

Dispensations, Part 3

We have examined the first five dispensations: the Age of Innocence, the Age of Conscience, the Age of Human Government, the Age of the Patriarchs, and the Age of the Law (also known as the Age of Israel). Each dispensation begins with blessings and a test; mankind fails the test, and the dispensation concludes with divine judgment. These dispensations are designed to progressively reveal God's plan of redemption to mankind and to teach man about himself and his human nature.

There are two dispensations remaining: the Church Age and the Kingdom Age. As noted, the Church Age was not revealed to Daniel in his Seventy Weeks Prophecy, nor to any of the preceding dispensations. Paul referred to it as a *mysterion*, meaning something that was kept hidden and revealed to him and the other apostles after the Cross.

Based on an interpretation of Daniel's Seventy Weeks Prophecy, we observed that 69 of the weeks have been fulfilled, leaving the final week seemingly unaccounted for. We concluded that the missing week is the yet-to-come Tribulation week, and the Age of Israel was interrupted when they rejected their Messiah and crucified Him. The Church Age was introduced during this time when God offered the rejected Messiah and the spiritual aspects of the Kingdom (the indwelling Holy Spirit) to the Gentiles. Israel is set aside while the Church Age runs its course, but God is not finished with Israel. He will return to deal with them during that final week of Daniel's prophecy—the Tribulation—where they will face their ultimate discipline for their sins before finding redemption and entering the final dispensation, the Kingdom/Millennium.

The Church Age

Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and

prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

In verse 2, the term “stewardship” is derived from the Greek word *oikonomia*, which also translates to “dispensations.” The phrase “stewardship of God’s grace” refers to the dispensation of the Age of Grace, also known as the Church Age. During the Age of the Law, there was no universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit; only a select few, such as the artisans who created worship articles in the Temple, certain kings like David, and the prophets, experienced this indwelling and empowerment for specific tasks. Righteousness could only be attained through adherence to the Law, which proved impossible, as the Jews could only rely on their human capabilities to live righteously before God. However, in the Church Age, under God’s grace, believers can live righteously through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Their success is limited only by their free will decision to access that power to resist sin and follow God or not.

It is important to note that this is the same power source that Jesus, in His humanity, used here on Earth. He set aside His deity to become human (Phil 2:6-8). Everything He accomplished—His miracles, His sinlessness, and enduring the Cross—was achieved not through His deity but through His humanity, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1; Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12). Thus, we say, “Jesus test-drove the spiritual life, proved it worked, and left it here for us to use” (Rom 8:5, 14). Galatians 5:16 states that if you “walk by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” Jesus lived a sinless life by the power of the Holy Spirit, and believers during this Church Age, with the indwelling Holy Spirit, have the same power to resist sin and live righteously; however, we must use our free will and make that choice to “walk by the Spirit.”

Paul says this mystery “was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (v. 5). This mystery, the Church Age, was kept secret from all the dispensations before it and was only then fully revealed to the apostles and prophets.

While Israel remains central to God's plan, Gentile believers are also heirs to His promises (Rom 8:17; Eph 3:6). Paul makes it clear that God is not done with Israel. He will continue to engage with them during the Tribulation, after the Church is taken away by the Rapture, and throughout the subsequent Kingdom Age.

Daniel was not shown the Church Age because the prophecy he received concerned "his" people and not the Gentiles. The Church Age is a Gentile age, as God gave the Messiah to the Gentiles when Israel rejected Him. The Tribulation, the missing yet future 70th week of Daniel's prophecy, is found throughout Scripture, seen as relating to Israel and referred to as a "time of Jacob's trouble." Beyond chapter 3 of Revelation and the messages to the seven churches, the Church is not seen except in heaven, represented by the 24 elders in chapter 4. There are no references to it afterward, and the remainder of Revelation speaks almost exclusively of events relating to Israel.

The Church Age, along with its associated doctrines, was a *mysterion* or mystery kept hidden from the foundations of the heavens and the earth (Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:26). Late in His ministry, after it became clear that Israel would reject Him, Jesus began speaking in parables, leading His disciples to ask why He did this. His answer is found in Mark 4:11, where Jesus tells them (the disciples), "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.' "

Jesus alluded to the fact that Israel has been "blinded" as a result of their apostasy and rejection of the Messiah. Their hearts have been hardened by their own willful rebellion (Romans 11:25). We see Israel's blindness in Matthew 15:14, where Jesus tells His disciples to leave the Pharisees alone because they are blinded. Many other Scriptures refer to this blindness, such as Matthew 23:16-17, 19, 24, 26; Luke 6:39; John 9:39, 40; 12:40; Romans 2:19; 2 Corinthians 4:4. In the John 9:40 passage, the Pharisees even perceive that Jesus is speaking of them and their blindness. This blindness is judicial in nature and self-inflicted. It will be

lifted during the Tribulation when Israel will, at last, see the truth of Jesus as the Messiah.

This blindness does not imply that Jews cannot attain a saving knowledge of Christ. It is national in nature and a partial blindness. Many Jews do come to Christ and are saved. Numerous Messianic congregations worldwide acknowledge and believe in Jesus as the Messiah through faith in His work on the Cross. They are born-again believers in Jesus Christ.

In the beginning, the Gospel was to be given to the Jews first (Romans 1:16); however, as the Jews continued to reject Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah was instead offered to the Gentiles. Paul, never one to mince words, addressed the Jews this way: "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Through this action, it was hoped that Israel would be provoked to jealousy (Romans 11:11, 14; 10:19). This was prophesied in Deuteronomy 32:21.

Deuteronomy 32:21 They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

But that does not mean they are lost forever.

Romans 11:11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

They are likened to an olive branch broken off the tree that can be grafted back on.

Romans 11:17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant

toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Israel rejected the Messiah, but God's plan was not inconvenienced at all. God knew in eternity past that an apostate Israel would reject their King and intended all along to give that King to the Gentiles instead. However, the plan was kept hidden so as not to interfere with Israel's free will. In a sense, Israel was given "first right of refusal" due to their chosen status.

Do not for a moment think that Israel has been rejected by God in all this. Do not for a moment believe that the Church has somehow permanently replaced Israel. Some denominations teach this false doctrine of "replacement theology" and assert that the Church has replaced Israel. Refer to Romans 11:1-10 to see that Israel has not been rejected.

Romans 11:1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!

The passage continues to describe their blindness. God will redeem His chosen people and deliver to them the promise of the New Covenant to Israel, as noted in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Romans 11:25 Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; ²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

This blindness is temporary and will be lifted during the Tribulation, allowing Israel to see the truth. Verse 23 states that “all Israel will be saved.” Here, “saved” probably should be understood as delivered out of the Tribulation rather than as eternal salvation, although many will have seen and accepted the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. The Messiah will rescue all living Jews out of the Tribulation at the second advent, and it is quite possible that this will represent only born-again Jews that God has kept alive (saved) during those seven years.

Following the Second Advent and before the Kingdom Age, there will be a judgment in which Jesus will separate the “sheep” from the “goats.” The sheep represent those who are born-again, and only they will enter the Kingdom Age that follows.

Matthew 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world

“Nations” should be translated as "Gentiles." These are the people, aside from Jews, who have lived through the Tribulation, described here as a mingling of sheep and goats.

We are currently in the Church Age, which began on the day of Pentecost in AD 30 when the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. However, we do not know when it will conclude. It could happen in a thousand years, ten years, or even tomorrow. No one knows the day or the hour. What we do know is that it will end with an event referred to as the Rapture or Resurrection of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:51-55).

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in

the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

After this event, the Age of Israel will continue. Israel is owed seven years, the most challenging period in human history, the Tribulation, a time when God will judge an unbelieving world and guide Israel toward national redemption.

References in Scripture to the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" and "the kingdom of God" refer to the spiritual aspects of the Kingdom Age, the seventh and final dispensation. During the Church Age, believers can experience these spiritual benefits. They include the indwelling and potential empowerment of the Holy Spirit for all believers, an incredible power source experienced by very few in previous ages. This power source, found in the Holy Spirit, enables Church Age believers to achieve true victory over sin and cultivate a deep, personal relationship with the Creator, which is impossible under the Law. Clearly, the Church Age represents a change in the "economy."

With the Church Age, humanity faced a new test: Would they trust in their own abilities (works) or in God's provisions of grace? Man has failed this test! Few individuals can let go of their arrogance and fully trust God. Instead, they become entangled in the legalistic practices inherent in the Law and the system of works for salvation.

By ignoring the reality of nature, which displays God's character and glory, humanity fails to honor God appropriately, leading to further degradation of mankind (Romans 1:18-29). Self-righteousness and pride can prevent one from believing in or trusting the gospel message (Acts 26:28, Romans 10:2-4). Additionally, the reluctance to acknowledge one's need for deliverance or divine salvation may arise from various sins that create a hardened heart (Hebrews 3:7-11). Consequently, those who refuse to believe must face the consequences.

John 8:24 "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."

Corporately, nations fail when many individuals reject the gospel for themselves, allowing evil to flourish (Matthew 13:31-33). This ultimately leads to the moral, social, and political disintegration of society (Proverbs 28:5, 29:16, Isaiah 5:20).

Secular humanism, as a mindset that stems from this, offers inadequate answers to society's problems while either ignoring or persecuting those who uphold sound doctrine. Confronted by an anti-God, anti-Christian philosophy, nations become susceptible to further deception and error, ultimately leading to self-destruction (Proverbs 14:12, 21:7). This is what is occurring today, and we face divine discipline for it. The Church Age will conclude, and God will administer discipline for our failure under grace. I believe we are witnessing the beginnings of that discipline now, and assuming we are near the end of the age—and I think we are—it will continue into the Tribulation that follows.

The Wedding of the Messiah

To understand the timing of events related to the end of the Church Age, the conclusion of the Age of Israel, and the beginning of the Kingdom Age, consider a series of statements Jesus made toward the end of His earthly ministry. These statements are linked to a traditional first-century Middle Eastern wedding.

In Scripture, the Church is depicted as the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:22-33; Rev 21:2, 9; 22:17). Both the Old Testament and the New Testament describe how Christ, the Bridegroom, is in the process of marrying His bride, the believers in Him who will ultimately live and dwell with Him forever.

The Church Age concludes with the Church's resurrection at the Rapture, when Christ returns for His bride and brings her to His Father's house.

Let's first consider some relevant passages:

John 14:2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to

myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Mark 13:32 “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. (The Parable of the Absent House Owner follows.)

Matthew 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” (24 Elders seen in v4.)

Traditional Middle Eastern Wedding

The above passages and others are more meaningful when considered in the context of a traditional Middle Eastern wedding in the first century.

- 1. The selection of the bride.**
 - The father of the bridegroom typically selects the bride, just as God selects the believers in the Messiah (John 15:16).
- 2. A bride price was established.**

- A price must be paid for the bride. In Hebrew, the agreed-upon price is called a *mohar*. *Yeshua* paid a very high price for His bride—His life.
3. **The bride and groom are betrothed to each other.**
 - This is the first stage of marriage, known as *kiddushin* or betrothal. It is the first of two steps in the marriage process.
 - A betrothal legally binds the bride and groom in a marriage contract, even though they do not live together physically.
 - Historically, God betrothed Himself to Israel at Mount Sinai (Jeremiah 2:2; Hosea 2:19-20).
 - Whenever you invite the Messiah into your heart, you become betrothed to Him during your time on earth.
 4. **A written document, known as a *ketubah*, is drawn up.**
 - The *ketubah* is the marriage contract that outlines the bride's price, the groom's promises, and the bride's rights. The term *ketubah* translates to "that which is written."
 - The Bible serves as the believer's *ketubah*.
 5. **The bride must give her consent.**
 - As *Jeremiah 2:2* states, God betrothed Himself to Israel at Mount Sinai. *Exodus 24:3* records that Israel consented to God's marriage proposal, saying, "I do. "
 - Similarly, Church Age believers must provide their free will consent to the relationship, as it is stated in *Romans 10:8-10*:
 6. **Gifts were presented to the bride, and the bride and groom exchanged a cup known as the cup of the covenant.**
 - The rite of betrothal (*erusin*) concludes when the groom presents the bride with something of value, and she accepts it.
 - God gives the Holy Spirit to those who accept the Messiah, along with approximately thirty other gifts, including eternal life, Christ's imputed righteousness, spiritual gifts, and more.
 - Additionally, at this moment, the cup of the covenant was shared, sealing the covenant between the bride and groom by drinking wine. The cup is first offered to the groom to sip, and then it is presented to the bride. This cup called the "cup of the covenant," is referenced in *Jeremiah 31:31-33*.
 - Jesus referred to the cup of the New Covenant at the Last Supper in *Luke 22:20*.
 7. **The bride underwent a *mikvah*, a ritual cleansing.**

- *Mikvah* is a ceremonial act of purification through immersion in water, symbolizing a transition from an old way of life to a new one. In the context of marriage, it signifies leaving behind a former life to begin anew with your spouse (Gen 2:23-24; Eph 5:31).
 - Immersing in the *mikvah* is regarded as a spiritual rebirth.
 - Both water baptism and Spirit baptism come to mind here.
8. **The bridegroom left to return to his father's house to prepare the bridal chamber.**
- At this point, the bridegroom departs for his father's house to prepare the bridal chamber for his bride.
 - Before he leaves, he tells the bride, "I go to prepare a place for you; if I go, I will return again to you."
 - This is the same statement Jesus made in John 14:1-3 before He went to His Father's house in heaven.
9. **The bride was consecrated and set apart for a time while the bridegroom was away constructing the house.**
- Before the bridegroom could retrieve the bride, the groom's father had to be satisfied that the son had made every preparation. Only then would he give permission for the son to go and retrieve the bride.
 - The bridegroom did not know when his father would consider the bridal chamber acceptable and send him to retrieve his bride.
 - This is precisely what Jesus referred to in Mark 13:32: "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."
 - Meanwhile, the bride eagerly awaited the return of the bridegroom. In her mind, he could arrive at any moment, even in the middle of the night or at midnight. Therefore, she needed to be prepared at all times.
 - Jesus alludes to this in Mark 13:32-37 and Matthew 25:1-13.
10. **The bridegroom would return with a shout, "Behold, the bridegroom comes!" and the ram's horn (*shofar*) would be sounded.**
- When the bridegroom arrived, he came with a shout (Matthew 25:6) and the sound of a *shofar* (trumpet) (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Rev 4:1).
 - The bridegroom arrived at the bride's house ***but did not enter; instead, he called out for her to come to him.*** She obliged, and

the couple returned to the prepared bridal chamber for their honeymoon.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:17** we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air,

11. **He would “abduct” his bride, usually in the middle of the night, and take her to the bridal chamber, where the marriage would be consummated.**

- The bride and groom will go to the wedding chamber, referred to as *chadar* in Hebrew, where they will consummate their marriage. They will stay in that wedding chamber for seven days, or one week. (Genesis 29:26: Laban said, “It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷ **Fulfill her week**, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years.” ²⁸ Then Jacob did so and **fulfilled her week**. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife also.)
- At the end of seven days, the bride and groom will emerge from the wedding chamber. (Joel 2:16 Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room.)
- The word “*week*” in Hebrew is “*shavuah*.” It translates to “seven” and can refer to either seven days or seven years.
- Bible believers recognize the week mentioned in Daniel 9:27 as the Tribulation.
- The Jewish people interpret this period as the birth pangs of the Messiah, known in Hebrew eschatology as the “*Chevlai shel Mashiach*.”

12. **Finally, a marriage supper will be held for all the invited guests.**

- The marriage was consummated on the first night (Gen 29:23).
- The bride and groom would spend seven days in the wedding chamber (Daniel’s seventieth week).
- When the bride and groom initially entered the wedding chamber, the bridegroom’s friend stood outside the door.
 - All the guests assembled for the wedding gathered outside, waiting for the friend of the bridegroom to announce the consummation of the marriage, as relayed by the groom. John the Baptist referred to this in John 3:29.

- At this signal, great rejoicing broke forth (John 3:29).
- The bloodstained linen from that night was preserved as proof of the bride's virginity (Deut 22:13-21).
- On the wedding day, the groom is regarded as a king, and the bride is perceived as a queen.
- After the marriage, the bride and groom will return to Earth at the Second Advent. The marriage supper will take place on Earth, and only the invited guests of the Father of the Groom (God the Father) will be present at the banquet (Rev 19:7-16).
- The wedding supper is a theme of the *Sukkot* festival, symbolizing the Kingdom Age.

The wedding ceremony perfectly depicts the relationship between Church Age believers and Christ, our "husband. " He comes for His bride in the Rapture.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

The true Church, made up of believers in Jesus Christ, will not experience any part of the Tribulation. The Rapture is a pre-Tribulation event. While the dreadful events of the Tribulation unfold on earth, the Church will be in heaven undergoing our "evaluation" for rewards (or not).

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Thus, the Church Age comes to an end. The true Church, as the bride of Christ, is rescued and prepared to receive rewards in heaven. God then turns His focus back to unbelieving Israel and the final seven years of Daniel's Seventieth Week. Meanwhile, Israel, which failed under the Law, and the apostate church, which stumbled under grace, will face judgment during the Tribulation.