

From
EDEN
To
ETERNITY

God's Plan of the Ages



Pastor Hollis Partlowe

**FROM EDEN TO ETERNITY
(God's Plan of the Ages)**

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this booklet is to give an overview of the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation, with a brief coverage of the period from Malachi to Matthew. This intertestamental period—that is, the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament—is often referred to as “The Four Hundred Silent Years.” Why? Because there was no word of divine inspiration during that time.

The writer has tried to be very simple in his approach, avoiding complicated and unknown terms to the average reader. However, some of the words and phrases may not be familiar to some readers—in which case, please see the glossary in back for definitions.

All quotations are from the King James Version unless stated otherwise. At the same time, modern translations are used frequently. It is hoped that this effort will increase the reader’s faith in the Bible, the very Word of God. As it is written:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, NASB).

“No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:21, NASB).

Many pages of details could certainly be added to each major heading in this survey, but it is our purpose here to give only a skeleton outline of God’s redemptive plan for earth and man. When completed, the perfect conditions seen in Genesis 1 and 2 will be restored to planet earth in what Scripture calls “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1; 2 Pet. 3:13; Isa. 65:17).

It is my prayer that you will be blessed by the message of this booklet, and that you will have an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11).

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FROM EDEN TO ETERNITY **(God's Plan of the Ages)**

All of the Bible can be divided into five Ages—from Eden to eternity. The whole plan of redemption which God has so graciously revealed to man on the pages of sacred Scripture covers five major time periods. They are as follows:

- I. THE PATRIARCHAL AGE: From Adam to Moses
- II. THE JEWISH AGE: From Moses to the Death of Christ
- III. THE CHURCH AGE: From Pentecost to the Second Coming of Christ
- IV. THE MILLENNIUM: Jesus' 1000-Year Reign on King David's Throne in Jerusalem
- V. ETERNITY: New Heavens and New Earth

It is our goal at this time to touch briefly on each of these time periods. Hopefully this overview of God's program will help us get a handle on the whole Bible so God's Word will be more understandable and meaningful to us.

Now, the Bible does not necessarily divide God's plan into these five time periods, but to deny them is to deny the obvious. This is a systematic, orderly way to organize the whole plan of redemption from Genesis to Revelation.

I. THE PATRIARCHAL AGE: From Adam to Moses

There was little or no written revelation during the Patriarchal Age. God spoke directly to certain men and revealed His plan and purposes to them. These men were God's leaders. God worked through heads of tribes. The institution of worship was the altar during the Patriarchal Age. God's people worshiped Him by offering animal sacrifices. This was the common method of worshipping God during the time from Adam to Moses. There was no organized system of worship.

Genesis 1 and 2 record the creation of all things by a powerful and mighty God. The Bible opens with this sublime statement: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Genesis 2:7 records the formation of the first man, Adam.

"The LORD God formed man of the dust of
the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the
breath of life; and man became a living
soul."

Observe the common equation: the dust of the ground plus the breath of life equals a living person. The first man resulted from an immediate creative act of God. He did not evolve over millions of years from a single cell, as evolutionists would have us believe. Moreover, God created man "in his own image," which sets man apart from the rest of His creation (Gen. 1:27).

The fall of man from his perfect environment is recorded in Genesis 3. It's a sad story. Adam and his wife Eve chose to obey the dust-made serpent, which "was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made," instead of obeying their Maker (Gen. 2:19; 3:1, NIV). That one act plunged mankind into the condition of sin and death (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22). Yes, we all inherited a sinful nature from the first man, Adam. Consequently, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). Someday you

and I will “go the way of all the earth” and keep our appointment with death (1 Kings 2:1, 2; Heb. 9:27).

Moving on through the first book of the Bible, we come to the universal flood in Noah’s day (Gen. 6-9). Man had become so wicked that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. . . . The earth [was] filled with violence” (Gen. 6:5, 13). That sounds like our day, doesn’t it?

Because of sin, God brought judgment upon the human race in the form of a world-wide flood (Gen. 7:10-24). Only Noah and his wife, and their three sons and their wives were saved in the God-designed ark. (See 1 Pet. 3:20.) The rest of humankind perished, and the earth was repopulated by Noah’s three sons—Ham, Shem, and Japheth (Gen. 5:32; 8:18). The line of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, would come through Shem.

After the flood the first thing Noah did was to build an altar and worship the God of creation (Gen. 8:20). This speaks well of him. How deeply he must have loved God after experiencing such a miraculous deliverance for him and his family from world-wide destruction.

The Institution of Human Government

Up until this time God had governed His creation directly. Now a new dispensation (administration, economy) is being instituted. God is going to manage His household world differently. That’s what I mean by “dispensation.”

A part of this new arrangement in which man is responsible to govern himself is capital punishment. God ordained that the death penalty should be inflicted for murder.

“WHOSO SHEDDETH MAN’S BLOOD,
BY MAN SHALL HIS BLOOD BE SHED:
FOR IN THE IMAGE OF GOD MADE HE
MAN” (Gen. 9:6).

God says that life is holy, that man was made in His image, and whoever chooses to reach out and take the life of another human being has already chosen to have his life taken “by man”—that is,

by the judicial system. This concept spills over into subsequent time periods and is still in force today. Make no mistake: the Bible teaches capital punishment. Romans 13 clearly teaches that Christians should obey civil government.

God had a clear purpose in issuing this commandment—protection of the innocent. God says that life is sacred and precious, but in our society today life is as cheap as dirt. This writer believes in capital punishment for another reason. It is a deterrent to crime, in my opinion, although it has not been practiced consistently enough in our society to get a solid reading on it.

It is obvious that God did not allow capital punishment for murderers before the flood, as in the case of Cain (Gen. 4:13-15), but it is clear that He did institute it after the flood (Gen. 9:5, 6). A new dispensation was instituted after the flood which gave man authority to rule over the earth and maintain law and order. A part of this authority was the judicial taking of human life for some crimes.

Shortly after Noah and his family left the ark, God ordained capital punishment for murderers (Gen. 9:5, 6). Capital punishment necessitates a human government agency to administer the sentence of execution. God required that the murderer's blood be shed by man. Actually, when God commanded capital punishment, He was thereby instituting human government as a further restraint against the lawless rebellion of man. Romans 13:1-7 indicates that governmental authority derives its existence from God, that it was ordained for the purpose of restraining evil, and that it functions as the servant of God when it uses the sword for capital punishment. This is the function of political government, according to the Roman passage.

Human government, then, with its authority to administer capital punishment, was a new ruling factor which God ordained for humankind shortly after the flood. Its purpose was to maintain law and order, to protect the innocent, and restrain evil.

II. THE JEWISH AGE: From Moses to the Death of Christ

This time period is often called the Mosaic Age because the law covenant that God gave His people Israel through Moses was the basis of His relationship with His people during that time period. Moses was the great lawgiver and emancipator of the Hebrews. He and Joshua were used of God to lead Israel out of bondage in Egypt and to bring them into Canaan, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” (See the Old Testament books Exodus through Joshua.) The law covenant ended with the death of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

More Scripture deals with Israel than any other subject in the Bible. This is certainly understandable when we realize that God’s great purpose in keeping the Jews a separate and holy people was to bring His Son into the world through this divinely chosen nation. God and Israel are seen as husband and wife to illustrate the close relationship between them (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 31:32).

The institution of worship during the age of the law was the tabernacle—and later the temple. An orderly systematic form of worship was established which God required His covenant people Israel to follow. No other approach to God was acceptable.

Perhaps we should point out here that the whole Mosaic system pointed to some aspect of the Person and work of Christ. It was a temporary system. The law covenant that God made with Israel through Moses in its entirety was nailed to the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14-17).

Since the Jewish nation rejected their king (Messiah) and turned Him over to the Romans for crucifixion, God turned to Gentile nations to call out from them a people for His name (Acts 5:14; Eph. 3:14, 15). This group is called the church (*ekklesia*), the called-out ones. God’s people on earth today constitute the church. We’ll talk about this in our next section. Now back to the Mosaic Age.

The Sabbath

Perhaps the most distinguishing mark of the Jewish Age was the Sabbath, the seventh day of rest in which no work was to be done. This commandment was given only to Israel as a sign between God and His elect nation.

“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever” (Ex. 31:16, 17a).

Observe that this special day of rest was given to Israel. It was never given to the church. The Sabbath was Saturday. It never was Sunday, and no one has ever changed it. The day started at sunset Friday and ended at sunset Saturday. In contrast to the Jewish day Saturday, Christians worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Bible deals with two religions—Judaism and Christianity. Judaism was temporary and only for Israel. Christianity is permanent and the perfect religion for all mankind. The Book of Hebrews makes this abundantly clear. “For if the first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second” (Heb. 8:7, NASB). Christianity has superseded Judaism.

During the Mosaic Age, God commanded that Sabbath-breakers be put to death. “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death” (Ex. 35:2). Moreover, the Jews could not even kindle a fire on the Sabbath day (v. 3).

Consider an example of the death penalty being inflicted as recorded in Numbers 15:32-36. “While the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to

him. And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses." This may seem brutal to us today, but it was the very Word of God. If anyone has any doubts about the death penalty, please read Exodus 21 and 22. God's goal was to "put away sin from Israel." This divinely chosen nation was to be the channel through which man's Redeemer would come. In that gracious redemptive plan, every human being in all nations could find forgiveness of sin and assurance of eternal life in the Age to Come. That is the universal offer of a good and gracious God in the Christian religion.

III. THE CHURCH AGE: From Pentecost to the Second Coming

The institution of worship is the church during the time period in which we live. God is calling individuals from all nations to be a part of His forever family. As each believer responds to God's call for salvation, God baptizes him or her by the Spirit and adds him or her to the church, the body of Christ. (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:47.) During the Age of the law only the Jews had a covenant relationship with God. All others were classified as heathen. In Israel one had to make his offering "at the door of the tabernacle" or "be cut off from among the people" (Lev. 17:8, 9). In contrast, the church is found wherever "two or three are gathered together" in the name of Christ (Matt. 18:20). The church is world wide.

We must remember that three Ages meet in the four Gospels, the books of the New Testament which cover the earthly ministry of Christ. Jesus^c opened His public ministry with the words, "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17). Our Lord offered the Kingdom to the Jews at that time. God was ready to set up His Kingdom then and there, and so was Christ, but the people were not spiritually ready—so it did not happen. Jesus told the Jews of His Age: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruits" (Matt. 21:43, NIV). God was getting ready to set aside the Jewish people temporarily and turn to the nations to call out His church (*ekklesia*).

Secondly, the law covenant was still in force. The temple was still standing, the sacrificial system and the priesthood were still active, the Sabbath was still being observed, etc. The New Covenant could not come into force until Jesus died. Notice how clearly the writer of the Book of Hebrews establishes this concept:

"For this reason He is the mediator of
a new covenant, in order that since a death
has taken place for the redemption of the
transgressions that were committed under

the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives” (Heb. 9:15-17, NASB).

We must keep in mind that the law covenant was in full force until Jesus died. Then it ended and the New Testament came into full force. The New Testament is in the form of a will. It could not become valid until the death of Christ, the one who made the will. Jesus’ death occurred at the end of each of the four Gospels.

The third time period which meets in the four Gospels is the Church Age. While Jesus was offering the Kingdom to Israel, He knew the religious leaders would reject it. And it was evident they would reject Him as its King. At the same time, He was preparing the twelve disciples to be the nucleus of the church. During the Church Age, the faithful would preach to the ends of the earth the truths of Christ crucified, risen, and coming again. That’s where you and I come in. We are to be about this business of making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV). The Jews were never so commissioned.

As you study the Gospels it’s vitally important to recognize that a tremendous transition is going on in that section of the Bible. The law covenant is passing off the stage of history, the Kingdom is being offered to Israel, and the church is being introduced. Jesus dealt with all three of these during His earthly ministry. If we fail to keep that in mind we will be greatly confused.

“I will build my church; and the gates of hell [*hades*, death] shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

Jesus was well into His earthly ministry when He said that,

knowing full well that the Jewish leaders were already in the process of rejecting Him as their King, and the law covenant was about to end. Consequently, He focused on training the twelve to be the nucleus of a new group called the church (*ekklesia*). The church was still future when Jesus made the announcement concerning its birth and endurance.

The whole tendency of Scripture is toward the position of distinguishing rather than merging Biblical Judaism and Christianity. The word "Israel" is never used of Gentiles.

The church did not exist in Old-Testament times. It did not come into functional existence until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when the Lord by the Spirit baptized that little band of struggling believers.

Although the church was a part of God's overall plan from the beginning, He did not put that part of His plan into functional operation until 10 days after Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 2). The formation of the church resulted from the baptism of the Holy Spirit, a work not experienced until the Day of Pentecost. Clearly a new era was inaugurated at Pentecost. The church came into existence as a brand-new entity. It did not enter Israel's program. The New Covenant is brand new. It was not in existence before Christ died, which could not be true if the New Covenant were simply a continuation of the old.

It's interesting to notice that the word "church" occurs only three times in the Gospels; it appears only in Matthew, only in two verses, and is used exclusively by Jesus (Matt. 16:18; 18:17).

The church consists of Jews and Gentiles baptized by the Spirit into one body, the Head of which is Christ (Col. 1:18).

"There is neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile],
there is neither bond nor free, there is
neither male nor female: for ye are all
one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

We lose our nationality when we come into Christ. We are Christians, not Jews or Gentiles. The church is a brand-new group, scarcely seen if at all in the Old Testament. The church is a New-Testament revelation.

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13, NASB).

Here is something you never saw or heard of in the Old Testament—Jews and Gentiles formed into one body by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament a clear distinction was maintained between Jews and Gentiles. The church is unique. It has a distinct character and is separate from all other peoples of the world.

Then, too, Scripture specifically shows that the church not only was *not* revealed in Old-Testament times, but the revelation of it was “kept secret since the world began” (Rom. 16:25). Notice how Paul elaborates on this concept.

“Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship [dispensation] from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints” (Col. 1:25, 26, NASB).

Notice that the church which Jesus committed Himself to build (Matt. 16:18) was “hidden from past ages and generations,” and was revealed by Paul and the other apostles. The word “mystery” as it is used in the New Testament doesn’t mean something that is incapable of being understood, but a new revelation—something not revealed in the Old Testament. The new revelation of Jew and Gentile united in one body by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit was not taught in the Old Testament. The church is a New-Testament entity, hardly—if at all—hinted at in the Old Testament. Paul stresses this same thought in his letter to the Ephesians.

“If indeed you have heard of the stewardship [dispensation] of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery [new revelation], as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has

now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. . . . And to bring to light what is the administration [dispensation] of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things” (Eph. 3:2-6, 9, NASB).

When Jesus comes the second time we'll enter into the fourth period of this study.

IV. THE MILLENNIUM:

Jesus' 1000-Year Reign on King David's Throne in Jerusalem

God ordained that Jesus Christ should reign over this planet in truth and righteousness from the Holy City, Jerusalem—"the city of the great King" (Matt. 5:35). When Jesus comes the second time, He will exert His authority and power over this planet (Psa. 72:7-11). The meek shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

All of mankind is divided into three groups—Jews, Gentiles, and the Church of God (1 Cor. 10:32). All three people groups will have part in Jesus' reign on earth in the Age to Come.

The Church's Position

The church will reign with Christ as kings and priests and assist Him in His governmental rule of this planet. "Do you not know that the saints [the Christians] will [one day] judge and govern the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2, A.B.) Yes, the unique group of believers of our Age which constitutes the church will help Christ manage His government during His thousand-year reign over the whole earth. Students who interpret Scripture normally usually refer to this time period as "the millennium."

The word "millennium" is derived from the Latin words for "thousand years." The term "thousand years" is found six times in Revelation 20:1-15. This time period doesn't begin until Jesus literally returns from heaven (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Acts 1:11). The physical presence of Christ will bring about major changes as His rule and authority extend over the entire earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:15, 16). Jesus' literal reign on David's throne gives the prophecies of both the Old and New Testaments adequate fulfillment.

What a wonderful blessing awaits us in the future. Listen to John the Revelator as he reveals our exalted position in God's coming Kingdom:

"Thou hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we

shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9, 10). Yes, we shall rule with Christ, our lovely Lord, praising Him each step of the way. Overcomers are promised “power over the nations” (Rev. 2:26).

We would expect a major event such as the second coming of Christ to bring about significant changes in the earth and its government. If the prophecies of the millennial Kingdom are interpreted in their normal sense, they describe a dispensation that is clearly different from that of the law and also from the present Age. The physical presence of Christ will bring about major changes as His rule and authority extend over the entire planet. “All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him” (Psa. 72:11).

The righteous rule of God will be restored world wide. Nature will be restored to its pre-fall condition (Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:18-23). The climate and natural elements will be controlled perfectly for the good of man (Joel 2:21-32).

There will be food in abundance (Amos 9:13-15). All animals will be tame and vegetarian in diet (Isa. 11:6-9; 65:25). Longevity of patriarchs will be restored (Isa. 65:20-22). Mankind will submit to the righteous rule of Messiah. Rebels will be executed (Isa. 11:3, 4).

Christ will bring all this about by establishing and reigning over a literal, earthly, political Kingdom from David’s throne in Jerusalem. Prophecies of Christ’s second coming are major themes of both the Old and New Testaments.

The millennium is superseded by the timeless eternity which follows.

Israel’s Position

Another major part of the millennial Kingdom is the restoration and conversion of God’s ancient people Israel. Although the Jews rejected their Messiah when He came the first time, the remnant of that nation will accept Him at His second coming. At that time they will ask Him: “What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zech. 13:6). When the Jews recognize that Christ is indeed their Messiah whom their ancestors crucified so many years ago, “they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son,

and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zech. 12:10). There was no such repentance in Israel when Jesus came the first time, but clearly there will be when He comes the second time. “And so all Israel shall be saved . . . for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (Rom. 11:26, 27).

With Israel redeemed, converted, and empowered by the Lord God, Israel will dominate the nations during the millennial Kingdom. She will yet fulfill her God-given role as head of the nations (Deut. 28:13).

It seems evident that God is going to use Israel in a mighty way to subdue nations as He establishes and extends His Kingdom to the ends of the earth. God says to His chosen nation:

“You are my war club, my weapon for battle—with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms” (Jer. 51:20, NIV).

“The nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined” (Isa. 60:12, NIV).

Apparently, Christ will use Israel to bring the nations of earth under his righteous rule.

The Nations' Position

The third people group to participate in the millennial Kingdom will be the nations of the world. These are MORTAL people who survive the War of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16) and the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21, 22; Dan. 12:1). They go into the thousand years as subjects, not as the ruling class. They learn to worship the one true God. “It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles” (Zech. 14:16).

After the War of Armageddon and the Great Tribulation have run their course, the ones who survive are gathered before Christ

for judgment. Jesus speaks about this judgment in Matthew 25:31-34:

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

This is clearly not a judgment of the church. Christians have had their sins judged at the cross and when Jesus descends they are made immortal “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

The purpose of the Matthew 25 judgment is to determine the worthiness of these mortal people to enter the millennium. Jesus invites the sheep on His right to come into His Kingdom. It is they who will populate the millennial Kingdom. At the same time the “goats”—the ones on the left hand—are cast into the fire and destroyed (Matt. 25:41). Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 is perhaps a parallel passage. The timing seems to be the same.

Notice the time of this judgment of the nations according to the Matthew 25 passage: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory . . . then . . .” “Then” is a time word. It tells us when this judgment takes place. It’s when Jesus comes at the beginning of the millennium. He provides entrance into His thousand-year reign for those mortal individuals whom He classifies as “sheep.”

Many passages of Scripture focus on the nations and their nature during the earthly reign of Christ. Perhaps Isaiah 2:2-4 says it best:

“It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and

shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Isn't that a beautiful picture? All the nations are in submission to the righteous, peaceful reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. They come from near and far to worship and learn of the one true and living God, and they will walk in His ways. Hallelujah!

V. ETERNITY: The New Heavens and the New Earth

As wonderful as the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth will be, it is not the final and perfect Age. Scripture reveals that the final resurrection and the final judgment occur at the end of the millennial Age. The wicked are cast into the lake of fire and eternally destroyed (Rev. 20:11-15). The holy city, new Jerusalem, comes down to earth, and God thereafter dwells with man. These are the final prophesied events. There is no prophesied order beyond that.

At the end of the thousand years, the Kingdom merges into eternity. Jesus turns the Kingdom over to God the Father after having put all enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:24-28). In this perfect Age there will be no sin or death. "There shall be no more curse" (Rev. 22:3). Revelation 21 and 22 give us a beautiful word picture of the eternal Age when every trace of sin has been removed from every inch of planet earth. God's creation will have been returned to its original state of purity as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. The history of man has come full circle. Christ reigns for 1000 years on this earth before turning the Kingdom over to God (1 Cor. 15:28). Then God will rule forever on the new earth.

John the beloved had the curtain pulled aside and was given a vision of the marvelous eternal Age. Having been exiled to the island called Patmos (Rev. 1:9), God revealed to him the final consummation of His plan for earth and man. Let's peek through the curtain with John.

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven

saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I will make all things new.” (Rev. 21:1-5).

Here the scene passes from time to eternity. When we come to this place in God’s plan, there is “time no longer” (Rev. 10:6).

Observe that John saw the New Jerusalem “coming down from God out of heaven.” Most students place this event in the transition from the millennium to the eternal Age. I believe they are on the right track. The Holy City may be suspended in space for who knows how long, but it descends to earth as we move into the period designated “new heavens and new earth.”

Three writers of Scripture reveal information about this period of time: John the Revelator, as we have seen; Isaiah, one of the major prophets of the Old Testament; and the Apostle Peter.

Isaiah speaks to us of the time when God will “create new heavens and a new earth” (65:17). After describing the cleansing of this present earth by fire with intense heat causing the elements to melt, Peter wrote:

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet. 3:13). It seems fairly certain that the new earth will be this earth made new, cleansed and purified by fire which Peter describes. God says, “I make all things new”—not all new things (Rev. 21:5). The Bible says “the earth abides for ever” (Eccl. 1:4).

The cleansed and purified earth will be free from the curse of sin and death and will be the eternal dwelling place of the saints of all Ages. We will be with God and His lovely Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, throughout the billions of years of eternity.

The Book of Revelation reveals to us the consummation of all things. Without this final book in the canon of Scripture, God's plan of redemption would have ended on an unfinished note. It would have been left up in the air. Here we see the conclusion of the whole matter, the *Grand Finale* of God's salvation plan. How we praise Him for His great love, mercy, and grace which He has so freely bestowed upon us.

Eschatology assumes that God is sovereign and is directing the course of human history toward an intelligent end. The establishment of the New Heaven and New Earth is the realization of God's sovereign purpose.

BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS (Four Hundred Silent Years)

From the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New Testament there is a period of about 400 years. Most students usually refer to this period, from Malachi to Matthew, as “the 400 silent years,” because there was no divine revelation during that time.

Then John the Baptist appeared on the scene and announced that he had come to prepare the way for Messiah (Matt. 3:1-12; Luke 1:17, 76; Isa. 40:3-5). The earthly ministry of Christ began close on the heels of John’s ministry.

As Jesus opened His ministry, He announced: “Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). God’s timing is always perfect, right on the money. “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5).

Over the centuries Judah had become the dry ground out of which Messiah would come (Isa. 53:2). The glory of the David and Solomon years had long since faded. Christ’s birth was like a flash of lightning in a world filled with spiritual ignorance and darkness.

When we speak of the silence of the intertestamental period, we do not imply that nothing happened for four centuries between Malachi and John the Baptist. God was still at work; howbeit, man was oblivious to it. We mean there was no prophetic voice during that period, no pen of divine inspiration. History went on and God did not completely and permanently forsake His people. We have to rely on secular historians for information about these centuries. The Apocryphal books, and historians like Josephus (the Jewish historian), fill the gap for us.

We may not trust these in all details, but they certainly make clear that they were stormy days for the Jews—days of disaster. Although God was silent, He was still active, moving on in His program for the redemption of mankind.

The Persians were in power at the close of the Old Testament. The onset of the Grecian empire, the spread of Greek culture, the death of Alexander the great and the breakup of his empire, the rise of Rome with its arterial roads and its concept of law and order—all were part of the providential preparation for the sudden breaking of the silence in the wilderness of Judea as John the Baptist began his preparation for the first advent of Christ.

Certainly information coming out of the “four hundred silent years” is brief and incomplete, but the Apocryphal books help us bridge the gap between the testaments.

The word “apocrypha” is a Greek term meaning “hidden things.” The Apocrypha consists of 15 books that some have placed among the books of the Old Testament. Although these writings have much historical and literary value, by and large they have been rejected as not being inspired. They are not found in Hebrew and are entirely rejected by Judaism. Most protestants believe they are not inspired and have no place in the canon of Scripture.

The apocryphal books were not a part of the Hebrew Scriptures known as the law, the prophets, and the psalms, which were the Scriptures of Christ and the apostles (Luke 24:44).

Moreover, the apocryphal books were written in Greek and were added to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint), which came into being two or three centuries after the last Hebrew prophet (Malachi).

Malachi, whose book completes the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures, was the last of the Old Testament prophets. He may have written as early as 450 B.C. or as late as 397 B.C., the latter date being given in the margin of some Bibles. His message belongs to the period covered by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, after the Israelites returned from Babylonian captivity.

The Old Testament ended with the Jews restored to their homeland under Cyrus of Persia. They anticipated the Golden Age of Israel to be restored once more. But the years came and went—to be met only with hardship, deprivation, and persecution. God’s people were far from Him spiritually, although they were physically back in the promised land. The 400 years were another of those periods of tension with surrounding cultures and

subsequent compromises with pagan forces that preyed upon them.

The Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple under Zerubbabel; they rebuilt the city walls under Nehemiah. Then the Old Testament revelation closed. For about 400 years there was no new revelation from God—and what they had, had been forsaken.

Malachi had predicted Elijah would come again to turn the hearts of the people back to God (Mal. 4:5). Several prophets had pointed to the coming of the anointed one, Messiah, the Son of God. But as the Old Testament closes, one is left waiting for these prophecies to be fulfilled.

In the normal course of things, Jesus would have been born in Nazareth of Galilee, but God said the coming ruler of Israel would be born in Bethlehem of Judea—and so it was (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:1-6). Hence, with Jesus' birth and the ministry of John the Baptist, God continued His revelation in the New Testament after the long silence.

THREE WORLDS

2 Peter 3

The whole history of man—man in creation, redemption, and glorification—extends over three worlds; not layer caked, but three periods of time on this planet. The first gave way to the second, the second will be succeeded by the third, but the third will never end. It is God's plan to recover this rebel planet and man upon it to Himself. It is His goal to establish a Kingdom on earth "which shall never be destroyed"; it will be "an everlasting kingdom" (Dan. 2:44; 7:27).

The first Age began with creation and ended with the great flood in Noah's day. The second began with the flood and will continue until the second coming of Christ. The third time period will begin then and never end.

WORLD ONE The World That Then Was 2 Peter 3:6

God created all things in heaven and earth (Gen. 1; 2), and then announced that “it was very good” (1:31). However, later He took another bird’s-eye view of His creation as we read in Genesis 6:5, 6: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented [grieved] the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.”

Something happened between the “very good” state of affairs and the gross wickedness that God observed here. Man fell into sin. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and plunged the whole human race into sin and death. The sad record is in Genesis 3. Subsequently, men became corrupt, did what was right in their own eyes, and the earth was filled with violence (Gen. 6:11, 12). God judged that world with a universal flood.

Knowledge of this arrangement of things (before the flood) is very limited. Apparently it had not rained up until this time, which may well have contributed to the unbelief of the antediluvians. Imagine the ridicule that Noah must have received when he preached a coming flood, but that unbelievable flood came right on schedule (Gen. 7:23).

Certainly the New Testament supports the Noahic flood and how Noah’s family survived through faith. “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Heb. 11:7, NIV). By using the phrase “not yet seen,” perhaps the writer is referring to the fact that no rain or rainbow had ever been seen before the deluge.

Peter reminds us that only eight persons—Noah, his wife, and their three sons and their wives—were saved (1 Pet. 3:20, 21). All others perished. The ark is a type or illustration of Christ. He is to

us what the ark was to Noah and his family. Jesus is our passage out of this Age into God's Kingdom. Had Noah not been obedient and built the ark, or if he had stepped out of it before it rested on dry land, he would not have survived. I have to assume that. Likewise, we must remain in Christ until death or until Jesus comes.

God "did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:5, NASB).

It was not always "the world of the ungodly." It was once the abode of holy beings. In this world God planted the only tree of life. In this world was the only Eden and the only perfect pair of human beings. They had face-to-face fellowship with their Maker, but then sin entered and the sinless world became a sinful world. God's wrath and judgment fell hard on that generation.

"Whereby the world [*kosmos*] that then was, being overflowed with water, perished" (2 Pet. 3:6).

The word *kosmos* refers to the inhabitants, since the earth itself was not destroyed in the flood. The same is true in John 3:16. The world (*kosmos*) has reference to humankind. Mankind is the object of God's love. It is obvious that the earth itself was not destroyed, but the *order of things* that existed before the flood. Scripture says: "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (Eccl. 1:4).

If there was no judgment in Noah's time, we have no reason to believe in judgment at the end time, and the accuracy of the Bible is called in question. The flood assures us of judgment in the past and also in the future. Jesus said, "Just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:26, 27,

NASB). They were unaware that judgment was hanging over their heads.

The shape of the ark is not clear from Scripture. It was probably shaped like a box or even a coffin. Noah wasn't going anywhere. He was only going to float around for a while.

Let's remember that Jesus is to us what the ark was to Noah and his family. Jesus is our passage out of this ungodly world into His glorious Kingdom.

WORLD TWO
The World That Now Is
2 Peter 3:7

World two began after the flood and will extend to the return of Christ. World one passed off the stage and world two came on. Our world is peopled by survivors of world one brought over by way of the ark. While all men descended from Adam, it is equally true that all of us descended from Noah's three sons.

World two is no better spiritually than world one inasmuch as sin still exists. Paul the apostle tells us that Christ came "to rescue us out of this present age of wickedness" (Gal. 1:4, NEB). We are repeatedly cautioned not to love or focus our lives on this world's system:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17).

Jesus taught us that the wide gate and the broad way lead to destruction, and many enter thereby. Then He was quick to add that the small gate and the narrow way lead to life, and few find them—not many, but *few* (Matt. 7:13, 14, NASB). There are just two highways that one can travel—the broad way and the narrow way. They are going in opposite directions and obviously they lead to quite different destinations. We are all born on the broad way and need to do nothing to be lost—just sit tight and ride the broad way to eternal death. Jesus, our lovely Lord, came into this world to help man avoid the tragedy. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to

save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). God be praised! Through Jesus we can find forgiveness of sin, newness of life, and assurance of eternal life in the Age to Come.

Jesus said: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). We, too, can be overcomers through Him, because “He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25, NASB). Our Lord said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Christ’s Kingdom is not according to this world’s system.

“For this world in its present form is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31, NIV). This world (*kosmos*), this arrangement of things, is already in the process of passing away. Anything or anyone that does not comply with God’s will must sooner or later pass out of existence. This world—world two—is rapidly coming to its well-deserved end. “But the present heavens and earth are sustained by his word and are reserved for fire on the day of judgment, which is the day of destruction of ungodly men” (2 Pet. 3:7, Lamsa).

Observe the future of this arrangement of events in our world. The final destruction will constitute cleansing of the earth in preparation for the Age to Come. The water was literal in Noah’s day, and the fire that God uses to consume the wickedness of this Age will also be literal.

Just as surely as world one ended in judgment and gave way to world two, so world two will end in judgment and give way to world three. Make no mistake! With the passing of world two will appear world three.

WORLD THREE
The World That Is to Come
2 Peter 3:13

World three begins when Jesus comes and it will never end. Worlds one and two were colored and warped by sin, but thank God that will not be the case in world three. By contrast, “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; Num. 14:21).

Then Daniel 7:27 will be fulfilled: “Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (NASB). What will be our nature then? Jesus said He would give us eternal life in the world (Age) to come (Luke 18:29, 30). Moreover, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15, NASB). Yes, Jesus, “the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David” (Rev. 5:5) will rule over all nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15).

“But in keeping with his promise we are
looking forward to a new heaven and a new
earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter
3:13, NIV).

The prophecies run through the darkness of former Ages and reach their climax in the dawn beyond—God’s eternal Kingdom. Jesus called it “the age to come” (Luke 18:30, NIV); Paul called it the world or Age without end. Revelation 21 and 22 focus on the new heavens and new earth, the eternal Age after the millennium has run its course. We should be especially interested in this period because of the amount of time we’ll spend there and the glory and joy of it all.

By the way, Revelation is the Grand Central Station of Bible

prophecy. All the themes of prophetic truth come into this magnificent book. It unfolds the great events of bringing human history to a close. In order to rightly understand Revelation, one needs a working knowledge of all parts of the Bible.

World three is the final, eternal Age. Nothing is prophesied beyond that. It is an Age without sin and filled with light and the glory of God. It is peopled by redeemed survivors brought over from worlds one and two.

The only way one could get from world one to world two was in Noah's ark. The only way one can get from world two to world three is by Jesus Christ, our ARK OF SALVATION. Have you engaged passage on the ark of salvation? Are you bound for the New Heavens and New Earth? Are you prepared to enter God's perfect tomorrow?

“God's tomorrow is a day of gladness,
And its joys shall never fade,
No more weeping, no more sense of sadness,
No more foes to make afraid.

“God's tomorrow is a day of glory,
We shall wear the crown of life,
Sing thro' countless years love's old, old story,
Free for ever from all strife.”—*A. H. Ackley.*

THE HISTORICAL POSITION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD

Joseph Marsh, one of the founders of The Church of God General Conference, Morrow, Georgia, writing in *The Harbinger and Advocate*, January 5, 1850, pointed out the importance of recognizing the various Ages revealed in the Bible. In an article, "The Age to Come," which was reprinted in *The Restitution Herald*, April 1984, Marsh wrote:

"The Mosaic Dispensation, or Age, closed at the death of Christ; and the Gospel Age commenced with his resurrection. The Gospel Age will close at the second coming of Christ when the Future Age, a more glorious dispensation, will commence, and continue until the ushering in of the Eternal Age of glory.

"The order and events of the Jewish and Christian Ages are now matters of history, with the exception of the closing scenes of the latter—and the history of that will soon be complete. Then the great and glorious events of the Age to Come will be passing before us."

Another source also reveals Joseph Marsh's clear convictions concerning the different Ages in God's overall plan. The Advent Christian Publications, Charlotte, North Carolina, has printed a book by Clyde E. Hewitt, *Midnight and Morning*, which was reviewed by Jan Stilson in *The Restitution Herald*, November, 1984.

Stilson wrote: "Joseph Marsh and other Age-to-Come Adventists remained outside the circle of organized groups. Marsh's Age-to-Come idea was quite distinctive among Adventists as it divided history into four time frames."

Quoting Hewitt, Stilson wrote: "The Mosaic Age was the first. It had ended at Christ's death. Christ's resurrection had opened the second, or Gospel Age. This would end with His return which would usher in the Millennium, or third Age. Marsh called this the Age to Come. The Eternal Age would begin at the close of the Millennium" (p. 230).

GLOSSARY*

- Antediluvians—people who lived before the flood.
- Apocrypha—A Greek term meaning “hidden things.” It refers to 15 books sometimes found between the Old and New Testaments which Jews and Protestants usually believe are not inspired.
- Capital Punishment—the judicial taking of the life of criminals for certain crimes, such as murder (Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21; 22).
- Church—Greek *ekklesia*, the called-out ones, the body of believers from the Day of Pentecost to the coming of Christ, called out from the Jews and the nations (Gentiles) and baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28).
- Dispensation—refers to a distinctive way in which God manages or arranges the relationship of human beings to Himself. Synonyms of the word are stewardship, administration, economy, and management. The Greek word *Oikonomia* is also translated “stewardship” (Col. 1:25).
- Eschatology—Greek *eschatos* or last things, hence the doctrine of last things; the study of the future; prophecy. It properly includes all that was prophetic of future events when recorded in Scripture.
- Israel—the physical descendants of Abraham through His grandson Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel; the Jews.
- Josephus—Jewish historian who was born 37 A.D. and died sometime after 100 A.D.
- Messiah—the king of Israel, revealed in the New Testament in a broader context as the anointed one, the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.
- Millennium—a term which refers to the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.
- Patmos—a tiny island in the Aegean Sea where the Apostle John saw visions and revelations concerning the future (Rev. 1:9-11). He recorded them in the final book of the Bible.
- Patriarch—the father of a family, tribe, or race.
- Pentecost, Day of—from Greek derivation meaning 50 because it was the 50th day after the Feast of Firstfruits. It was on Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection, that the Holy Spirit came upon the early church—and that little body of believers was baptized into one body (Acts 2).
- Redemption—the root “redeem” means “to buy back,” as the purchase of a slave for freedom. Hence, God has bought us back from sin and death through the blood of His only begotten Son.
- Sabbath—the seventh day of the week; Saturday. God gave this day as a sign between Him and His covenant people, Israel (Ex. 31:16, 17). The day started at sunset Friday and ended at sunset Saturday.
- Soul—normally a person (Gen. 2:7). However, sometimes it refers to the life of a person (Mark 8:36, 37) and of other living creatures (Rev. 16:3).
- Tabernacle—the movable place of worship used by the Israelites on their journey through the desert from Egypt to Canaan.
- Worship—attributing worth to God both publicly and privately, usually done through prayer, praise, music, giving, etc.

* Definitions are based on usages in this book.

THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

The 39 Old Testament Books

The 27 New Testament Books

Books of the Law	Genesis Exodus Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	M I N O R
H	Joshua	
I	Judges	
S	Ruth	P
T	I Samuel	R
O	II Samuel	O
R	I Kings	P
Y	II Kings	H
B	I Chronicles	E
O	II Chronicles	T
O	Ezra	S
K	Nehemiah	
B	Esther	
P	Job	
O	Psalms	
B	Proverbs	
T	Ecclesiastes	
R	Song of Solomon	
Y	Isaiah	
Major Prophets	Jeremiah	
	Lamentations	
	Ezekiel	
	Daniel	

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

Gospels	Matthew Mark Luke John
History Book	Acts
P	Romans
A	I Corinthians
U	II Corinthians
L	Galatians
'S	Ephesians
	Philippians
	Colossians
L	I Thessalonians
E	II Thessalonians
T	I Timothy
T	II Timothy
E	Titus
R	Philemon
S	Hebrews
	James
	I Peter
General Letters	II Peter
	I John
	II John
	III John
	Jude
Prophetic Book	Revelation

*Memorize these Bible books!
Everyone should know them!*

The eight authors of the New Testament:
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter,
James, and Jude. *Memorize them, too!*

