His administration of the wrath of God upon Israel and the nations), none speak of any event prior to that coming (e.g., I Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; I Thess. 1:10; Jas. 5:7-9). Rather than look for some celestial sign, the return of Israel to the land, or the rise of the Anti-Christ, the Church is to look forward to only its “rapture” into the arms of the Lord.

The Rapture Event. The term *rapture* refers to the event described in I Corinthians 15:51-52 and I Thessalonians 4:13-18. This event constitutes the part of the return of Christ that concerns the Church alone. It consists of two nearly simultaneous happenings: the resurrection of dead Christian believers (not OT saints) and the translation of living Christian believers.

At the rapture, believers in Christ ascend to meet Jesus in the air and go with Him to heaven (note John 14:3 speaks of a place other than earth). There is no movement to the land of Israel mentioned. After it occurs, there are no remaining believers on earth and none in natural, mortal bodies. It concerns only believers in Christ, not OT saints. It is a new piece of revelation that has to be added to previous OT revelation.

The rapture occurs when all the Gentiles that are destined to be part of the Church come in to it (Rom. 11:25). At this point the total number of believers in the Body of Christ is reached. The Church is completed at last. This completion of believers in Christ, rather than completion of some sort of calendar span of time, is what ends the Church age.

#### Lesson 212

The Church's Final Historical Milestones. Besides the imminent rapture, two other events make up the set of final milestones to the Church's role in present history. After the rapture brings all believers in Christ together in the presence of the ascended Lord, He passes judgment upon the fruit of each believer. This judgment is called by theologians the "bema seat" judgment. According to Paul, this judgment distributes rewards based upon works (I Cor. 3:10-15; II Cor. 5:10). Jesus refers to it when giving out His evaluations of individual congregations in Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3). Rewards are given or denied based upon behavior. These rewards apparently also include assigned roles in the coming Kingdom of God. The bema seat judgment is a sober reminder that obedience and fruit do count in the Christian life. More on that later.

The third final milestone in the Church's historic existence is its arrival back on earth in resurrected bodies and reward-based duty assignments. According to Revelation 19 Christ returns with His bride (the Church) to earth to judge the world and make way for the long-awaited Kingdom of God. Obviously, to be in this position the Church must have previously been removed from the earth, put in resurrection bodies, and received rewards.

We have now completed our survey of the Church's destiny in contrast to that of Israel. Believers in the Church must orient to a different eschatology than that of OT saints. They differ significantly in their respective positions before the Lord. Before we study the doctrinal ramifications for Christian living, we must look at how the Church fits into the prior OT plan that centered upon Israel and the Gentile nations.

## THE CHURCH AND THE TRIBULATION

At least five different scenarios are being advanced today by students of eschatology to relate the Church to the OT outline of history. Since all five views compete in evangelical circles, it behooves serious students of the Word of God to know what they are and develop reasons for choosing a position. I will describe each of these five scenarios and offer a critique pointing to

pretribulationism as the correct scenario. Keep in mind what we studied in the previous chapter about Church history. The last few centuries have seen the Holy Spirit stimulating the Church to think through its eschatology and refine it just as earlier generations of Christians were led to refine other doctrinal areas. Eschatological variation and debate, therefore, ought not to discourage your involvement in this area of doctrine. The Lord wants us to face the issues of our day and to do so properly we have to refine Christian eschatology.

**Lesson 213**

Preterism. Some students, particularly in Reformed circles (e.g., R. C. Sproul), have recently attempted to strengthen the amillennial or postmillennial viewpoints against the logical consistency of premillennialism by relegating the strongly prophetic portions of the NT—Jesus’ Mt. Olivet discourse in Matthew 24 and John’s book of Revelation—to past history (hence the term “preterism” in contrast to the term “futurism”). The basic idea of preterism asserts that these Scriptures view the Fall of Jerusalem to Rome in AD 70 as the wrath of God against unbelieving Israel.

What does preterism do with OT texts that underlie these NT texts? For example, Matthew 24:29 and Revelation 6:12-14 speak of the same catastrophic events as Isaiah 13:9, viz., the great tribulational judgments upon the world that figure so prominently in the OT view of Israel’s history. “Stars falling” and the “sun not giving its light”, according to preterist interpreters are figures of speech that depict the fall of a nation or kingdom. When such terms occur in the NT, the reasoning goes, they refer to the fall of the nation Israel for its rejection of Jesus. In this fashion preterism carries out the same metaphorical interpretation methodology advocated centuries ago by Augustine. Augustine, you remember from Part IV, was responsible for replacing the premillennial viewpoint of the early church with the amillennial viewpoint. Under the influence of Greek philosophy that demeaned physical forms and flushed with the recent capitulation of mighty Rome to the Christianity, Augustine built upon earlier allegorical interpretation to deny the literal and physical nature of the Millennial Kingdom. By his amillennialism *the Church (the Roman Catholic Church in particular) replaced Israel and took over all the Kingdom promises.*

Older versions of preterism before and during the time of Augustine were less consistent and less developed. Early preterism generally viewed the first few centuries of Church history as fulfilling prophecy (from the fall of Jerusalem through the rise of persecutions under Nero and other emperors variously seen as the Antichrist to the fall of pagan Rome under Christianity in Constantine’s day). Today’s preterism, however, insists that most, if not all, NT prophecy was fulfilled in the first century with its fall of Jerusalem and Neronian persecutions. Today’s preterists must insist, therefore, that the book of Revelation was written prior to AD 70. *The tribulation, in this view, has come and gone; it is past, not future.* We now live in the Kingdom age. *Preterism thus is bound logically, theologically, and hermeneutically to amillennial or postmillennial views. It cannot coexist with premillennialism.*



What exegetical justification do preterists offer? They cite NT texts that seem to anticipate the soon coming of Christ. With these texts in hand, they appeal to believers to defend the inerrancy of Scripture by adopting preterism. It has a powerful appeal to evangelical Christians who haven't studied carefully the cited NT texts. Jesus, they point out, clearly stated that his Mt. Olivet prophecies were going to be fulfilled in "this generation", i.e., the one present as He spoke (Matt. 24:1-3,34). All the events in Matthew 24 (and the parallels in Mark and Luke) had to have been fulfilled before the generation of Jesus' day died off. The detailed, additional revelation of the Matthew 24 events through the Apostle John are stated as "at hand" and about to come to pass "shortly" (note the language throughout Revelation). Preterists claim that they are literally interpreting these texts while their opponents (futurists) depart from literal interpretation. Once preterists anchor their approach with these "time texts," they then cite from first-century historical narratives features that "fulfill" Matthew 24 and Revelation, (e.g., Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the occurrence of Nero as the sixth Caesar from Julius Caesar and the myths of his return that followed his death),

#### Lesson 214

Of course, the most prominent problem with the preterist approach is the lack of Jesus coming back to earth in AD 70. If all the events of Matthew 24 and Revelation were fulfilled then, where was Jesus' coming? In AD 70 did "all the earth. . .see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt 24:30)? Did "every eye. . .see Him, even they who pierced Him" (Rev. 1:7)? Did He return from a cloud and come back to earth just as He left earth and ascended into a cloud (Acts 1:10-11)? Realizing the problem, some "partial" preterists (e.g., R. C. Sproul, Kenneth Gentry) split the second coming passages into two groups: one group (Rev. 1:7; 19:11-21; 22:12,20) supposedly refers to the AD 70 coming in judgment against Israel; a second group (Acts 1:11; I Thess. 4:16-17) refers to another future coming in judgment against the whole world.<sup>74</sup> Other, more logically-consistent "full" preterists (Don Preston) insist that all such texts refer to the past event of AD 70. Christ's coming in AD 70 cannot be associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit some forty years earlier (as some liberal theologians tried to do in during the past century or two). Preterists, therefore, are left with trying to associate it with the Roman invasion and judgment upon Israel. Moreover, they are left trying to interpret present history as the manifestation of the long-promised Kingdom age that fulfills all prophecy.

Preterists' most persuasive arguments concern the "time texts" mentioned above—texts apparently indicating that Christ was going to come soon after His ascension. Lexical studies of the terms used, however, clearly show that they can have two meanings: "soon" (not delaying), and "quickly" (not slowly). Which meaning a given instance has must be determined by the context. The former meaning occurs in I Timothy 3:14 ("I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you *before long*"). The latter meaning occurs in Matthew 28:7-8 ("And go *quickly* and tell his disciples. . . and they departed *quickly* from

<sup>74</sup> For a details in the preterist-futurist debate see Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry, The Great Tribulation: Past or Future? (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999).

the tomb. . . .”) The second meaning rather than the first is the one most commonly associated with prophetic events. Such passages sometime use the illustration of a thief breaking and entering (Matt. 24:43; I Thess. 5:4; II Pet. 3:10). The thought here isn’t that the thief comes *soon*, but rather whenever he does come, he comes so *quickly* that one cannot respond. The thought focuses upon the sudden interruption into the “normal” state-of-affairs, a miraculous intervention into history like the global flood of Noah’s day (Matt. 24:37-39; II Pet. 3:1-13). That flood did not come soon; it took over a century to come. When it came, however, unbelieving humanity were utterly unprepared. The NT emphasis upon the quickness of Christ’s future coming points to its supernaturalness and unpredictability.

Similar to the terms for “soon/quickly” is the expression “at hand” which is used in Revelation 1:3 and 22:10. Preterists argue that this expression requires the events of Revelation to occur shortly after the book was written. The coming of Christ, they claim, was “at hand” in the sense that it was only a short time away. However, just as with the term “soon”, so with this expression: a second meaning occurs in biblical prophecy passages. Dr. Ice explains:

***“An illustration from sports may help. A team may make it to the championship game. It may be said of the team that the championship is ‘at hand’ or ‘within grasp.’ This does not mean that it is certain to come within a short period of time, just because it is at hand. Just ask the Buffalo Bills. The NFL championship has been “near” or “at hand” for a number of years for the Bills, but thus far it has yet to arrive.”***<sup>75</sup>

“At hand” can mean something potentially *could* occur soon besides meaning that it *will* occur soon. This idea of potentiality, of something imminent, we’ve seen twice in previous chapters. First, during Christ’s earthly ministry, the Kingdom was “at hand” in the sense that *if* Israel had received Jesus as Messiah, it *could* have come about *right then*. The Kingdom was imminent. Then a second time the Kingdom appeared to be “at hand” when Peter promised that *if* the nation Israel would reconsider their decision about Jesus, the times of refreshing *could* come immediately.

A favorite preterist proof-text centers upon the identity of “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 (“This generation will not pass away until all these things take place”). Preterists ask these questions: is not “this generation” in Matthew 24:34 the same group of people being addressed by Jesus since the last contextual use of the phrase “this generation” (Matt. 23:36) clearly refers to Jesus’ contemporaries; and if Jesus had meant to refer to a future generation would He have not used “that generation”?

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

Let's think about pronouns like "this/these" and "that/those", especially as used in eschatological texts. Pronouns substitute for object-nouns previously mentioned or implied in the context. Demonstrative pronouns help locate where the object is within the speaker's perspective. "This" points out an object that is visualized as *nearby* to the speaker; "that" points out an object that is visualized as *further away* from the speaker. By carefully observing which demonstrative a speaker uses, the listener can learn where the speaker locates himself relative to the objects that are spoken of. Everyday speech as well as literary texts often show that a speaker shifts his location relative to the objects that are spoken of. Eschatological texts are no exception.

Experienced readers of OT prophecy know that such a shifting back-and-forth between a present-centered perspective and a future-centered one is common in eschatological passages. Readers repeatedly observe shifts in temporal viewpoint from the present to the future then back to the present as in Psalm 2 and many other places. In Isaiah 12, for another example, the text speaks of a future time as "*that day*" (12:4), a day located further away from the speaker. It shows that the speaker visualizes himself as in the present looking into the future. The text then, however, shows that speaker has moved into the future and now speaks about saving works of the Lord as nearby in his perspective ("Let *this* be known. . .").

Preterists think that Jesus throughout all of His discourse in Matthew 24 never moves away from a present-centered perspective. In such a perspective "this" and "these" would refer to things present and "that" and "those" would refer to things in the future. Indeed, Jesus has this present-centered perspective when speaking of the future time of his coming. He uses "that" and "those" in such expressions as "those days" and "that hour" (24:19, 22, 29, and 36). He also speaks of the past flood of Noah as "those days" (24:38). The objects Jesus speaks about are remote to His vantage point in the present.

However, when He speaks of specific events in that future time (wars, famines, earthquakes, astronomical catastrophism), He uses the demonstrative pronoun "these" (24:8, 33) indicating that in His perspective the prophesied phenomena are now in the foreground. No longer is He standing in the present looking into the future. Now He stands in the future looking at its features "close up". He focuses upon these future works of God as though He and his audience are there in that future time looking at them as they occur. And it is while He has this future-centered perspective looking at these features close up, that He utters the sentence "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" (24:34). In this context it is clear that "this generation" belongs in the same visualized foreground as the events themselves. The generation Jesus has in mind is the generation who get to see these Tribulational judgments. Thus He uses the near demonstrative pronouns "this" and "these" that tie both the objects viewed and the viewers together in that same future time. If He had meant to say what the preterists think He is saying, He would have remained in the present-centered perspective, looking into the future and

uttering something like this: “This generation will not pass away until all those things take place.”

Preterism experiences difficulty with Daniel 9:24-27. If, like most non-dispensational systems, preterism denies that a gap exists between the first 69 weeks and the 70th, then that 70th week, a seven-year period, cannot be made to stretch from AD 32 or 33 when the Messiah was cut off to the judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. To make this passage fit the preterist scheme of an AD 70 final judgment upon Israel, advocates must give up literal interpretation of this very crucial OT passage.

Finally, preterists must date the book of Revelation before AD 70 in order to have AD 70 events appear as future happenings. Evidence for the date of this book is split between an early date near AD 70 and a later date near AD 96. While other schools of interpretation can accept either date, preterism can accept only the earlier date. Moreover, if preterism were true, then much of the rest of the New Testament motivational passages that rely upon the future coming of Christ to encourage godly living would become irrelevant. With Christ's coming already past, much of the NT cannot directly relate to the Christian life today. It would have applied only to believers living between Pentecost and AD 70. Preterism, for all its complaints against dispensationalism, winds up in the end creating its own dispensation between the ascension of Jesus Christ and AD 70 that takes away much of the NT!

[Lesson 215](#)

Post-tribulationism. The second of the five scenarios relating the Church to the Tribulation is post-tribulationism. Recent post-tribulationism places the Church within the seven-year Tribulation with the Rapture event occurring after this seven year period as part of Christ's return to earth to judge the nations. It combines the Rapture of the Church with the Return of Christ. Unlike preterism, post-tribulationism can involve premillennialism as well as amillennialism and postmillennialism.

For most of Church history prior to the recent few centuries of eschatological doctrinal clarification, most theologians saw the Church as living within a present Tribulation or as existing after the Tribulation of pre-Constantine Rome. Thus post-tribulationism in its earlier undeveloped state was a part of a vague amillennialism. The Church age would end with the Return of Christ and the Rapture was part of that Return.

During recent Church history in which eschatology began to be refined and sharpened, there arose a strong emphasis upon literal interpretation of prophetic texts with a rise in popularity of premillennialism. The same literal hermeneutic that led to resurgent premillennialism also led to a differentiation between the Rapture of the Church and the Return of Christ. In the late 1800s when these two events were subject to much discussion, there arose the school of modern post-tribulationism. Led by proponents like S. P. Tregelles in the 19th century

and by Robert Cameron, Alexander Reese, and Robert Gundry in the 20th century, modern post-tribulationism has been quite vitriolic against pre-tribulationism without at the same time dealing in a logical way with specific OT and NT passages.

Lesson 216

What post-tribulationism needs to prove is that the Rapture and the Return cannot be distinguished sufficiently to show they are distinct events separate from each other.<sup>76</sup> The problem post-tribulationism faces is that the Rapture is specifically addressed to the Church with its unique position distinct from Israel. The Return, however, is spoken of in the NT with direct continuity from OT prophecies relating to Israel. Table Nine shows the contrasts found in the texts that speak of each event. Since these differences are at least as great as the differences in OT prophecy between the first and second advents of the Messiah, it seems that post-tribulationism fails to prove the required closure between the Rapture and Return.

Since modern post-tribulationists tend to be pre-millennialists, they also have to show, if the Rapture occurs at the end of the Tribulation and thus all living believers no longer have natural bodies, how the Millennial Kingdom can get started with believers in natural, mortal bodies. [The Millennial civilization requires natural bodies subject to death—see, for example, Isa. 65:20.] Sometimes post-tribulationists attempt to generate living survivors from the Tribulation in natural bodies from the 144,000 witnesses of Revelation, from repentant Jews in Matthew 24:30, or from the 75-day interim period that occurs between Christ's return and the beginning of the Millennium (cf. Dan. 12:11-12). The attempt to use the

<b>Rapture</b>	<b>Return</b>
Only and all of those "in Christ" are resurrected or translated (I Thess. 4:16-17)	Resurrection not mentioned in Olivet Discourse and OT resurrection reference speaks of resurrected of "some" dead OT saints but not of translation of OT living saints (Matt. 24; Dan. 12:2)
Physical union with Christ in the air with all Church-age believers in resurrection bodies; no mention of inauguration of the Kingdom on earth with natural bodies (I Cor. 15:50-57; I Thess. 4:16-17)	Judgment of nations with everyone in natural bodies and inauguration of the Kingdom on earth (Matt. 25:31-46)
Christ comes in blessedness to deliver His Body into eternity (John 14:1-3; I Cor. 15:50-57; I Thess 4:16-17).	Christ comes in judgment against all nations, including Israel, and to save the elect remnant of Israel and the "sheep" among the Gentiles for entry into the Kingdom on earth (Matt. 24:29-31; 25:31-46—OT imagery from Joel 3:12-16; Zech 14:3-5)

<sup>76</sup> I am indebted in this section for the clear argumentation presented by John S. Feinberg in his article, "Arguing About the Rapture: Who Must Prove What and How?" in *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), pp. 187-210.

Believers removed; unbelievers left (see above references)	Unbelievers removed; believers left (Baptism of Fire motif in Matt. 3:12; 24:40-41 cf 25:30,41)
Christ comes for His globally-dispersed Church (see above references)	Christ comes with His Church back to the Mt. of Olives (Zech 14:4; Acts 1:11; Rev. 19:7-14)
Church delivered from the wrath of God (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10)	Entire globe, including believers dwelling on it at the time, experience the wrath of God (Rev. 6-19)
Church to look forward to physical union with Christ with no mention of anticipatory “signs” (I Cor. 1:7; 4:5; 15:51-52; 16:22; Phil 3:20; 4:5; I Thess 1:10; II Thess. 3:10-12; Titus 2:13; Jas 5:7-9; I John 2:28; Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12,20)	Numerous signs associated with the Tribulation and Day of the Lord (OT prophecies; Matt. 24:3-44; Rev. 5-19)

**Table 9. Partial listing of the differences between the Rapture for the Church and the Return of Christ to earth to establish the Kingdom. Post-tribulationism must show that these two events cannot be distinguished.**

144,000 as a source for the Millennial civilization doesn't work because they are all male and all celebrate (Rev. 14:4). The attempt to use the repentant Jews in Matthew 24:30 fails because, according to post-tribulationism, the next verse requires the Rapture which would translate all such Jews into resurrection bodies leaving none in natural bodies. Finally, the attempt to use those who believe during the 75-day interim period after Christ's return also seems to fail because they would have been unbelievers at Christ's return and therefore have been removed in judgment.

A third problem for post-tribulationism, which insists that the Church remains on earth during the Tribulation, is reconciling the Scriptures that immunize the Church from the wrath of God (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9; Rev. 3:10) with the Scriptures that declare the Tribulation to be the supreme historical example of the wrath of God (see Table 8; Rev. 6-19). What is the Church doing in the Tribulation and, if it is, how is it immunized against the very present “wrath of God”? For one who follows OT theology (again see Table 8), the phrase “wrath of God” refers to a specific Tribulation period of judgment that has to do with Israel and the nations who have rebelled against God—Israel because of its rejection of the Messiah and the nations because of their persecution of Israel. The Church positionally distinguishes itself from both Israel and the nations because it started as the community of Jews who did receive the Messiah and because it contains Gentiles who have submitted to the authority of Israel's God. Therefore, the Church has no purposeful connection with the Tribulation. Post-tribulationists have to resort to various schemes to explain the presence of the Church inside Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week when it isn't part of the first 69 weeks. Some writers try to eliminate the wrath of God from the seven-year Tribulation and confine it to the moment of Christ's return. This attempt fails because by definition the Tribulation is the wrath of God. Others try to invoke the protective method for the Church that God used to protect the Jews in Egypt during the Exodus judgments. This approach fails because during the Exodus

no physical harm came upon believing Jews whereas during the Tribulation numerous believers are martyred. The promise of Revelation 3:10 doesn't say that God will merely protect the Church from Tribulation, but it says He will protect it from the *time* of Tribulation, viz., the Church will not be present during that historical period.

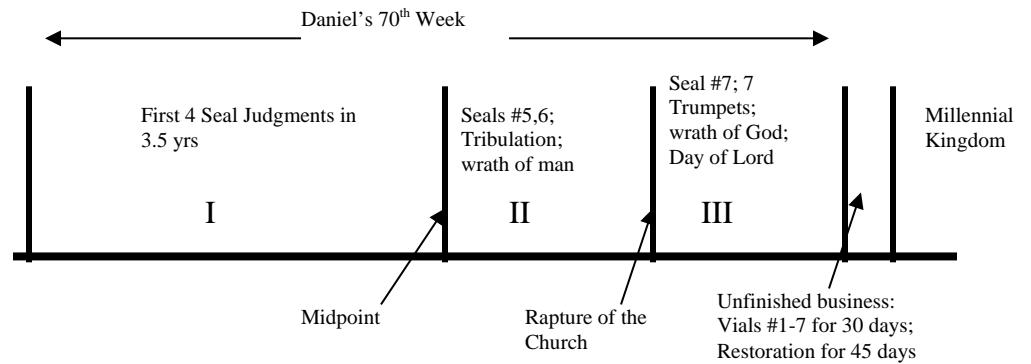
Finally, a fourth problem for post-tribulationism concerns the sequencing of the Bema-seat judgment of the Church, the marriage feast of the Church, and the Return of Christ to earth. If the Rapture doesn't occur until the Return of Christ, then the Bema-seat judgment and the marriage feast must follow the Return since the Church would not have been removed for these events until after Christ descends to earth. However, several texts in the book of Revelation indicate that the marriage supper occurs in heaven before the Return of Christ to earth (Rev. 19:7-9). Theologically, one would expect that prior to marriage feast, the Bema judgment would have had to occur for the bride "to have made herself ready." Moreover, in addition to the requirement to be made ready for the marriage supper, there is the requirement to have already received reward-based-assignments for the coming Kingdom by the time that the Church returns with Christ (Rev. 19:14).

We conclude that post-tribulationism along with preterism fails to properly relate the Church to the Tribulation and OT prophecy. Preterism fails because it continues the same basic interpretation methodology of Roman Catholicism, i.e., an amillennial or post-millennial perspective. Post-tribulationism, while adapting a reformed hermeneutic for eschatology, errs in not being sufficiently consistent with that hermeneutic. It stops short of logically integrating its exegesis of NT prophetic passages so as to produce a coherent view of the distinct historic roles of Israel, the Church, and the Millennial Kingdom.

Three Quarter Tribulationism or the Van Kampen / Rosenthal "Pre-Wrath Rapture" View. A third scenario that attempts to relate the Church to the Tribulation has arisen since 1990 through the efforts of the Christian publisher, Robert Van Kampen and the former executive director of Friends of Israel, Marvin Rosenthal.<sup>77</sup> In this arrangement, the Rapture and the Return of Christ are distinguished, unlike post-tribulationism. The Rapture is then located, timewise, prior to the last quarter of the Tribulation. The Church continues through the first half of the Tribulation, past the midpoint, and into the second half of the Tribulation for a while until the "three-quarter point" Rapture occurs.

Figure Eight shows this scenario.

<sup>77</sup>See Marvin J. Rosenthal, The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990) and Robert Van Kampen, The Sign (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992). The title is somewhat gratuitous since all views (post-, mid-, and pre-tribulationism) insist upon the Church escaping the wrath of God.



**Figure 8. The Three Quarter Tribulation Scenario of Van Kampen and Rosenthal that divides the period into three parts. The Rapture occurs half-way through the second 3.5 year period of the 7 year span of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week.**

The scenario requires several unique features not found in any of the other views of the Church and the Tribulation. First, Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week is divided into three parts instead of the customary two halves of three-and-a-half years each. The term "tribulation" as a title for this seven year period is dropped and moved to label only the second division between the midpoint and the Rapture. Moreover, the meaning of the term is changed to exclude any of God's judgments; "tribulation" refers in the three-quarter view only to those judgments caused by man. Such a redefinition of "tribulation" is required in order to keep the wrath of God confined to that period of history after the Church has been removed via the Rapture. Otherwise, the promise that the Church escape the wrath of God would be vitiated. Hence the title of Rosenthal's book, "The Pre-Wrath Rapture. . . ."

Such an arrangement requires a unique view of the book of Revelation. Since the "wrath of God" is mentioned in Revelation 6:17 in connection with the sixth seal judgment, that seal must be pushed forward into the second half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. Customarily, the sixth seal has been understood to occur by the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, not later. By pushing that seal forward in the 70<sup>th</sup> week, little time remains for the seventh seal, the seven trumpet judgments, and the seven bowl or vial judgments. As a result, the bowl judgments spill over the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. They now fall inside the 75-day period prior to the actual beginning of the Millennial Kingdom.

Figure Eight also points to another unique interpretation of the book of Revelation. On the basis of Jesus' remark in Matthew 24:22, Rosenthal concludes that the Great Tribulation (normally the second 3.5 years of the 70<sup>th</sup> week) has been shortened to less than 42 months. This shortening establishes the second part of the 70<sup>th</sup> week in Figure Eight. Room is thus left for the third part which is labeled as the Day of the Lord during which God's wrath pours out upon the earth.

Lesson 217

Three-Quarter Tribulationism starts, unfortunately, with some careless exegesis and theology that causes it to create problems of interpretation that



really don't exist. After trying to resolve these derivative problems, the view ends up with a series of additional problems in setting the Church vis-à-vis the Tribulation. A prime example concerns the concept of "tribulation." From Table Eight we observed that Israel looked forward throughout the OT with dread to a time of tribulation. OT revelation supplies sufficient information to understand clearly the meaning of the term. During OT history God caused various judgments that prepared Israel for the ultimate judgment or tribulation yet to come. As we pointed out in discussing Table Eight, these OT divine interventions consisted of both human armies and geophysical catastrophes. Therefore, Three-Quarter Tribulationism's attempt to separate the 70<sup>th</sup> week events into purely human invasions and persecutions that occur in the first two sections of Figure Eight and divine geophysical catastrophes that occur only in the third Day-of-the-Lord section is artificial and unbiblical. This view fails to explain how earthquakes that occur in the first section (Matt. 24:7) are caused by man and not geophysical judgments caused by God. *All the judgments during the 70<sup>th</sup> week, from the first seal to the last bowl, are expressions of the wrath of God unleashed by the Lord Jesus Christ acting as Judge beginning in Revelation 6.*

The OT concept of tribulation includes the metaphor of birth pains. The OT metaphor of birth pains includes all of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week, not part of it, as we saw in the discussion following Table Eight. Jesus explicitly labeled the first part of the 70<sup>th</sup> week as a time of the "beginning of birth pains" (Matt. 24:8). Paul confirms this usage (I Thess. 5:3). This birth-pain metaphor encompasses all seven years as a time of tribulation. The term "tribulation" as a title for the entire 70<sup>th</sup> week, therefore, is legitimate. Not only is it legitimate, it properly conveys the OT viewpoint that would have prevented the artificial and unbiblical distinctions between the wrath of man and the wrath of God that underlie Three-Quarter Tribulationism. It would have prevented overstatements like Rosenthal's insistence that the Greek term for tribulation never refers to the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week.<sup>78</sup>

Three-Quarter Tribulationism correctly holds that the expression "Great Tribulation" begins after the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> week as Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15 reveal. Because of its confused notion of tribulation, however, this view can't allow the tribulation of the Great Tribulation to last a full 42 months or else the Church would be exposed to the wrath of God that occurs in the third part of the 70<sup>th</sup> week. To try to resolve this dilemma, Rosenthal seizes upon Jesus' remark about the Great Tribulation being shortened (Matt. 24:22). Interpreting this remark as a modification to the prior-announced 42-month period (Daniel 12:1-7), he concludes that the Great Tribulation will last less than 42 months. Another problem now arises. The text of Revelation 12:7-17 that was written decades after Jesus' remark still requires the Great Tribulation to last a full 42 months. Obviously, Jesus' remark must refer to the original decree of God to establish the 42-month duration as a sufficiently short time period to permit survival of a faithful remnant of believers, not to a subsequent modification of it.

<sup>78</sup> Rosenthal incorrectly insists that the Greek term for tribulation never refers to the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week (Rosenthal, pp. 103, 105). It does in Matthew 24:9 which text refers to the time period prior to the midpoint discussed later in 24:15-21.

Other examples of unnecessary secondary problems created by Three-Quarter Tribulationism could be cited. Let's look at one more. This view insists that the cry of unbelievers after the opening of the sixth seal that the wrath of God has come (Rev. 6:16-17) is an anticipatory comment, not a conclusion from past experience. If it were a conclusion from the unbelievers' past experience, then that would mean the wrath of God had already come during at least the sixth seal, if not earlier. That in turn would require the Rapture to precede the sixth seal or earlier. Logic would then dictate that the Three-Quarter Tribulation position collapses into the older Mid-Tribulation position to be discussed in the next section. But how can Revelation 6:16-17 be an anticipatory comment? How would unbelievers recognize that a completely new kind of catastrophe was about to occur, a catastrophe directly from God rather than the previous catastrophes that supposedly arose from man alone?

Following logically from this unique interpretation of Revelation 6:16-17, the bowl or vial judgments must occur after Christ returns in the 75-day preparatory period just before He begins the Millennial Kingdom (see Figure 8). Now we encounter yet another unnecessary interpretative problem with the text of Revelation. The bowl or vial judgments occur in Revelation 15-16 before the Return of Christ which occurs in Revelation 19. The textual sequence no longer corresponds to the actual temporal sequence of future history. In some cases the textual sequence of Revelation is not in temporal order but in topical order (as occurs in some of the gospels, for example). However, in this case the text contains temporal markers that require correspondence between the sequence of the text and the sequence of the events. In Revelation 17:1 one of the angels who administered the bowl judgments comes to John and shows him the destruction of Babylon which occurs in chapters 17 and 18. Next in Revelation 19:1 there is a sequential text "after these things" and the Return of Christ is revealed to John. How, then, can Three-Quarter Tribulationism wrench the bowl judgments out of the order in the text and put them after the Return of Christ?

If the Rapture is distinguished from the Return, where in the flow of Revelation does it occur according to Three Quarter Tribulationism? Three-Quarter Tribulationism selects a textual reference to people in heaven that is closest to and just after the sixth seal judgment text of Revelation 6:12-17. The reference is Revelation 7:9-17, which speaks of a great multitude. This view interprets the multitude as the Raptured believers in Christ and OT saints who have just been brought into heaven. In order to solidify this group of people as the Raptured group, Van Kampen argues that the text shows them in resurrected bodies because of the fact that they are pictured wearing white robes, standing on their legs and holding palms in their hands.<sup>79</sup> Again, we see the same pattern emerging of secondary problems developing as a consequence of Three Quarter Tribulationism's exegesis. Here the problem is that the text cited clearly labels the group as one unknown to John which has just come out of the Great Tribulation.

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<sup>79</sup> Van Kampen, pp. 296-8

Besides the strangeness of John's ignorance of who these people are, if they are the Church raptured, this view creates tension with the group in heaven observed in Revelation 5:9-11. Three-Quarter Tribulationism insists that this group of obviously martyred believers cannot be the same as the Raptured saints in Revelation 7:9-17 because the former have entered heaven through martyrdom and don't have resurrected bodies. However, since they were martyred prior to the sixth seal and because according to Three-Quarter Tribulationism the Church still exists on earth up to the sixth seal, they must be "in Christ" when they are martyred. If so, then it follows they are dead in Christ and must be part of the Rapture, which this view insists occurs in Revelation 7. Clearly, Three-Quarter Tribulationism generates a new set of problems by trying to identify the great multitude with the Raptured Church.

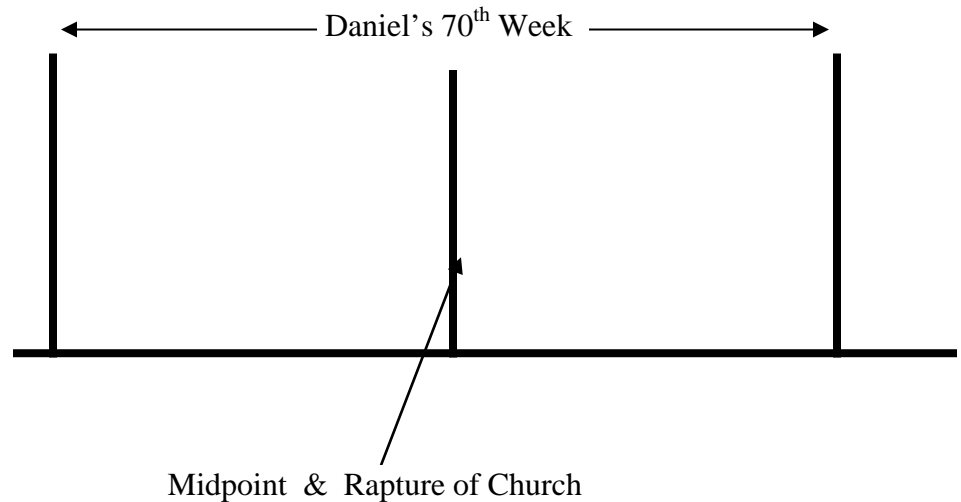
Unlike preterism, Three-Quarter Tribulationism holds to a literal hermeneutic. It genuinely seeks to unravel the textual details of the Rapture and Return. It is a midway position between post-tribulationism (discussed above) and mid-tribulationism (discussed below). As a midway position it suffers from some of the weaknesses of both. Like post-tribulationism it faces the problem of keeping the Church out of the wrath of God during the Tribulation period. Whereas post-tribulationism tried to solve the problem by positing some sort of divine protection for the Church during the Tribulation judgments, Three-Quarter Tribulationism tried to redefine the wrath of God as something distinct from tribulation so it could be compressed down to a few months at the end of the seven-year period. As we have noticed, however, secondary problems of interpretation erupt all over the text. This view also shares some of the weaknesses of mid-tribulationism, weakness which will be discussed in the next section.

Lesson 219

Mid-Tribulationism. A fourth scenario attempts to extend the Church age into half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week rather than into three-quarters of it. Much of the previous Three Quarter view relied upon features first articulated by proponents of this scenario. In agreement with the Three Quarter view, mid-tribulationism distinguishes between the Rapture and the Return. Unlike that view, however, mid-tribulationism adheres to the conventional two-part view of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week. Figure Nine shows this view.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> A definitive work on mid-tribulationism is Norman B. Harrison, The End: Rethinking the Revelation (Minneapolis: The Harrison Service, 1941).



**Figure 9. The Mid-Tribulation Scenario retains the classical two-fold division of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week. The Rapture occurs at the midpoint.**

Like all the futurist scenarios mid-tribulationism must deal with the promise to keep the Church from the wrath of God. Post-tribulationism, you will remember, tried to do so by either protecting the Church somehow from the wrath of God throughout the 70<sup>th</sup> Week or by confining that wrath to the closing moments of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week. Three Quarter tribulationism tried to do so by confining the wrath of God to the latter half of the last three-and-a-half years by claiming that the Great Tribulation consisted solely of the wrath of man and that it had been “shortened” to leave a little space for the wrath of God to occur. Mid-tribulationism also has to deal with this problem. It does so by identifying the Great Tribulation with the wrath of God, both of which then occur in the last half of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week.<sup>81</sup>

Central to mid-tribulationism is its linking the Rapture of the Church to a key event in God's judgments upon Israel and the nations. The key link, according to mid-tribulation proponents, centers upon the identity of the “last trump” in one of the Rapture texts, I Corinthians 15:52. Since another Rapture text, I Thessalonians 4:16, mentions a “trump of God” both of these passages are linked to the last of the seven trumpet judgments in Revelation 11:15. To make its case, however, mid-tribulationism has to make two further assertions: (1) that no wrath of God occurs before the seventh trumpet judgment; and (2) that the seventh trumpet judgment occurs at the midpoint of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> week. Thus mid-tribulationism must prove three points to establish its position.

Mid-tribulationism bolsters this link by pointing to what is claimed are hints of the Rapture in Revelation 10-11. Revelation 10:7 speaks of a “mystery of God” that is about to be “finished.” This reference to mystery mid-

<sup>81</sup> Notice that ALL four futurist views see themselves as “pre-wrath” so that Rosenthal's view cannot legitimately claim that title for itself as something distinctive.

tribulationism identifies with the “mystery “ of I Timothy 3:16 and, thus, the completion of the Church. Revelation 11:3-12 speaks of God’s two witnesses who are killed but then resurrected and called up into heaven in a cloud. Noting some similarities with Rapture texts, mid-tribulationism uses Revelation 10-11 to clinch its case.<sup>82</sup>

Let’s evaluate the three key assertions above and the supplementary assertion just made. Mid-tribulationism must make the case that no wrath of God occurs prior to the seventh trumpet judgment in Revelation 11:18. Unfortunately, earlier in Revelation 6:16-17 the wrath occurs, clearly prior to the seventh trumpet. Moreover, Revelation 7:14, where the only occurrence of “great tribulation” occurs in the book, occurs before any of the trumpet judgments. Mid-tribulationism at this point is no more successful than Three Quarter tribulationism at postponing the wrath of God into the latter part of the seven-year period.

The other mid-tribulational assertion says that the seventh trumpet judgment occurs at the midpoint of Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Week. The problem with this position comes from the fact that all seal and all trumpet judgments have to be completed by the midpoint when none of them are said to express the wrath of God! Moreover, the seventh trumpet judgment appears in Revelation 11 to be very close to the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week since the Return is very close at hand. Only the vial judgments remain to happen. Mid-tribulationism merely asserts without strong exegetical evidence that the seventh trumpet judgment occurs at the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week.

The other crucial mid-tribulational assertion links the Rapture’s “last trump” with the seventh trumpet judgment. This assertion claims that the “last trump” terminology implies that there are previous trumpets in a coordinated chain. The trumpet judgments provide such a chain. However, according to Matthew 24:31 yet another trumpet occurs at the gathering of Israel from the nations just prior to the Return. If mid-tribulationism requires that the Rapture occur at the last of a chain of trumpets, it has to identify the seventh trumpet with this trumpet in Matthew. Once this identification is made, mid-tribulationism becomes indistinguishable from post-tribulationism since Matthew 24:31 occurs long after the midpoint of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week.

In fact, mid-tribulationism and Three Quarter tribulationism both slip toward post-tribulationism in their treatment of Matthew 24. By insisting that this major Scriptural passage includes revelation of the Rapture event, both views wind up trying various maneuvers to avoid concluding that Matthew 24:31 occurs at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week—mid-Tribulationism by either ignoring the passage or by reinterpreting its chronological sequence and “Three Quarter” tribulationism by splitting it away from Matthew 25:31. Among the three views, therefore, it seems that post-tribulationism is the most stable.

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<sup>82</sup> I am indebted to the critique of mid-tribulationism in Gerald B. Stanton, Kept From the Hour (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1991), pp. 178-208.

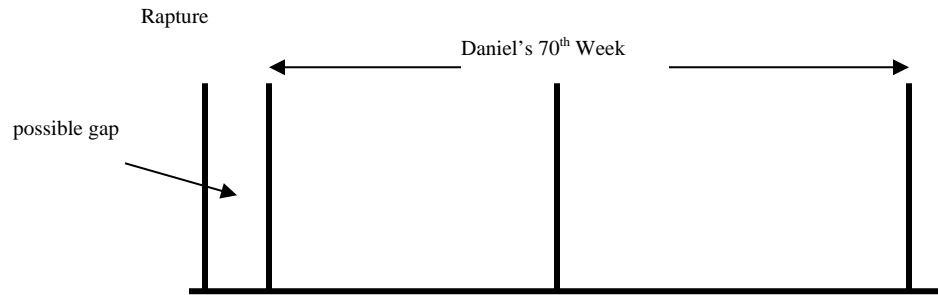
Finally, the case for the Rapture being implied symbolically by the two-witness event in Revelation 11 depends upon an allegorical hermeneutic. The two witnesses die in the literal city of Jerusalem, and their bodies lie for a literal number of days in Jerusalem's streets. The text seems to invite a straightforward literal interpretation. Nowhere in the text are there any hints at individuals besides the two witnesses. The only way this passage could imply a Rapture of the entire Church would be by allegorical interpretation, a move that flies in the face of the futurist interpretative approach.

Lesson 220

We have now discussed the preterist scenario and three futurist scenarios (post-tribulationism, Three-Quarter Tribulationism, and mid-tribulationism). Notice that each of the futurist views is struggling to combine events having to do with the Church (Rapture and union with the ascended Lord Jesus) with events having to do with Israel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week. The first of the futurist views, post-tribulationism, unites the Rapture and the Return into one indivisible event. Thus it combines very clearly the Church and Israel. In doing so, however, it forces the post-Rapture events of the Church (Bema Seat Judgment and the Marriage Feast) to occur instantaneously while it nearly destroys the OT picture of the Messiah coming to establish His Kingdom on earth with saints in natural bodies.

The last two futurist views—Three Quarter Tribulationism and mid-tribulationism—correctly distinguish the Rapture from the Return but continue, like post-tribulationism, to include the Church inside the 70<sup>th</sup> Week. Once this inclusion occurs, however, the Church's immunity from the wrath of God arises as a crucial problem. Both of these views seek to redefine "wrath" so as to keep it from occurring during the first part of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week when the Church is present. In the light of OT theology behind the 70<sup>th</sup> week, these attempted redefinitions of God's wrath fail. The OT makes clear through its vocabulary of the pain of childbirth, vocabulary that Jesus adopted in Matthew 24 to describe both halves of the Tribulation, that the entire 70<sup>th</sup> Week is a period of God's wrath. Moreover, its purpose is directed to Israel (to produce repentance toward the coming Messiah Jesus) and to the Gentile nations (to divide them on the basis of their response to God's work in Israel), not to the Church. Unnecessary exegetical complications arise from these two views.

Pre-Tribulationism. The fifth and final scenario of combining the destinies of Israel and the Church places the Rapture prior to Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week rather than trying to fit it inside that timespan. In agreement with the Three-Quarter and mid-tribulationist views, pre-tribulationism distinguishes the Rapture and the Return as separate features in the Second Coming complex of events. It adheres, too, to the classical two-part division in the 70<sup>th</sup> week, agreeing with mid-tribulationism but rejecting the tri-partite division of Three-Quarter tribulationism. Figure Ten pictures the scenario.



**Figure 10.** *The Pre-Tribulation Scenario retains the classical two-fold division of Daniel's 70<sup>th</sup> Week and places the Rapture prior to its beginning. Some pre-tribulationists believe there may be a gap of time between the Rapture and the signing of the treaty between the Anti-Christ and Israel that starts the 70<sup>th</sup> Week.*

Advocates of this position believe that it best solves several challenges in the textual references to the Second Coming. It clearly solves the problem of keeping the Church from the wrath of God in a way compatible with the Revelation 3:10 reference to the *time* of tribulation. It maintains the entire 70<sup>th</sup> Week as a time of judgment focused upon Israel and the nations as this judgmental period is presented in the OT. It allows enough time for the Bema Seat judgment and Marriage Supper of the Lamb to occur prior to the Church returning with Christ at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week and permits a literal interpretation of the Millennial Kingdom starting with people in natural bodies.

Pre-tribulationism also raises the issue of “imminency”. Nowhere in the NT epistles’ references to the rapture does there appear to be any prior “sign” of it. The Rapture comes suddenly without warning (see discussion above under the Church’s Progress). Mid-tribulationism, Three-Quarter tribulationism, and post-tribulationism cannot have this sort of imminency. They all have prior signs in heaven and on earth such that when one observes them, one can calculate how soon the Rapture will occur. Pre-tribulationism has the Church looking for the any-moment return of Christ, not looking for the years-prior rise of the Anti-Christ.

By placing the Rapture before Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> Week pre-tribulationism reinforces the qualification of the Lord Jesus Christ to trigger the series of catastrophic judgments beginning in Revelation 6. Revelation 5 claims that His qualification to open the seals derives from His having redeemed “us” out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (5:9). The “us” group already exists in heaven prior to the beginning of tribulation and seem to be the reason why the Lord Jesus Christ has proven Himself before the Father as worthy. He has become “complete.”

This is not to say that pre-tribulationism is without its difficulties. Critics have pointed to historical circumstances that occurred at the time its modern “father” John Nelson Darby worked out its first systematic statement. Critics have argued that it misinterprets Matthew 24 and II Thessalonians 2. And critics have accused it of fostering an “escapist” attitude toward suffering. What does pre-tribulationism say to these accusations?

First, regarding the historical circumstances, church historians have shown that Darby began to arrive at the idea of a pre-tribulation Rapture by 1827 while recovering from an injury. It wasn't until 1830 that charismatic and unorthodox “prophets and prophetesses” supposedly had visions which critics claim were the real source of pre-tribulationism. Serious examination of the 1830 utterances of the prophetess Margaret Macdonald shows no pre-tribulation elements existed in them. Moreover, in recent years scholars have discovered an essay by the founder of Brown University in Rhode Island, Rev. Morgan Edwards (1722-1795), that describes a position close to pre-tribulationism that involves the Rapture of the Church and subsequent return with the Lord when He descends to the Mt. of Olives. Scholars have also discovered a very ancient manuscript ascribed to a Syrian theologian in the Eastern Church, Ephraem (AD 306-373). He wrote about a tribulation period prior to the Lord's return of “one week” of seven years and about an imminent rapture of Christians prior to the tribulation.<sup>83</sup> Clearly, then, the idea of a pre-tribulation Rapture has a long history, even though it was not systematically developed until the 19<sup>th</sup> century “back to the Bible” movement.

Lesson 221

How does pre-tribulationism respond to the accusation that it misinterprets Matthew 24? Every futurist position discussed so far except pre-tribulationism insists that the Church and Israel are somehow both involved in Matthew 24. Most insist that 24:31 parallels Rapture passages in the epistles because of certain similarities. Their argument from similarities undercuts the distinction made previously between Israel and the Church and between the Return and the Rapture. If both the Church and Israel are spoken of in Matthew 24 and these distinctions are weakened, then post-tribulationism is the logical result. Mid-tribulationism and Three-Quarter tribulationism in holding this mixture view are thus unstable.

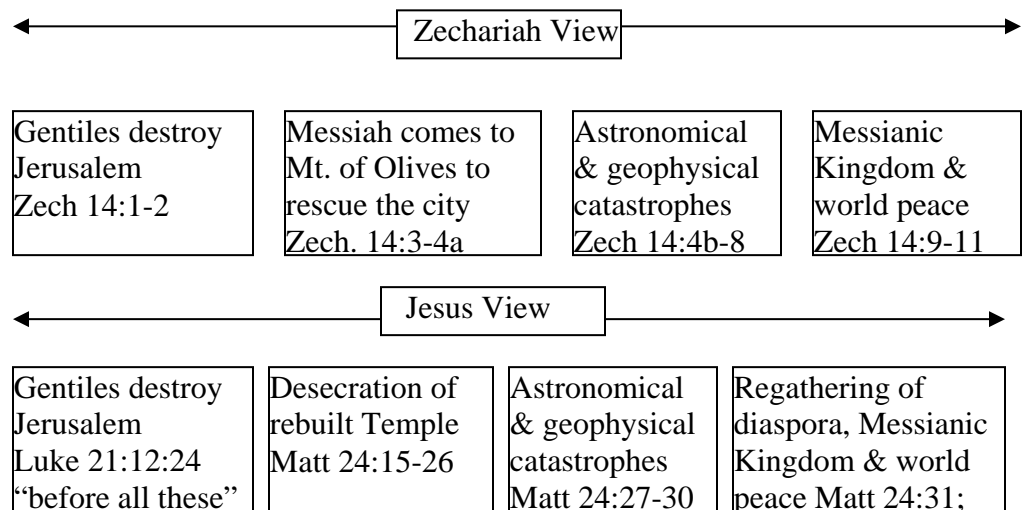
In contrast to these views pre-tribulationism maintains the distinctions between Israel and the Church and the Return and the Rapture. Matthew 24 is viewed as Jesus addressing his Jewish disciples as representing Israel here, not the Church (which wasn't formed until weeks after these Mt. Olivet discourse). Matthew 24 in this respect parallels Matthew 10 where the disciples very clearly represent Israel's believing remnant, not the Church. The disciples of the Mt. Olivet discourse apparently are thinking in terms of Zechariah 14:1-11. From

<sup>83</sup> Grant R. Jeffrey, “A Pretrib Rapture Statement in the Early Medieval Church,” *When the Trumpet Sounds*, ed. Thomas Ice and Timothy Demy (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1995), pp. 106-125. Other essays in this volume describe eschatology in the early Church as well as more details surrounding the development of dispensational pre-tribulationism in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



the OT they had been taught that Jerusalem would be devastated by Gentile nations just prior to the arrival of the Messiah to the very place they and Jesus were standing on at that moment (cf. Zech. 14:4). During this Day of the Lord there would be astronomical and geophysical catastrophes (14:6-8) terminating in the Kingdom of the Messiah and world peace (14:9-11).

During this discourse Jesus fills out details in this OT frame of reference. He actually expands the disciples' picture just as Gabriel did for Daniel. Jerusalem and the Temple would be devastated (Luke's account focuses upon this destruction that would come in AD 70) and the times of the Gentiles would occur for an extended period. Then sometime off in the future in a day when the Temple would be again rebuilt, the Antichrist would desecrate it (note that this future Temple is NOT destroyed unlike the Temple of the disciples' day) for a time. Then the Messiah would come with astronomical and geophysical catastrophes and establish His Kingdom. The disciples' idea from Zechariah was expanded to consider the interadvent age as in Figure 11.



**Figure 11. In the Mt. Olivet discourse Jesus builds upon OT prophecy and fills in more details for the disciples' concern about Israel and the Temple.**

The OT prophesied that God would scatter Israel to the four winds (Deut. 28:64-68; Ezk. 5:12; 17:21). It also prophesied, however, that God would regather His elect nation from the four winds one-by-one accompanied by the sound of a great trumpet (Deut. 30:3-4; Isa. 27:12-13; 43:5-7,10,20). This scenario is Israel's, not the Church's. Matthew 24:31 doesn't speak of the Rapture; it speaks of the OT regathering. Neither do the later verses in Matthew 24:40-41 speak of any Rapture; they speak in terms of OT prophecy—the unbelievers are taken away to make way for the Messianic kingdom just as unbelievers were taken away in the flood of Noah's day. Pre-tribulationism,

therefore, maintains a consistent distinction between Israel and the Church, leaving Matthew 24 addressed to Israel.

Lesson 222

The profound difference in perspective between the future of Israel and the future of the Church can be observed by comparing the Matthew 24 OT view of the future of Israel with the view that Jesus shares with the Church in Revelation 2-3. In the letters to the seven churches Jesus focuses believers' attention on eternal rewards for life after resurrection. No mention is made of any special prior events except when in 3:10 He excludes the Church from the tribulation to come.

Another criticism of pretribulationism centers upon II Thessalonians 2. The Thessalonians were upset by some sort of rumor that apparently the Day of the Lord had come. Critics of pretribulationism argue that if Paul had taught a pretrib Rapture to the Thessalonians in his first epistle, then he should have responded to this rumor by telling them not to worry since they would be raptured before the Day of the Lord. Why, they, ask is Paul silent about any pretrib Rapture in II Thessalonians 2?

Paul's so-called silence is not about the Rapture, per se. He surely refers to it in the phrase "our gathering together to Him" (II Thess. 2:1). The silence concerns only the matter of the timing of the Rapture. There seems to be no clear reason given in the context for Paul's omission of the Rapture's timing so we may safely conclude that its timing would not have answered the problem the Thessalonians were having.

And what was their problem? They thought that a special time had come that endangered their safety. Whether this special time was the familiar Day of the Lord or some portion of it, the textual evidence varies. The majority text reading in 2:2 reads "Day of the Messiah", a slightly different designation than Day of the Lord. Perhaps this Day of the Messiah period was thought to be a special time of tribulation that the rumor claimed had come about already ahead of the actual Day of the Lord. If so, one can understand why Paul would not have bothered to use the pretrib Rapture argument. He was battling a view that would have had this Day of the Messiah out ahead of both the Rapture and the Day of the Lord. The logical refutation required that he show that this Day of the Messiah was not going to precede the Day of the Lord but in fact was to occur after revelation of the Antichrist. In this logic the timing of the Rapture would have been irrelevant to the discussion.

Another more important point arises from this text. Whether some subtly involving a special Day of the Messiah is involved here or not, the critics of pretribulationism have the same problem with it as the pretribulationists themselves. Here is why. If a critic is a posttribulationist, he either holds to a Rapture before a very short Day of the Lord (to avoid the Church being exposed to the wrath of God) or he holds to a Rapture in the Day of the Lord (the Church being somehow protected from the wrath after the manner of Israel during the Exodus). If the former view, then he has exactly the same problem as the

pretribulationist. Why the silence of Paul since he should have reminded the Thessalonians that they would be raptured before the coming very short Day of the Lord? If the latter view, then the Thessalonians should not have been upset at all since the Rapture was imminent! Mid-tribulationists and Three-Quarter Tribulationists both have the same problem as the former posttribulationist view. The bottom line is that we don't understand enough about the rumor that troubled the Thessalonians to be able to extract from this text any information about the timing of the Rapture favoring any of the competing scenarios.

Lesson 223

Finally, critics of pretribulationism often take cheap shots about the view being “escapist”, i.e., that it misleads Christians to underestimate the intensity of struggle in this life prior to the Rapture. While sounding pious, this argument actually misleads Christians to misunderstand the purposes of suffering for the Church. By definition the Church is that group of humanity who has not rejected Israel's Messiah and therefore cannot be accused of that sin. And it is that sin that brings the Tribulation judgments upon Jews and Gentiles alike. The Church suffers indeed as Christ did, but for different reasons and in different ways. Christians suffer persecution and onslaughts of Satan precisely because of their identification with Christ in the fallen world. They are the only “part” of Christ available to Satan to attack. Moreover, the Church doesn't suffer globally at the same time. Simultaneous global persecution of believers cannot occur until the Restraint is removed and the Antichrist is let loose. Then a new more intense persecution arises never before seen in history: suffering for different reasons and in different ways.

## Summary and Conclusion

Lesson 224

We have now completed our study of the destiny of the Church, the last set of events in its life. The framework for worship and obedience in an age of global deception is complete! Twenty-three events from creation to the end of the Church age reveal numerous doctrines for Christian living today. Throughout we have utilized a straightforward literal interpretation of Scripture to produce a rationally-consistent and empirically-valid framework of reliable truth. Such a framework totally envelops every area of life and thereby fosters a true “walk by faith.”

Rapture of the Church	Pre-Tribulationism
Growth of the Church	Sanctification specific to the Body of Christ
Emergence of the Church	Work of the Son
Earthly Origin of the Church	Person and Work of the Holy Spirit
Heavenly Origin of the Church	Judgment/Salvation
Resurrection of the King	Glorification
Death of the King	Substitutionary Blood Atonement
Life of the King	Kenosis, Impeccability, Infallibility
Birth of the King	Hypostatic Union
Restoration of a Remnant	Canonicity, Prayer
Exile and End of Kingdom	Sanctification and Separation
Fall of the Kingdom	Sanctification and Chastening
Decline of the Kingdom	Sanctification and Chastening
Golden Era of Solomon	Sanctification and culture
Rise and Reign of David	Sanctification modeled by individual
Conquest and Settlement	Sanctification modeled by war
Mt. Sinai	Revelation, Inspiration, Canonicity
Exodus	Judgement / Salvation w/ sub-blood-atonement
Call of Abraham	Election, Justification, Faith
(Noahic) Covenant	God, man, nature
Flood	Judgement / Salvation
Fall	Evil, Suffering
Creation	God, man, nature

## APPENDIX A: REFORMED AND DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

Lesson 162

In the centuries after the Reformation as Protestants tried to set forth their position against Rome, various disagreements ensued over how far Roman Catholic doctrine should be reformed. Lutherans, for example, held to much of the Romanist liturgy, to infant baptism, to an amillennial eschatology, and to a strong view of Communion (“Consubstantiation”). Calvinists, while departing from Lutherans on liturgical aspects and the nature of Communion, nevertheless held on to infant baptism and amillennial eschatology. Those Christians who insisted upon believers’ baptism and were less committed to amillennialism (usually known as the “Anabaptists”) were persecuted and excluded politically and socially as “too radical” for the general Protestant community.

For the purposes of this part of the framework series, we will look again at the traditions coming from Calvin as we did in Part V, Appendix C, when we examined the doctrine of the extent of the atonement. Here we take a broader view. To put the doctrine of the Church in perspective we have to show how different trends in Calvinism result in different views of the origin and mission of the Church. The two trends we are most interested in are Reformed theology and Dispensational theology because these views actively compete today with one another in evangelical, Bible-believing Christian radio programming, magazines, and bookstores. I will discuss them in the historical sequence of their origin, first a survey of Reformed theology and then a survey of Dispensational theology.

### A SURVEY OF THE RISE AND INFLUENCE OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

Lesson 163

The Protestant Reformers lived “under fire” all their lives. Europe was rent politically and religiously by the Protestant-Romanist split. Intrigue, politics, councils, and violence followed. The Reformers had neither the time nor the energy to wholly reform Roman Catholic theology. What they did do was to affirm the *primacy of Scripture* over the Church (i.e., *sola scriptura*) and, out of that belief, affirm also the *doctrine of justification by faith*.<sup>84</sup> [Both of these doctrines were discussed in Part III of this series.]

### RATIONAL STRUCTURE OF REFORMED THEOLOGY

Protestant scholars following Calvin relied upon their scholastic background which had thoroughly trained them in logic and systematics.

<sup>84</sup> For an excellent, well-documented, well-written discussion of how the doctrine of justification has waxed and waned throughout Church history and especially during the Protestant-Roman Catholic conflict read Ron Merryman, Justification By Faith Alone and Its Historic Challenges (Merryman Ministries, 4306 Grouse Ridge Drive, Hermantown, MN 55811, 1999). Contact Rev. Merryman at merryman@skypoint.com for information on ordering a copy.

Whereas Romanist scholars utilized scholasticism to expound theology with Aristotelian categories, the Reformers utilized scholasticism to expound theology with the authority of Scripture and the doctrine of justification taken into account. They focused upon soteriological truths within the Bible and therefore concentrated upon New Testament texts where justification by faith was presented. In the decades following Luther and Calvin they had to defend Protestantism against a very strong counter-attack from Rome. One tool they found useful to present and refute Catholic counter-attacks were establishing detailed, systematic, creedal statements (e.g., the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort). These confessional statements continued the tradition of formulating doctrinal conclusions that had begun centuries earlier with the Apostles', Nicean, and Chalcedon creeds. All Christians should give them study, especially in our day when there is so much unsystematic and fragmentary teaching in our pulpits.

The Structure “Freezes”. Viewed from the standpoint of Church history (see Chapter Four), creeds show the progressive teaching of the Holy Spirit in bringing the Church to its destined maturity. In the case of Reformed Theology, however, it seems that such progress was thought to have ceased with the great Protestant creeds. Doctrinal understanding was essentially “frozen” at the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century stage of growth. Christians living at the time who wanted to apply the Protestant principle of the authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) to other areas of theology such as ecclesiology (doctrine of the Church and its ordinances) and eschatology (doctrine of the future involving prophecy) were stymied. Three major thrusts were sharply resisted by Reformed theology as it froze up to further reformation.

Reformed theology continued the Roman Catholic practice of infant baptism (although modifying its meaning). Soon this practice came under fire. Students of the Swiss Reformer, Zwingli, following *sola scriptura* noted that only believers were baptized in the New Testament. Since they insisted that people who in Europe at the time had nearly all been baptized as infants should be re-baptized after belief, they were called the “Anabaptists.” Zwingli and his fellow Reformers savagely persecuted the Anabaptist practice.

A second trend toward a more consistent application of the authority of Scripture was the Anabaptist belief that the Church cannot be identified with the State in any way. Whereas Reformed theology continued the Roman Catholic practice of government sponsorship of one church within a jurisdiction, Anabaptists determined to form what they called a “Free Church” made up of those who voluntarily were baptized after conversion. The church and the state were two separate institutions with two entirely different requirements for membership. It was out of this belief that pacifism developed within Anabaptism because a church member, it was thought, could not simultaneously serve as a state magistrate. Such a separation often tended toward a new monasticism of an attempted withdrawal from the world, repeating the earlier tendency of Roman Catholic monasteries. Needless to say, this break with the “established” state churches was labeled by both Reformed theologians and

Catholic authorities as a dangerous radicalism that threatened social unity. Both persecuted the Anabaptist followers because of it.

The eminent Church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette sums up the situation:

*“[Lutheranism and the Reformed Churches] sought to be the church of the entire community. In this they succeeded in several lands. Both continued infant baptism and by it endeavoured to bring into the visible church all who were born into the community. To be sure, Luther was not entirely happy over this procedure, for it did not fully accord with his basic principle of salvation by faith. Calvin taught that many so baptized were not among the elect and did not belong to that invisible church whose membership was known to God alone. Yet each wished the visible church to include all in a given area. . . . Contemporaneously with Lutheranism and Calvinism there was another kind of Protestantism, much more radical than either. . . . [Those who adhered to it] looked to the Scriptures and especially the New Testament as their authority and tended to discard all that they could not find expressly stated in that basic collection of sources. They wished to return to the primitive Christianity of the first century. They thus rejected much more which had come through the Catholic Church than did Lutherans and the Reformed. They believed in ‘gathered churches’, not identical with the community at large, but composed of those who had had the experience of the new birth. Rejecting infant baptism as contrary to the Scriptures, they regarded only that baptism valid which was administered of conscious believers. They were therefore nick-named Anabaptists. . . .*

<sup>85</sup>

In addition to continuing Roman Catholic practices of infant baptism and state sponsorship, Reformed theology also perpetuated Roman Catholic amillennial eschatology. Included in this eschatological view were the idea of “replacement theology” whereby the Church replaced Israel in God’s plan, the idea of allegorical interpretation of biblical texts—especially the prophetic texts, and the idea of the political-social dominance of the Church whereby state laws would derive from Scripture and enforce the Christian faith upon all citizens. When Christians awoke to the *sola scriptura* principle in defining the nature and destiny of the Church, amillennialism was challenged. A great variety of prophetic ideas which were not well developed from the Scripture arose within groups like the Anabaptists. Eschatology is an exceedingly complex area of interpretation that takes much detailed study, something that was not possible during the post-Reformation era. Soteriology, not eschatology, was the central combat zone of the time. The departures from classical amillennialism, therefore, were viewed with alarm by Lutherans and the Reformed Churches. Political radicalism came to be associated with such departures so that Lutherans, Reformed Churches, and Roman Catholics united against the so-called “radical Reformers” who entertained fragmentary versions of premillennialism and other more literal approaches to the prophetic Scriptures.

<sup>85</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1953), p. 778f.

We learn from this period of Church history that Reformed theology had formulated a defensive, systematic, and detailed structure that was set into creedal form. Under fire from Rome, Reformed theology focused upon the central issue of soteriology and essentially froze any further reformation from Catholic faith and practice. Three major reformational trends were fiercely resisted: the reform of baptism, the reform of church-state relations, and the reform of eschatology.

The Structural Content: TULIP. Soon after Reformed theology began its systematization, dissent from within arose in Holland with a group known as the Remonstrants. A Reformed theologian, Jacob Arminius (1559-1609) who had studied under Calvin's successor, Beza, became convinced of the Remonstrants' beliefs and became so identified with their position that ever since it has been known as Arminianism. [We studied part of this controversy in Appendix C of Part V.] Latourette sums up the Arminian objection:

***“Rejecting supralapsarianism [God decreed who should be saved and who should be damned before creation and the fall] and infralapsarianism [God so decreed after the fall], limited atonement (namely, the teaching that Christ died only for the elect), irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the elect, it held that Christ died for all men, that salvation is by faith alone, that those who believe are saved, that those who reject God’s grace are lost, and that God does not elect particular individuals for either outcome.”<sup>86</sup>***

The Reformed Churches met the Arminian challenge in their typical way: they held a theological convention to write a creedal answer. Known as the Synod of Dort (completed in 1619), the convention agreed on the five doctrines that have since become the hallmark of Reformed theology. Each of these doctrines' names form the acrostic TULIP.

**T: Total Depravity of Man.** This doctrinal formulation is an attempt to spell out the effects of the fall on every member of the human race. The word “total” refers not to the *depth* of depravity (which differs from person to person) but to the *comprehensive character* of the depravity, i.e., that it affects every area of the soul in such a way that no one can come to God without God taking the first step. In order to make salvation wholly of God's initiating grace and to exclude all human merit, Reformed theology makes this expression to assert that no one can believe unless they are first regenerated. This use of regeneration to stand for all of God's pre-salvation calling is done for theological consistency with other Reformed doctrines rather than being the conclusion of detailed exegesis of the biblical text. A question arises whether protection of God's initiating grace and elimination of human merit can be done in a fashion that respects textual details more than imposing this meaning upon the term regeneration. The doctrine of regeneration is discussed in Chapter 2 of this Part of the Series.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 765.



**U: Unconditional Election.** By unconditional election Reformed theology means that God's choice of who is elected and who isn't is not determined by anything outside of God. It is not controlled by the relative merit of men or their foreseen positive response to the gospel offer. In other words, God is Himself not "conditioned" by something outside of Himself. He is absolutely free to do whatsoever His wills that is compatible with His nature.<sup>87</sup> Viewed one way this doctrine simply asserts the Creator-creature distinction that is in danger of being lost in discussions involving creature free will. Viewed another way it gets involved in the details of the divine decrees (the supralapsarian-infralapsarian discussion). Again, the issue arises over how much emphasis is upon filling in details of a theological system vis-a-vis researching contextual meaning in the biblical text. The doctrine of election is discussed in Chapter 2 of Part III of this series.

**L: Limited Atonement.** By articulating the limited atonement, Reformed theology tries to protect the work of Christ on the cross from being wasted on those who reject it and from being contingent upon human response. More than the other points in TULIP, however, this point most clearly alters the contextual meaning of specific biblical references. The work of Christ can be rendered certain by a more balanced doctrinal statement which more thoughtfully respects biblical references. The limited atonement debate is discussed in Chapter 4 and Appendix C of Part V of this series.

**I: Irresistible Grace.** The doctrine of the irresistibility of grace is the logical extension of unconditional election. Works that God has chosen to occur will certainly come to pass. Grace extended to sinners who are the elect ones, therefore, cannot be successfully rejected. By the term "irresistible" is not meant a steamroller effect; it means that the grace is never permanently rejected. This doctrinal formulation is a reaction to Arminian emphasis upon man's apparent capacity to disobey, block, and thwart God's directly revealed will. Of course, in the end God's total will is never thwarted. Yet it often in Scripture involves "three-steps-forward-and-two-steps-backward" along with real "hypothetical options" that must be expounded. The neat theological formulation of irresistible grace can often be devoid of much biblical content, content which stimulated the original Arminian objections and which is buried but not answered.

**P: Perseverance of the Elect.** This Reformed doctrine can be understood several ways, depending upon how one reads the phrase. It could mean that the elect *persevere in obedient faith without serious lapses* from which they fail to recover before their death. It could also mean that the elect *persevere in a saved status in spite of unrecoverable lapses* due only to God's faithfulness to bless and to chasten. This second meaning would include the idea of loss of rewards

<sup>87</sup> Note the phrase "that is compatible with His nature". Critics of Christianity, particularly of Protestant Calvinism, sometimes have the mistaken notion that the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty implies that He can do anything, whether rationally or ethically absurd or not. This error attributes "voluntarism" to God (the idea that He can choose to do anything, regardless of His nature).

after death due to disobedience. The former meaning is one that was emphasized strongly in later Reformed theology such as that of the Puritans and by Lordship Salvation advocates today who follow the Puritans on this point. It entails concepts of false and saving faith whereby assurance of saving faith is contingent upon continual fruit in the life. Faith and assurance are separated in this view to “protect” against licentious living so that the Protestant and Catholic views of faith ironically wind up as strikingly similar.<sup>88</sup> Not only that, but this separation of faith and assurance mirrors even more ironically the Arminian notion of faith! This understanding of perseverance tends to see *NT admonitions as being directed to churchgoers who remain unbelievers.*

The first meaning of the doctrine of perseverance characterized the original Reformers. Calvin, for example, did not separate faith from assurance; in his view they were identical. Because one has assurance of his salvation, one can walk by faith. The danger of licentious living is controlled in this view by divine chastening and the future judgment of the believer. It relies upon the perseverance of God in stead of that of the believer. This view tends to understand *NT admonitions as being directed to believers who are in danger of divine chastening and loss of rewards.*

## THE ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE OF THE COVENANT

Lesson 164

Reformed theology soon began to be identified as “covenant theology” because it organized its doctrine using the concept of a covenant. Since the Bible expressed salvation through covenants, this form seemed to later Reformers like God’s archetypal soteriological structure for managing all redemption. Reformed theology used several such covenant structures to express itself, but the most prominent is the “covenant of grace.” This covenant must not be confused with any of the biblical covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Siniatic, Palestinian, and New). It is a theological structure that derives from an inductive generalization of biblical covenant material. It is the source of the frequent appearance of the word “covenant” in titles of ministries based upon Reformed theology.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Recent research has exposed the remarkable difference in meaning of the term “faith” between the original Reformers such as Luther and Calvin and later Reformed theology. See the bibliographic references listed in Zane C. Hodges, *A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation: Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 207-210.

<sup>89</sup> A good comparison of this covenant structure in Reformed theology with Dispensationalism is Renald E. Showers, *There Really is a Difference!* (Bellmawr, NJ: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1990). Much of the material of this Appendix is taken from my article, “A ‘Meta-Hermeneutical’ Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies” to be published in a forthcoming issue of *The Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*.

Covenant Structure. It is a hypothesized contract between God and the elect to completely redeem them. Its objective basis is the atonement of Christ. Its subjective requirement is belief on the Son which results from irresistible grace. It implies a unity of content amidst all the biblical covenants. And it guarantees and applies all the blessings God has ordained for His elect. Logically, it is developed primarily from NT terminology which is seen to be the final interpretation of earlier Old Testament texts.

Effects of the Covenant Structure Upon Biblical Interpretation. This covenant structure with its soteriological orientation has a number of important effects upon how Reformed adherents must interpret Scripture. The primary effect occurs in minimizing the differences among the biblical covenants in order to emphasize the one Covenant of Grace that allegedly underlies them. Since the Covenant of Grace always involves the elect and only the elect and always centers upon eternal salvation, texts that speak of temporal historical details that concern both believers and unbelievers tend to be neglected. Whatever the biblical covenants' "fine print" says, in this view must always be interpreted in the light of eternal redemption.

Thus by emphasizing this one underlying covenant with the elect conceived of as a homogeneous group, Reformed theologians insist that there can be only "one people of God." Distinctions among God's working with the Gentile nations, Israel, and the Church are suppressed. "Replacement theology" results whereby the Church replaces chronologically Israel in God's plan. With the crucifixion of Christ, Israel's role in history is finished in the perspective of this covenant theology. Terminology in the Abrahamic and other biblical covenants regarding Israel, the land, the Temple, and a theocratic political reign from Jerusalem is usually reinterpreted in "spiritual terms" that understand the "deeper meaning" to refer to the Church. The NT is viewed as actually "correcting" the meaning of certain OT texts.<sup>90</sup> If the Church replaces the nation Israel, in this view, it must inherit a political mission. Covenant thinking produces a tendency, therefore, for overt political domination, for "Christianizing the world", for establishing state and national churches, and for adherence to a post-millennial eschatology.

By downplaying differences in the various programs of God throughout history, covenant theology must attribute to OT saints an advanced understanding of the gospel that rivals that of NT saints. So, for example, if an OT exhortation says "bring a sacrifice into the Temple", the meaning in this view, is that there is a clear consciousness of Messiah as the coming Lamb of God. Historical progression in biblical revelation is not fully appreciated. Biblical texts are interpreted theologically rather than placed in their historical context. This method of interpretation finds itself unable to distinguish between the features of an OT saint's walk with God and a NT saint's walk with Him. Features unique to the Church age are left unappreciated.

<sup>90</sup> Note how Reformed scholar Willem VanGemeren puts it: "The Reformed exegete approaches the [OT] prophets from the perspective of the unity of the covenant". He clearly says that the NT "sets aside" and "corrects" literal interpretation of OT prophets. "Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy (II)", Westminster Theological Journal 46 (1984), 269, 271.

Another effect of covenant theology upon biblical interpretation is how NT passages that cite OT passages as “fulfilled” are understood. If a passage from the OT prophet Joel, for example, is said in the NT to be “fulfilled” on the day of Pentecost, that must mean that Pentecost fulfills the whole complex of second advent prophecy in Joel. OT textual details of geophysical catastrophism must be reinterpreted metaphorically. Recent developments in Reformed theology, in fact, have taken this tendency to its logical conclusion: there will be no physical second advent of Christ. This event has already happened, presumably at A.D. 70 when Jerusalem fell. Other more moderate Reformed theologians such as R. C. Sproul and Kenneth L. Gentry save a future advent but strip away most of OT prophecy (and the book of Revelation) as already fulfilled. This position is known as “preterism” and is becoming popular.<sup>91</sup>

To sum up: Reformed theology utilizing the concept of a covenant structure “behind” history not only has frozen the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century level of theology into permanent creeds but has also established its own unique rules of Bible interpretation. It therefore centers upon soteriology, the doctrine that was central to the Reformation era, and a very close relationship between the state and the church. It views with deep suspicion any further extension of the *sola scriptura* principle in reforming theology.

## A SURVEY OF THE RISE AND INFLUENCE OF DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

Lesson 165

Dispensationalism developed within Protestant circles after Reformation theology had come to dominate Holland, Switzerland, most of Germany, and England. Reformed attempts at political dominion had resulted in less than admirable spiritual conditions in the churches. New questions in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries focused on other areas of theology than soteriology. In spite of the different theological focal points, however, history shows clearly that dispensationalism arose within Calvinist circles.<sup>92</sup> Let’s look at the reformational directions of dispensational theology and its various structural components.

<sup>91</sup> See for example, R. C. Sproul, [The Last Days According to Jesus](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998) and a debate between Drs. Kenneth Gentry and Thomas Ice in [The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999).

<sup>92</sup> George M. Marsden, [Fundamentalism and American Culture](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp 46, 60. To find out the key ideas and the personalities behind dispensationalism read Charles C. Ryrie, [Dispensationalism](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995).

## REFORMATIONAL DIRECTIONS OF DISPENSATIONAL THEOLOGY

If at first the Protestant movement aimed at clarifying how salvation is wrought, it later had to contend with two further issues: what is the proper function and mission of the church and does *sola scriptura* apply to natural history?

The Function and Mission of the Church. The rise of Protestant “state churches” left much to be desired. There arose repeated attempts at spiritual renewal. The Puritan controversy in England was one such attempt which ultimately failed. In America Puritanism tried to create a modern counterpart of ancient Israel which collapsed when it couldn’t propagate its agenda into succeeding generations. New England rapidly became “Unitarianized.” Higher criticism of the Bible was beginning to show its unbelieving presence in Protestant academic circles.

New questions demanded answers. What was God’s will for the church? Increase the political power of the organized visible church? Try once again to bring OT Israel’s cultural forms into present society as some groups of Puritans had nearly succeeded at doing? Or regroup as a community distinct from any state structure as the early church had done? What should the church do about the newly discovered, culturally-diverse peoples throughout the continents, all without a gospel witness? Dispensational theology arose out of concerted Bible study that sought answers to these questions. The Church, it was discovered, was a lot more distinct from Israel than classical Protestantism had assumed. Dispensational theology was a dominating force in the modern missionary movement.

Dispensationalism’s Extension of *Sola Scriptura* to Natural History. Other circumstances in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries shaped the focus of Dispensational theological reforms. Mankind’s idea of history was being challenged not only by increased awareness of new peoples who lived far the European homeland of Protestantism but also by discoveries in geology that seemed to point to a high antiquity of the human race. Major political revolutions in America and France proved how rapidly profound changes in history could occur. Structures of parliament and king no longer seemed immutable. The whole complex issue of historical development came on center stage.

Unbelief took the lead in explaining historical development in terms of natural forces. Unbelief could do this because classical Protestantism had stimulated study of the natural world without providing specific interpretative standards from the Bible. The authority of the Scripture was a clear principle to Protestant thinkers in matters of theology but not always in other matters. In fact, as tension increased between biblical history and secular attempts at universal history, Reformed theology tried to solve the problem by extending

accommodating trends found in Calvin's writings.<sup>93</sup> The idea here was to retreat from historical details of the text, or at least minimize them, to avoid what was considered "unnecessary" conflict with historical science. This accommodation, however, only promoted further departures from the biblical picture of world history and eventually set the stage for the rapid growth of higher criticism of the Bible in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout the intellectual world a new paradigm arose in which the Bible was dissected into supposedly conflicting strands with "fake" history and counterfeit authors. In short, the origin of the Bible was now placed solidly within the non-miraculous naturally-evolving world order.

If early Protestants had faced the issue of whether the church controls the canon or the canon controls the church, the later Protestants faced the issue whether natural forces of historical development explained biblical faith or biblical faith explained the natural forces of development. Dispensational theology provided a scheme that explained natural and human history from a clear biblical framework. One historian calls the dispensational view of history as "anti-humanist and anti-developmental" and "a negative parallel to secular concepts of progress" that "opposed the liberal trends at almost every point."<sup>94</sup> It was out of Dispensational theology, therefore, that the modern creationist movement originated.<sup>95</sup>

Like the Anabaptists before them, Dispensationalists sought to use the original Protestant principle of *sola scriptura* to reform ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church) and with that effort clarify the will of God for Christian living as distinct from the modus operandi of OT saints living in the nation Israel. Along the way, Dispensationalists established a scheme of human and natural history that totally opposes modern unbelieving alternatives.

## STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS OF DISPENSATIONALISM

The three components of classical dispensational theology are emphasis upon a literal interpretative approach to biblical covenants, a doxological ultimate purpose to history, and separate identities for Israel and the Church.

A Literal Interpretative Approach to Biblical Covenants. By the time Dispensational theology arose, Bible students were awakened to a better sense of historical development than was known in the original days of the Reformation. They were more alert to interpret, therefore, the biblical covenants in their *historical contexts* rather than treat them as direct sources for systematic theology. A covenant made at one stage of history might differ from a later covenant.

<sup>93</sup> R. Hooykaas, Religion and the Rise of Modern Science (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 114-124.

<sup>94</sup> Marsden, pp. 54, 63.

<sup>95</sup> John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry Morris who triggered the modern creationist movement with their book The Genesis Flood, as well as numerous scientists in the Creation Research Society and the Institute for Creation Research all follow Dispensational theology. Reformed theology with a few exceptional adherents (who ironically were influential in publishing The Genesis Flood when other Christian publishers wouldn't) has either been lukewarm toward the movement or overtly hostile to it.

Perhaps even more important was a new appreciation for the concept of contract law. Covenant language relates intimately to ordinary street language. People enter into contracts with each other to stabilize relationships and to build trust. Ordinary economic and business life (whether in biblical times or in modern society) requires contractual relationships. People in every culture have their own manner of entering into contractual relationships, but they always have the same essentials. The contract defines the parties to it, codifies their expected behavior and establishes some sort of enforcement criteria or standards. Therefore, each contract must have a lexicon of words with common meanings imputed to them by all parties involved.

Two vital implications for the science of interpretation (hermeneutics) follow. First, the meaning of contract terminology must be conservative for the duration of the contract from origin to fulfillment. Second, only literal meanings can be verified or falsified against the enforcement criteria or standards. Two key figures in the rise and spread of Dispensational theology, John Nelson Darby and C. I. Scofield, both studied law in their early years, so they certainly were aware of the hermeneutics of contract law. How natural for them, therefore, after discovering the contractual structure in the Bible, to insist upon strict literal and conservative interpretation of contract or covenant terminology.

These implications are so obvious it is hard to understand how biblical interpreters could have overlooked them for centuries. Imagine an insurance company telling Mr. Jones and his surviving family, after a tornado destroyed his house, that the policy covered his “home” the “real meaning” of which is his *family*, not the *building* they lived in. Everyone would agree that changing the meaning of the original wording from its literal meaning to a metaphorical one amounts to contract fraud.

Dispensational theology views the biblical covenants the same way. Whether the new world covenant of Noah’s day, the Abrahamic Covenant, the Sinaitic Covenant, or any later biblical covenant, they all must be interpreted literally. If not, the faithfulness of God to fulfill each term of each covenant cannot be shown through appeal to subsequent history. When the Abrahamic Covenant, for example, says that land within specific geographical boundaries will “certainly” be given to the descendants of Abraham (Gen.15:18-21), it means just that. This terminology means literal land and can’t be “revised” to refer to immaterial blessings given to the Church later on. It also requires a fulfillment in exact geographical conformity with the text.

This approach to the biblical covenants is very different than that of most Reformed Covenant theology. Covenant theology assumes that the NT is the “final word” on how these biblical covenants are to be fulfilled. It looks for NT “fulfillment formula”, *viz.*, clauses in the NT of the general form “and X fulfilled Y”, where “X” is some NT event or saying and “Y” is an OT reference. If X turns out to be something not within the normal meaning of the original OT

text, then Covenant theology alters the meaning of the OT text to fit X.<sup>96</sup>

Dispensational theology refuses to do so. Instead it insists that no OT covenant is fulfilled until there is an X that corresponds to the normal meaning of the original OT text.

The problem with the Covenant theology approach using NT fulfillment formulas can be illustrated with the Jeremiah 31:15 / Matthew 2:16-18 texts. The Matthew text has a fulfillment formula with X representing Herod's political policy of genocide toward Jewish male babies two years or younger in the Bethlehem region. Y is the Jeremiah text that analyzes God's chastening of Israel during the fall of the Kingdom. Jeremiah speaks, not of babies being killed in Bethlehem (a town south of Jerusalem) but of Jewish young men being led into captivity through the town of Ramah (a town north of Jerusalem). Moreover, the Jeremiah reference isn't a prophecy; it's an analysis of history through the divine disciplinary provisions of the Mosaic and Palestinian biblical covenants. Matthew uses a fulfillment formula, not to show fulfillment of a biblical covenant or prophecy but to show that the Bethlehem genocide fulfilled a pattern of God's working with the nation Israel since the Kingdom had been lost. There is no need to make Jeremiah 31:15 into a prophecy and alter the meaning of "Ramah" into "Bethlehem", "young men" into "babies", and "captivity" to "death." NT fulfillment formulas thus refer to *many different kinds of "fulfillments"—pattern or analogical as well as prophetic*. They do not necessarily refer to only covenant or prophetic fulfillment.<sup>97</sup>

Dispensational theology, instead of starting with the NT and trying to work backward to the OT, starts with the OT and works forward. If a biblical covenant is not fulfilled in the NT, then it speaks to events yet future. The dispensational approach insists upon the conservative nature of covenant terms throughout historical time. In this manner it preserves a straightforward, objective method of verifying fulfillment of covenant promises.

A Doxological Ultimate Purpose to History. Whereas Reformed Covenant theology centers upon God's plan of salvation and makes redemption the ultimate purpose to history, Dispensational theology gives recognition to multiple workings of God, not just to His redemptive program. Speaking of the book of Revelation, John Pilkey writes of this larger perspective:

***“It furnishes an authoritative context larger than the Gospel of salvation and larger than salvation itself. . . .As mortals, we remain in various kinds of trouble; and salvation strikes us as an all-consuming, universal***

<sup>96</sup> See footnote 7.

<sup>97</sup> Hosea 11:1 / Matthew 2:15 is another such instance of a NT fulfillment formula that does not refer to prophetic fulfillment. Here again a general pattern of God's working is fulfilled: events in the life of Israel's Messiah correspond with events in the history of the nation. For more detailed discussion of this point see Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1989), pp. 945-948; and Charles H. Dyer, "Biblical Meaning of 'Fulfillment'," in Issues in Dispensationalism (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp51-72.



*concern. Yet the angels of heaven have never been saved; the demons cannot be saved; and the redeemed in heaven have nothing from which to be saved. If life in the resurrected state has a purpose, goals must exist beyond salvation. Because the book of Revelation has been given to us in our present mortal condition, we are able to anticipate these goals despite our natural preoccupation with personal salvation.”<sup>98</sup>*

By focusing upon areas beyond redemption, Dispensational theology insures that all of the universe falls under a plan of God that is intimately linked to the biblical covenants. *Sola scriptura* is expanded in a detailed fashion so as to apply to natural history as well as to human history (see Chapter One of this Part of the framework series). As a result, Dispensational adherents have been far more antagonistic to secular theories of historical progress as we noted above than classical Reformed theologians.

Another effect of placing redemption inside of a larger context is that the NT interpreter can fully recognize the contingent nature of God’s historical offers. As we mentioned in the introduction to this Part of the framework, biblical history has many “offers” and “hypothetical options.” The most controversial such offer to the Reformed-Dispensational debate is the apparent offer that Jesus made to the nation Israel of the Kingdom. In Matthew 11:14-15 He points out that if Israel would accept Him as the Messiah, then John the Baptist fulfilled the OT prophecy of Elijah who was to usher in the Kingdom of God in history (cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5). The Kingdom “could” have come to Israel at that historical moment. Of course, if it had, then how could the Cross have occurred? Reformed Covenant theologians are horrified at such talk, believing that it somehow denigrates the Cross to a sort of “Plan B” that God thought up at the last minute to deal with the rejection His Son. Such a fluid history in their minds denies the sovereign power of God. It only does so, however, if such contingency lies outside of the plan of God. If His sovereign plan includes these contingencies, then His sovereignty clearly is not threatened. Dispensational theology is, therefore, free to explore textual details in these matters without prematurely limiting possible meanings by a theological structure.

The ultimate purpose of history lies within the sovereign will of the Creator Who has expressed Himself in Scripture and outside of Scripture as Lord of the heavens above as well as over the earth beneath. It is doxological as Paul notes in Romans 11:36 encompasses all things, not just redemption.

Separate Identities of Israel and the Church. No more controversial topic occurs between Reformed Covenant theology and Dispensational theology than the matter of how the Church is related to Israel. Because Reformed theology has insisted upon one, grand, unifying covenant of grace behind all the biblical covenants and because of its emphasis upon divine election of individuals, it allows only “one people of God.” Distinctions between Gentiles, Israel, and the Church are downplayed out of fear that such distinctions will somehow rupture the unity of means in salvation. Adherents of Reformed theology criticize

<sup>98</sup> John Pilkey, *The Origin of the Nations* (San Diego, CA: Master Book Publications, 1984), p. 279f.

Dispensational theology for devoting too much attention to such distinctions. Some go so far as to accuse it of promoting multiple ways of salvation.<sup>99</sup>

As we point out, however, the Church didn't exist before Pentecost (see Chapter Two of this Part of the framework series) so the OT covenants couldn't have been addressed to the Church! *All of them*, except the Noahic (which was addressed to animals as well as to men), *were addressed to the nation Israel*. Jews were the recipients of these covenants—not Gentiles as the Apostle to the Gentiles notes in Romans 3:1-2; 9:3-5. Jesus clearly declared that He was sent not to the Gentiles, but to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6). Even the clause so frequently quoted by Reformed theologians as support for election of one homogeneous people of God (Matt. 1:21) in context refers to Jews, not Gentiles. Over against all “replacement theology” and modern anti-Semitic fringe groups, Jesus dogmatically proclaimed to a non-Jew that “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22).

The future destiny of history after the Church, as foreseen in the OT covenants and in the book of Revelation, continues with the Jewish-Gentile distinction. Dispensational theology, therefore, recognizes multiple peoples of God. Salvation is always the same in this view, by substitutionary blood atonement, but those who are saved do not form one homogeneous elect people of God. God has separate identities for ancient Gentile nations (addressed by nation in the OT prophets), for OT Jews, and for NT Christians. Each group fits within the one doxological purpose of God without conflict.

The distinction between Israel and the Church is discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 of this Part of the framework series. It is important to clarify the different *modus vivendi* utilized by each group for daily living in obedience to God. Further development of the social consequences is presented in Appendices B and C following.

## CONCLUSION

Lesson 166

Reformed theology is to be commended for its clarification of soteriology, its adherence to *sola scriptura* (at least in directly theological matters), and its intellectual discipline of systematically organizing Bible doctrine. We must note, however, that it did not fully carry out Reformation of the Church. Many things were left in a compromised state with Roman Catholic traditions.

Dispensational theology expressed another reformational wave in Church history that expanded the authority of Scripture, especially in defining the nature and mission of the Church. Dispensationalism, by separating the Church from both ancient nation Israel and modern national states, became the home of the modern missionary movement as well as the chief impetus of Fundamentalism in America. It has lent sympathetic hearing to the emergence of the modern state of Israel and to the cause of Jewish missions. Its literal method of interpreting the biblical text has also spawned most of the modern creationist movement.

<sup>99</sup> See John Gerstner, Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism (Nashville: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991), pp. 149-69.