

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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NEW TESTAMENT TIME PERIODS

Disordered and confused thinking in regard to the New Testament is a characteristic of those who handle the Bible today. Details of truth are picked up and placed anywhere with no consideration being given to the divinely revealed order. This compares with the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, spoken of in 2 Tim. 2:17, 18, who laid hold of the fact of resurrection and then declared that it was past already.

If we would be orderly in our thinking about the New Testament, eight clearly marked and definite time periods need to be recognized. This will give us a place for everything and each detail can be put into its proper place. These time periods form the true basis for fulfilling the directive of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

These time periods are in order:

1. **The Earthly Ministry.** This began with the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem and ended with His resurrection from the dead. It was thirty-three years in length and is called in Scripture, "the days of His flesh" (Heb. 5:7). This is a definite time period but it is not a dispensation. The birth of Christ made no change in God's dealings with His people Israel or with other nations. While Jesus Christ was indeed the Messiah, He was never presented to Israel as such. When certain favored men discovered this truth by divine revelation, they were forbidden to tell any man that He was Jesus the Christ (Matt. 16:16-20).

2. **The Acts Period.** This period began with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and continued for a little more than thirty-three years. It ended definitely and absolutely with Paul's great pronouncement in Acts 28: 28 (see Issue no.11).

This time period is a definite dispensation in which God's purposes, methods, and administrations were different from what they had ever been before or ever have been since. Theologians have willfully ignored the peculiar character of the Acts period and have always depreciated its unique dispensational character. It should be plain even to the simplest reader that the presence of divinely commissioned men (heralds and apostles), who spoke a divinely given and inspired message, and which message was always confirmed to the hearers by signs that followed; is bound to result in a different condition than that which prevails today.

3. The Dispensation of Grace. The pronouncement.(Acts 28:28) that closed the Acts period began the dispensation of grace, the time in which we are now living. This time period is also a unique dispensation in which God's method of dealing with the world is one of pure grace, in which every act of God is one of love and favor to the undeserving. In fact, at the present time, if God cannot act in grace, He will not act at all. His purpose in this dispensation is to write into the history of His long dealings with mankind an absolute record of the grace that is inherent in His character. Thus, every act of His is one of love, kindness, favor, compassion, pity, good will, sympathy and tenderness.

God's present administration (dispensation) is not only gracious, it is also in secret (Eph. 3:8) so that the wealth of goodness He pours out daily upon mankind is untraceable. There is no manifestation of what God is now doing, but the believer is able by faith to say, "**Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.**" Psalm 68:19.

The dispensation of grace is not going on forever, but we can rest assured that God will not spoil the record He has been writing for over 1900 years by a great display of wrath and anger. It will end in the greatest display of grace that He has ever shown. God will speak from heaven and enlighten the world (Psa. 85: 8, 11, 97: 4) . He will remove the veil from Christ (1 Cor. 1:7). He will pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2: 17). He will govern the nations upon the earth (Psa. 67:4). All this together will certainly amount to a divine inbreaking into the flow of human history. God will invade the earth by His Spirit, conquer the earth by His Spirit, set up His own order upon the earth, and the result will be a dispensation of absolute, divine government. The Bible calls this the kingdom(government) of God. .

4. The Kingdom (Government) of God. Our God has established His throne (seat of government) in the heavens (Psa. 103: 19) and it is from there that Jesus Christ will govern the earth. He has declared that heaven is His throne and the earth is His footstool (Isa. 66: 1). We can rest in the fact that when He governs, it will be from the throne and not from the footstool. This can properly be called the pre-advent kingdom since it precedes the second coming of Christ and prepares mankind for the thousand years of His glorious presence. The kingdom of God is in reality the subject of the Bible and it is the true hope of mankind. It begins with divine intervention and it is entirely the work of God. There is nothing that man can do toward it. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it (Isa. 9:7). It comes upon men bringing great blessings, but its advent is followed immediately by a judgment of all who are living and this will determine who are to continue to live upon this glorious earth when it is governed by God. There will also be a judgment of all who are dead to determine who should be raised to enjoy life under God's government (2 Tim. 4:1). Every promise and prophecy in the Old Testament has to do with this glorious time. There is no truth to be gained by assigning these prophecies to the thousand years of His personal presence.

5. The Great Testing (Tribulation). Many wild and incoherent prophets of doom have created great fear concerning this seven year period of time, but those who have knowledge of Scripture concerning it will neither be afraid of it nor disturbed by it. Vivid descriptions of the great tribulation have become the stock in trade of many so-called evangelists. It is described as being "**the hour of trial which is coming upon the inhabited earth to try those that dwell upon the earth**" (Rev. 3:10). Common sense will tell us that there would be no value in such a test being made today. The present failure of mankind is an evident fact and testing would reveal nothing that is not manifest. The great testing will come only after men have lived long under God's benevolent government. Those who learn well the lessons taught by the day-to-day experiences of the kingdom of God will have nothing to fear from this time of testing. Yet if they do not learn, then the punishment threatened in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, will be fully justified.

6. The Parousia of Jesus Christ (1,000 years). The great truth expressed by the word *parousia* was lost when it was erroneously translated "coming." It is the coming of Christ that will result in His parousia. He will be personally present upon this earth because of Who He is and what He does in view of His many offices. This is a term in God's school for which we are

not ready. This time is usually called "the millennium" by the world and "the millennial kingdom" by the theologians. The Bible calls it "the parousia of the Lord" and it has to do with the great work of revealing God to mankind. Those who are in it are people who have learned their previous lessons under government and have no need of the disciplines and restraints that government imposes. However "rule and authority" (1 Cor. 15:24) are not nullified until the end of the thousand years of His personal presence. Thomas Jefferson said, "That government is best which governs least." The true purpose of all government should be to produce a people who need none at all. The kingdom (government) of God will do this.

During the parousia of Christ, Satan is bound (Rev. 20:2) in order that he should deceive the nations no more, and after that he must be loosed for a little season. This brings us to the seventh time period.

7. The little Season. We know very little about this as the entire Biblical revelation concerning it is found in Revelation 20:1-3, 7-9. In these verses we learn of an uprising caused by Satanic deception after he has been loosed from being bound during the thousand years. We are told that Satan *must* be loosed for a little season and that he shall be loosed out of his prison. Once he is loosed he goes forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. Of course, it pains us to read of this, and it seems to be utterly impossible after two great periods of divine light and activity. Nevertheless; we accept the divine record without question.

The true picture set forth in Revelation 20:7-9 is one in which we see Satan, one of the cherubim, the greatest deceiver of all times, probably posing as an angel of light, going forth to the nations that are in the four corners of the earth to practice again his wiles upon men who have had no recent experience, if any at all, with this master of deception. The Word reveals that he has some success, but it must be remembered that those who act upon his advice are deceived by him. We do not know what devices he will use, what lies he will tell, what representations he will make, or what rewards he will offer. But we do know that those who succumb to his wiles will think they are following God's messenger, and that when they march toward Jerusalem they will think they are performing God a service.

Their great mistake will be that they fail to put this professed "messenger of light" to the tests that certainly were readily available to them, and this leads to their deception. The outcome of this deception is that they travel toward Jerusalem, unopposed by God or man, and they circle this "beloved city." Up to this point they have harmed no one and they have not been harmed. But the moment they circle the camp of the saints fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours them. One flash, and nothing remains but a handful of ashes where each man stood. Thus, again men have been tested and the divine realm is purged.

8. The New Heaven and the New Earth. The words "heaven (s) and earth" when used together in Scripture represent an order, system, world (*kosmos*). The words are used interchangeably in 2 Peter 3:5-7,13. There we learn of the heavens and earth that were of old, the heavens and earth which are now, and the heavens and earth which shall be. We know very little of this and we are told very little about it, there being nothing in our knowledge or experience whereby we could comprehend it. But as we advance through the kingdom of God and through the parousia of Christ we will gain the basis which will make understanding possible. This time period is as far as the Bible takes us.

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