

DISPENSATIONAL DISTINCTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A Study in Matthew and Acts¹

By
Dr. O. Wilburn Swaim, TH.D.

INTRODUCTION:

Dispensationalists are often accused of "pigeon holing" gospel truths, in order to avoid having to live by them. We do, after some fashion, the first, but are not guilty of the asserted motive. For purposes of this study, the validity of dispensationalism is assumed, though argued for as necessary to the discussion at hand. Two examples are cited to demonstrate the difficulties encountered outside of that good method.

Apart from dispensationalism, how does one justify the present day omission of Matthew 10:5-10, from our missionary method? In Matthew 24:13, how can one avoid a conflict with the doctrine of eternal security, apart from a dispensational context? How dispensationalism solves these, and other problems, is for the study to follow.

There are distinctions in what is said in scripture, according to who said it, to whom it was spoken, and concerning about whom, or what, it was spoken. The Books of Matthew and Acts are core elements around which much false doctrine and errant practices, in religious systems, are devised, when they are interpreted apart from the dispensational method.

A Chevrolet and a Ford automobile have much in common. They both have a motor, four wheels, a transmission, and thousands of other similar components. One chooses to purchase an automobile because of these similarities. That is, because these are the components comprising an automobile. All have them. But, the choice of one brand over another is based on the differences, not the similarities. One brand may be set up to please the manufacturer's engineers, to provide a ride that is a little firm, for superior road handling. A competitive brand's suspension may be the product of overruling marketing division consultants, who demand a soft ride. It does not handle as well in tight turns, but the soft ride is a sure selling point when the customer takes it for a test drive.

There are many things in the Bible that are a lot alike. Israel is made up of God's people, and likewise the church. Israel has a definite beginning, as does the church. They are both referred to as a "called out assembly" (εκκλησια). Similarities abound, but they are not the same. There are distinct differences that set them apart. The distinctions matter greatly.

This is not, and is not intended to be a research paper. While quotations will be duly noted, the purpose is not to find out what others have said, but solely to present the views of the author.

I. Israel and the Church

The foundation of distinguishing between Israel and the church stretches Bible-wide. The distinction is vividly painted with master strokes within the borders of Matthew and Acts, the two Books with which this study is concerned. I Corinthians 10:32 is a key verse in establishing that Israel and the church are two separate programs of God. Matthew and Acts, as books of historic record, crown this distinction in portraying both the regal presenting of Christ as King (21:1-11), and the prophetic revelation of Christ as the foundation Rock of a brand new building, The Church (Matthew 16:18). In Acts, we find the church program instituted and developing, and the pattern for future generations established, as Israel is sidelined, waiting for their reclamation at the return of Messiah.

It is commonly taught among conservative scholars that Matthew wrote to present Christ as King; Mark, as The Servant; Luke, as the Son of Man, and John, as the Son of God. This is quite evident when assessing matters, such as the absence of a genealogy in Mark, the orderly presentation of seven miracles in John, Luke's detailed reporting of the virgin birth, and Matthew's exclusive use of the title, "Kingdom of Heaven." While Luke the Physician would be very interested in the unique birth of Christ, Mark, as a servant (Acts 13:5 *υπηρετην*) would naturally view Christ in a similar role, even as He was prophesied to be (Isaiah 42:1; 53:11). John, who laid his head on the breast of Jesus and heard the heartbeat of God (John 13:23), would have a vested interest in the deity of our Lord. But what about Matthew? What in his background would interest him in the kingship of Christ? He was a tax collector! He worked for government. Now that he discerns how wicked the king he formerly served, he would be quite interested in the contrast of this professed King of Israel: The former in his ostentatious, regal splendor: the latter in His simplistic meekness.

A. The Continuance of Israel:

Matthew initiates his presentation of His kingly destiny with the first dozen words of the first verse, on the first page of the book:

*"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."*²

They set the tone and tenor of Matthew's message. They at once tell us that Christ is the promised Seed of Abraham, the royal heir of David. That He is the son of Adam is not pertinent to the main inspired message from Matthew's pen. Enough is said in the succeeding verses to verify that, but it is not the streaming truth emphasized here. He is David's Son, the King of Israel. That is that with which Matthew is consumed.

But, if there is no kingdom ahead, who cares? If Israel has permanently forfeited the promises of kingdom blessing, what is the significance of starting with David, instead of Adam, or Seth, or Shem, or Abraham? If there is no future kingdom, then why emphasize the coming of the King?

If Messiah is not to reign on earth in a kingdom of imposed righteousness, but will only reign in Heaven as King of the Church, why place David at the first of the genealogical record? Why revert back to Abraham to begin the listing? David was king in Israel. If Christ is only king in the church, why bring in the name of David, in such an obtruding manner. He is generations removed from Abraham. Why start with him, and then revert back to his distant ancestor?

He is David's Son! It is David, the King, twice declared in verse six. As such, He must have a throne. Who ever heard of a royal heir without a throne, at least in prospect? If Israel's promised reign as the head of the nations (Deuteronomy 28:13a), with their King ruling all the earth (for purposes of staying in the same context, note the implication of Deuteronomy 28:36), is no longer valid, then to what purpose is all this emphasis on Him as the Son of David, the King?

There is a kingdom ahead. Only the pre-millennial, dispensational method can develop this area of doctrine with consistency and accuracy. That method alone can, and does, hold to a future for Israel, and bring all other related doctrines into agreement, particularly the doctrine of the church. Any other method is wracked with errors that lead Bible students to doctrinal shipwreck.

Consider The Wise Men

The Wise Men (Matthew 2:1-12), or Magi, fan the fire ignited in chapter one.

That they followed the star to Jerusalem is not accurate. The doctrine of Christmas carols and cards is often in error. The prophet Daniel, or someone in his deported company, carried the extant writings with him to Babylon. In them he discovered that the seventy-year period, prophesied by Jeremiah, was about to end (Daniel 9:2). It is reasonable to believe that he also left Israel's precious cache of truth as the heritage of his peers, the wise men in Babylon, and their successors. Included in that treasured knowledge would have been the great prophecy of the ambiguous Balaam, recorded in Numbers 24:17, concerning a future luminary arising to shine in testimony to the birth of the King. The Babylonian astrologers included it in their collection of "The World's 1,000 Most Famous Religious Claims," as they well might have entitled it. This would all be in the spirit of Nimrod, their spiritual father, and his system, being perpetuated to this day.³ His religion was characterized by the creating of new gods, based on the heavenly array of signs in the corrupted Zodiac, and his infamy as the author of individual religious practice organized into a system.

For centuries the Babylonian stargazers looked for that star to appear, until on the night of record in the Matthew account, they saw it. It did not have to shine long. It did not lead them anywhere. That they saw it, even for a few minutes, would be sufficient to convince them concerning its identity. Doubtless, it disappeared with the same quietness of its manifestation. The sign motivated them to set out for the land from where the prophecy had originated: the land to which their ancient countryman, Abram, had journeyed, though for a wonderfully different reason. If one is going to look for a king, the capital city is the place of choice. They were, erroneously, Jerusalem bound.

Herod inquired as to the time frame of the appearing of the star. It is obvious he could not walk outside and see it, for it shone no longer. Had it been visible in Israel, as in that eastern land, he certainly would have known of it. The very wording infers the same. But verses 9 and 10 settle any remaining doubt. The star they "saw" in the East, came again. This time it did lead them on their way and stood just above the very house in which the Christ child abode. They rejoiced when they saw that star (again!). It was no regular star, neither so close as the sun, nor light years away in outer space. It was a special manifestation of light, shining so near the earth that men could tell the exact Bethlehem dwelling over which it hovered.

Matthew speaks in chapter 24 of "...the sign of the Son of man..." (Verse 30). What is the identity of that sign? The passage tells us it will appear when the sun is darkened, the moon ceases to shine, and the stars fall from the sky (verse 29). In the pitch darkness above and all around, it shall be "seen." "Seen?" How could it be seen in a setting of desolate darkness? Unless the sign itself shines! It shall. It is the very sign we have been considering, the star the wise men saw. It shall appear again, at Messiah's return to earth. Malachi says so: "The Sun of righteousness (shall) arise..." (Verse 2). In the closing prophecy of the Old Testament, and the concluding one of the New, the testimony is clear. The Revelator said, "...his eyes were as a flame of fire; And his feet...as if they burned in a furnace...in his right hand seven stars...and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength" (1:14-26). From the same pen, Jesus is called "the bright and morning star" (22:16).

Can you not picture it? Worldwide, men of the tribulation period are attempting to gaze into this latest, and most eerie phenomenon: A sky without sun, moon, stars--any light at all--enshrouding in total darkness the desolate landscape, laid bare by the wrath of God against this rebellious earth. Suddenly, from the smallest child's telescope, to the most modern instrument man will have placed in outer space (if such of the latter are still in place and operational), one by one, a faint light is detected in the far reaches of the North place. It draws nearer, growing brighter, until the shocking Revelation is discerned. As the disciples saw Him that night on the sea, and John suddenly realized that strange ghost of a figure (to his mind) was the risen Lord (John 21:6-11), so shall the Revelation come to all the survivors of the time of Jacob's trouble. The light assumes the form of the One Who is called, indeed, "The light of the world" (John 8:12). The Light was, is, and ever shall be, Christ Himself. The Star of Bethlehem was but the same kind of thing. The Light to come is the prophesied sign, the perfection of the Old Testament prophecy from Balaam.

Consider the Ruler

The whole event of His first coming is based on many prophecies. One quoted in Matthew's account, in verse 6, calls Him a Governor, which "shall rule" over Israel. It is the simple future tense ("ἐξελευσεται"), a future action not yet started. Israel received that night, a King. In due time the Wise Men came to honor Him. He shall rule; He has not yet. It is yet future, even to our own day. Wise Men indeed, they are, who honor Him (John 5:23).

Consider Prophecy

Does He now reign, in the church? From the texts of some hymns, one could be led to think so:

*Rejoice--the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore!
Rejoice, give thanks, and sing and triumph evermore:
.....*

*Jesus the Savior reigns, the God of truth and love;
When He had purged our stains He took His seat above:
.....*

*His kingdom cannot fail--He rules o'er earth and heav'n;
The keys of death and hell are to our Jesus giv'n:
.....*

*Rejoice in glorious hope! Our Lord the Judge shall come
And take His servants up to their eternal home....⁴*

Charles Wesley would have us believe that Jesus is now seated on David's throne, reigning as King, and someday will come and take His redeemed there to reign with Him. This is neither an isolated, nor a rare instance. Consider Lelia N. Morris's words, in her poem set to the music of "What If It Were Today?":

*Jesus is coming to earth again--what if it were today?
Coming in power and love to reign--what if it were today?
Coming to claim His chosen Bride....
.....*

*Satan's dominion will then be o'er,
Then shall the dead in Christ arise,
Caught up to meet Him in the skies.*

These are but examples of songs and hymns that deny or confuse the prophetic facts, concerning the future reign of Christ on earth⁵

Matthew 2:23--

Matthew 2:23 declares the word of an unnamed prophet, "He shall be called a Nazarene." Who is "He"? No such quotation in the record of Old Testament prophecies is recognizable. We know that more prophecies were made, than are preserved in holy writ. The Greek for "spoken," is (ρηθεν), narrowing the meaning to, "a word spoken."⁶ No written record is implied. Interestingly, it is "Prophets," more than one, who so spoke. Dr. Scofield refers to Isaiah 11:1, as a possible point of reference.⁷ Assuming some validity to his position, it is interesting to look at the One to Whom the prophet refers. He is the One Who will rule in the prophesied kingdom (verse 10). The time frame is yet future to this present day, as the event of verse eleven, "...set his hand again the second time to recover..." is yet future (author's emphasis). The first time was the recovering of the nation from Babylon. The "second time" must succeed it, and has not yet. There is a coming kingdom. It must have a king. Jesus is He.

Matthew 11:10--

If this preceding argument seems less than conclusive, consider the prophecies enmeshing themselves with the spiritual barnstorming of John the Baptist. Malachi 3:1, declares the coming of both the forerunner, and the One before whom he runs:

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts."

Malachi 4:5 names the one who is to prepare the way of the Lord:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD...

But did not our Lord say, in Matthew 11:10 that Isaiah was speaking of John the Baptist?

For this is [he], of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.

However, continuing on, in verse 14, he explained that John the Baptist would be Elijah, if, notice, "... **if** ye will receive it (author's emphasis)." "It"? What is "It"? Allow the context of verses 11 and 12, make it unmistakably clear. The Kingdom of Heaven would appear to be the obvious object of reference. But, one must notice that the word "it," is in italics. A further look into a wider context, offers an alternate interpretation. Read verse six:

And blessed is [he], whosoever shall not be offended in me (author's emphasis).

It is not the kingdom, but the King, which they find offensive. They would gladly have received the kingdom, had it been offered on their terms, and based upon their religious system and hierarchy. But the offense is in Jesus. Their attitude is revealed later in two Old Testament prophecies, referenced by Matthew. The first, in 21:4,5, quoting Zechariah 9:9--

All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying 5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass (Matthew 21:4,5).

In verse 11, it is recorded that they called Him a prophet, but the Prophet called Him their King (ο βασιλευς σου).

The second, in 21:42, quoting Psalm 118:22,23—

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?...And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Verse 43 unequivocally states that the reason that generation lost the kingdom, is due to their rejection of their King. The Kingdom would have been established in that very era, had the people received Christ as their Messiah. They did not, so it was, and still is, postponed. Now, instead of a marvelous cornerstone, Messiah has become a masticating millstone.

Matthew 17:12,13 reinforces the truth already declared concerning John the Baptist, and Elijah. The obvious then, is, since they did not receive the offered kingdom, John the Baptist is not Elijah. Malachi said Elijah would come, so he has to come! When will he come? Before the coming of that day. What day? Malachi 4:1-3 tells us clearly:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do [this], saith the LORD of hosts.

It is the day when our Lord (verse 2) will come and set things straight; when the kingdom shall be established. Otherwise, what shall Elijah do? Come to announce a kingdom that is not to be? That which could have been in John the Baptist's day (verse 18), but failed to materialize, will be in that future day. Elijah appears just prior to the return of Christ. Upon His descent, He will execute judgment and restore all that Israel has lost. Read carefully all of Malachi, chapters 3 and 4. Indeed,

*Jesus shall reign wher'ere the sun, does its successive journeys run. His kingdom stretch from shore to shore, til moons shall wax and wane no more.*⁸

This pattern continues on through this first of the gospels. There is a future kingdom, and a King. Otherwise, one must surely relegate all prophetic material to a non-literal interpretation. One who holds that all the Bible is filled with allegory and fables, is not even in the same hall which houses the recording of this debate. But, many today want to believe the Bible literally, except to allegorize, or spiritualize, prophetic material. Little wonder. In rejecting the dispensational method, they can only allegorize prophecy pertaining to the future of Israel, and attribute Israel's promises to the church, denying Israel any future in God's coming economy. Combining their attempt to accept the remnant of Holy Writ literally, spiritualize prophecy, and operate outside the dispensational method, a hodgepodge of "every man teaching that which is right in his own eyes," is purported a viable theological position.

Consider the Sermon on the Mount

In Matthew 5 through 7, Christ gives that on which many folks today profess to base their hope of heaven. But, we must incorporate the distinction (worthy of a section all to itself, but deferred to a separate study in hermeneutics), between interpretation and application.

The beatitudes, and the teachings of these chapters, applied to everyday living, is with much merit. But, to interpret them as though spoken to the Church, is to bring much confusion into the doctrine of salvation, and related doctrines (all Bible doctrines are related to that doctrine).

The very reason why it has been said that, "Ask ten preachers to explain marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and you'll get eleven different answers," is due to failure to distinguish between interpretation, and application, of Matthew 5:31,32, and 19:3-9. So it is in our present matter, also. By wrong interpretation, is meant, interpreting it apart from the context of Mosaic Law (for Christ said it to Israel, not to gentiles, and not to the church), and applying it to the church program, without regard to its Jewish context. Christ came and spoke to the Jews, alone (Luke 19:10, "the lost" being, by definition, Israel, according to Matthew 10:6 and Ezekiel 34:16a). Any speaking to gentiles was rare, and duly noted. Hear Him, in Matthew 15:24--

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Christ ministered to Israel. He is concerned, in Matthew, chapters 4-12, only with Israel. He is offering them the kingdom. In Matthew, chapters 5-7, He sets forth the principles upon which the kingdom should be, and shall be, established.

In 5:3-12, He declares the heart character of the kind of people who shall comprise that kingdom, and pronounces blessing upon them. In 5:13 through 7:11, He reveals the conduct of the people that will demonstrate the character of the kingdom. In 6:10, in the model prayer, He shows us the consummation of these three chapters. They concern, by interpretation, solely, the time when the Will of God, perfectly ruling in Heaven, shall likewise be in all the earth.

That has never been! It is not so, now. It will not be the case, tomorrow. But, there is coming a time on earth when it shall be. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel tell us plainly why it will be so then, but is not now:

*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah...But this [shall be] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;** and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jeremiah 31:31-34, author's emphasis).*

*For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. 25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 **A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them].** 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezekiel 36:24-28, author's emphasis).*

It is because Israel (the believing and surviving remnant) shall experience a new birth, regeneration,⁹ and God's holy principles will be effectively established in their innermost beings. That will make the difference. They will then dwell in the land, and never lose it. Today, in the closing days of the Twentieth Century, Israel has that land in possession. But it shall be taken from them again (Zechariah 14:1-3), in the time of great tribulation that looms ahead. The next time they get it back, it will not be the League of Nations, or the United Nations, or a block of Western and European nations that so grace her. God Himself will do it, and it will never be undone (Jeremiah 32:37-42).¹⁰

A professed Bible believer has two choices. Believe some of it, or believe all of it. Only the dispensational method can allow one to both accept literally the whole word, and make sense of these great prophecies.

Consider Christ's Ministry to Israel

In Chapter 4, Christ initiates His ministry to Israel. John baptized Him in Chapter 3. John's gospel record shows that John introduced the Lord to Israel following the temptation experience (1:29), as Matthew records in Chapter 4. Following the foundation lessons of Chapters 5-7, our Lord manifests His power over disease, sickness, nature and demons. He did this to fulfill prophecy (note 8:17--Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in the life time ministry of Christ, not at Calvary, as Pentecostals and Charismatics would have us to believe.)

In Chapter 9, He gathers His disciples, and in 10, sends them forth to preach and minister to God's chosen people.¹¹

In Chapter 11, Jesus then goes forth, and is rejected. He pronounces judgment on the nation. The chapter ends with an invitation to individuals. The ministry has been to the nation, but now the first hint of a change is given.

Chapter 12 records the fatal sin of blasphemy, allegedly here committed by the religious leaders of the day. Blasphemy is a greatly misunderstood doctrine. It is directly related to the reality of the kingdom being lost to Israel, at that time, and the resulting crucifixion of their King.

The record states:

*Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and **blasphemy shall be forgiven** unto men: but the blasphemy [against] the [Holy] Ghost **shall not be forgiven** unto men. 32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, **it shall be forgiven** him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it **shall not be forgiven** him, neither in this world, neither in the [world] to come. 33 Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by [his] fruit. 34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? (Matthew 12:31-32a author's emphases).*

The key is to determine what shall be forgiven and what cannot be forgiven, and, whether or not these religious tormentors did that which cannot be forgiven.

Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with the Pharisees accusing Jesus of doing His (i.e., God's) works by the power of the Devil. That is the common definition heard in preaching, and in writings concerning, the subject.¹² Neither is that the definition given in this context, nor is it what the Pharisees did. They did do this kind of thing against Christ (Mark 9:30). But He said that could be forgiven. It is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that is unforgivable.

In the Old Testament, God worked among men in the Person of the Godhead Who had, to that point, been clearly revealed: The Father. While this writer believes that all Old Testament anthropological appearances of God were Christophanies, nevertheless, it is God, as God, Who worked among, and talked with, His people as the norm for the day.

In the end of the Old Testament God became incarnate, and Christ became the central figure moving among His people. This held true on past Calvary, to His ascension, 40 days after His resurrection. Ten days later, the Holy Spirit came and assumed His place, not only dwelling among, but in His people.

What, then, is blasphemy, as Christ used it in Matthew 12? Christ is simply saying to these religious representatives of the people, this: You rejected the testimony of my Father, in the days of your fathers. You are now likewise rejecting me. You can be forgiven for these rejections. But there is coming One, the Holy Spirit; One just like me (John 14:16). If you reject Him, there will be no forgiveness for you, literally, neither in this world (age, or dispensation), nor in the one about to be (Greek ουτε εν τουτω τω αιωνι ουτε εν τω μελλοντι) The coming of the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost began a new program of God, within the confines of the age of which He spoke.¹³ Now, the Holy Spirit is the extant representative of the Godhead on earth. Rejection of Him (i.e. His testimony), is fatal. That is the sin of blasphemy which is unforgivable. They (these religious representatives of the nation) could be forgiven for what they were about to do to Christ, on Golgotha's hill. But, to reject the testimony of the One Who would be sent to bear witness before the earth (John 16:7-11), would seal them in their unbelief, and damn them to hell.¹⁴

They did not commit such blasphemy at this point. The Book of Acts provides the evidence of this truth, Acts 2:38-40--

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost...Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

The word "untoward" (της γενεας της σκολιας ταυτης) means, "crooked, curved," and is metaphorically used, of "wicked" or "perverse." The generation that had crucified Christ, is now being offered forgiveness.¹⁵ To reject this forgiveness, would thrust them on the threshold of blasphemy. Three thousand were converted, but that was a small number among the multitude of Jews in Jerusalem, during this feast time.

The next recorded occasion for the potential repenting of their murderous deed, is found in Acts 3:14-26--

14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses... Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; 20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you...

The phrase, "...when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;" is, in the Greek: (οπως αν ελθωσιν καιροι αναψυξεως απο προσωπου του κυριου,) and could be translated, "so that might come...." The "Times of refreshing," jogs the memory concerning a host of Old Testament prophecies, not the least of which, are:

12 A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God [are] always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. {careth...: Heb. seeketh} 13 And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, 14 That I will give [you] the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. 15 And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full (Deuteronomy 11:12-15).

7 So shall ye know that I [am] the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more. {holy: Heb.holiness} 18 And it shall come to pass in that day, [that] the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim...Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. 21 For I will cleanse their blood [that] I have not cleansed: for the LORD dwelleth in Zion (Joel 3:17-21).

1 Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; [so] the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field (Zechariah 10:1).

All these blessings shall come, as Joel says, when "the LORD dwelleth in Zion." Noting the Deuteronomy passage above, has Israel ever loved "the LORD (their) God, and (served) him with all (their) heart and with all (their) soul"? None of the above promised blessings have ever been received by Israel. Accept it literally. View it dispensationally. Jesus shall reign in a kingdom on this earth that will realize the fulfillment of all these things.

According to the Acts passage, had Israel repented then and there, Messiah would have returned and ushered in all these graces. To those who deny Israel's future kingdom blessings, one might inquire, "If they had repented, and there is no future earthly kingdom over which Christ shall reign, just what would have happened?" Instead of repenting, they instituted a period of persecution against the people of "The Way" (Acts 9:2, note the Greek text). They did not repent. They did not receive their Messiah. The King was again rejected, but this time, it is the voice of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33), against which they are rebelling. They are rejecting His testimony, and call to repentance. This is blasphemy, and for it, there is no forgiveness--nationally.

In Acts 2:36, it is "...all the house of Israel...". But Acts 2:38 "every (last) one of you (ητω εκαστος υμων), and 3:23 "every soul," makes it clear that while the message is to the whole nation, the repentance must occur on an individual basis. Nationally, there is blasphemy, and the whole nation is rejected, and the kingdom postponed; delayed, until the time when God changes their hearts, and brings in the age of peace. Individual Jews may be converted, but the nation is condemned under the sin of their blasphemy, until this age runs its course. There will be no restoration until Messiah comes and ushers in the new age.

Consider Things New and Old

As Pentecost began a new program, individuals who repented and believed became a part of the same. Blasphemy, then, by strict interpretation, concerns nation of Israel. However, one who hears the true gospel of Christ, and rejects it, has effectively done the same. By definition, it is not the same. But the results are the same.¹⁶ It is the same kind of thing.

The severity of Israel's national rejection of their King, leads Christ to now begin the unveiling of a new view of the kingdom. Matthew 13 is the most important chapter in the Bible for the accomplishing of II Timothy 2:15 "...rightly dividing the word of truth." According as a student understands Matthew 13, he understands what God is doing, and what He plans to do. As this chapter is the key to biblical interpretation, so verses 10-17 are the key to understanding this chapter:

10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? 11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. 12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. 13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. 14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: 15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and [their] ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with [their] eyes, and hear with [their] ears, and should understand with [their] heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 16 But blessed [are] your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. 17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous [men] have desired to see [those things] which ye see, and have not seen [them]; and to hear [those things] which ye hear, and have not heard [them]

Our Lord establishes several things, herein. First, that He is speaking "mysteries." A Bible mystery is understood as a truth in the Old Testament concealed, but in the New, revealed. Men could be quoted who hold that definition, but the best source for definitions of Bible terms, is the Bible. Colossians 1:26 tells us exactly what is a Bible Mystery. Ephesians 3:9, 10 elucidates it further, but definitely stating the involvement of the church program in making mysteries known.

The Master Teacher, then, is speaking things never told or known before. He is making known the new program, soon to begin, while the promised kingdom is in temporary abeyance.

Then, Jesus tells why He chooses to speak in parables. The explanation this writer heard most often, in early days of Bible preaching, is that they were used to make difficult truths easier to understand. But actually, He says it is for the opposite reason. There were two categories of people present: Those who believed, and those who did not. (It is interesting to note that every person who was a true believer within the Old Testament economy, when they heard the Lord speak, believed on Him [John 5:46, 47]). The latter had seen His miracles and heard Him teach. Their response is rejection of the King and His message (to Israel, concerning the coming kingdom). He now resorts to parables in order that they might not be able to understand what He is now saying, concerning the coming intercalation program. The disciples, who had believed, would be able to understand, for He would take them aside and explain in plain words His new doctrine (13:10 with verse 18 and following). That revelatory doctrine consists of the new form which the kingdom of heaven will assume, for some indeterminate time span to come. It is the kingdom in mystery form.

The Parable of the Sower reveals how the gospel (the new gospel message to begin being preached), will work among the mass of men. The results would be the conversion of a minority number of hearers, while pseudo-professors and gospel rejecters would abound. The ratio of religious converts and Bible deniers, to true believers today, testifies to the parable's message.

The Parable of the Tares among the Wheat, instructs us to avoid an error of Romanism, and some Protestants in centuries prior to this present one, namely, the purging of dissidents. Our Lord says to let them grow, and He will do the separating. This, of course, does not refer to disciplinary measures being exercised within a local church. There is an abundance of instruction from the master church planter, to establish that. It does concern Christendom, as it is called, worldwide. Baptists and Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, would have no mandate to have one another arrested, with punitive measures to follow, just because the one is convinced the other consists of false prophets and prophecies.¹⁷ False prophets are to be left alone to do what they will. Our only charge is to testify to them of the Truth. When the Lord comes again, He will set it all straight.

Matthew 13:31-35 shows us that the kingdom will grow worldwide, but will be the habitat of two wicked things. First, birds of the air will light in the branches of this growing tree. When its development is complete, every species will be found therein. Second, as the enemy sowed tares among the wheat, so shall Satan mask his sinister work within the new program. A small amount of error grows until the whole would be wholly corrupted, if it were possible.

Since it is a parable by which we are being instructed, there is recognizable symbolism, representing and teaching literal truth. What do the birds and the leaven represent? The answer is found in determining how our Lord used them in other lessons. We find "birds," in verse 4 of this very chapter. In verse 19, the Master Teacher tells us the literal identification of these symbolic characters:

They are Satan, or, satanic activity. In context, birds represent satanic activity. Leaven clearly represents false doctrine (Matthew 16:6-12), and sin (I Corinthians 5:6-13).

The kingdom in this new form is not to grow into the worldwide domination of Christianity. Rather, it is to grow into such a perverse form of universal occupancy, that birds of every religious belief and philosophy may be found nesting in the branches of its denominational and cultic structure. Its very capillary system will flow with the venom of hell, for the most hellish thing on earth is Satan's Great Lie.¹⁸ Religion is indeed the most damnable thing on earth. Our Lord was gentle toward individual sheep ensnared in the thorn bush of that Lie. But, the devisors of the system, and the propagators of the demonic dogma of Christ's day, received from Him the worst tongue lashing of His short ministry (Matthew 23:13-36). Religion is hated, and will be destroyed, by God (ref. Revelation 17, 18). More people are going to hell by the route of religion, than any other road.¹⁹ Religion is simply man's effort to seek out God, and through his own attainments, by ritual, ceremony, and personal efforts, to make himself presentable and acceptable to God.²⁰ Biblical Christianity is not religion. It is not a system of rituals, ceremonies, and prescribed codes of conduct. It is rather a personal relationship with the only True and Living God, Who revealed Himself to fallen man, provides that relationship solely because of His love, works the plan in mercy, and perfects the offer by grace. One can easily recognize religion: It always locates on the Calvary Bypass.

It is interesting, if not purposely significant, that the Lord says, "A woman" (v.33). Chapter 16:6 calls the leaven of His day, the product of the Pharisees and Sadducees. But in that future day, it will be of a woman. The Revelation 17:1-7 presents this woman prophetically. She is a spiritual whore, having fornicated and sold out the Truth. She is identified with a name that includes the word, "Mystery." She is the corrupted form of that which the Holy Spirit created on Pentecost, long since devoid of the True Church--the separatists (Ref. The Revelation 2:24 and 3:4), Bible believing people down through the ages who rejected her perversion, and refused to identify²¹ with her errors (The Revelation 18:4). She is the prophetic personification of that religious system begun by Nimrod, at Babel. Though it has been altered many times in form, it remains the corrupt substitute religion fostering Satan's Great Lie on a spiritually gullible world. She is the Roman Catholic religious system, and all her daughters, who worship Mary, offer the Sacraments, baptize babies, bind souls in religious dogma and traditions, and deny the perfection of His Holy Word. Rejecters of Grace, they are, and of Christ. She is still termed "Mystery," because she is not the fulfillment--the final form, dispensing the Viper's venom. This system will be destroyed by the Antichrist, and replaced with that perfection of perversion, the substitute imitation of The Faith of Christ. It will be complete with a pseudo trinity (Note Revelation 12;17; 13:1,11, The Dragon, and the two beasts), the walk of sight (Revelation 13:13,14), and the exaltation of Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2:3,4; Revelation 13:14,15); the culmination of the great lie Satan introduced in Eden (II Thessalonians 2:11, note the Greek, "The Lie).

The final three parables deal with the three-fold division of this world, established by Christ (Acts 1:8), and Paul (I Corinthians 10:32).

Verse 44 is Israel, the hidden treasure, buried in the world (Deuteronomy 28:64-68; Ezekiel 37:12). The man purchases the whole world, and consequently owns all that is in it--even the buried treasure! Our Lord did so at Calvary.

Verse 45 is the Church, the Pearl of Great Price, for whom Christ sold all, that He might purchase it (I Peter 1:18), as a peculiar treasure unto Himself (I Peter 2:9).

The Gentiles are seen in verses 47-50, as it will be at the return of the Lord to this earth. Matthew 25 delineates the process, from a variety of viewpoints.

Chapter 13 is the introduction to, and a general overview of, the new program about to be instituted. Our Lord says the man who understands it is able to handle the distinctions between the program about to end, and the one about to begin, i.e. "Things new and old."

Consider the Coming Change of Programs

In Matthew 16:18, Christ announces the new program, the Church. This simple future form in the phrase, "I will build," can only denote something that is not yet begun, but will begin at some future time.

Verse 28 plainly states that there is a coming kingdom, to be seen of men. The coming King will be seen of men presently being addressed. Chapter 17 fulfills the portion, which prophesied the viewing of that event. Of those men, 3 of them did see Christ in the glory of His kingdom (verse 2), and even Elijah is there, with the other personage who likely will complete the duo prophesied in Revelation 11:3. The remainder from Matthew's pen tells of the event preceding that kingdom: The death, burial, resurrection and ascension of the future King (17:12,22,23). Interspersed within the recording of the Calvary experience, are parables designed to warn them of their rejection (20:1-16; 22:1-14; Chapter 23), inform them of the transfer of programs (21:32, 43), a section foretelling the events of His return to earth (Chapters 24, 25), and the record of His final offer of Himself to them, as King (21:1-11). His second cleansing of the temple, followed by the little children praising Him, was sufficient for any believer of Moses to transfer their faith to Him. This, and all His activities, was solidly founded upon the Word of God, sufficiently demonstrating His identity as the Son of God, the King of the Jews. The prophet called Him "the King;" they called him but a mere prophet. The rejecters are rejected. The cursors are cursed. The new program is about to begin.

B. The Creation of the Church.

The New Program

The new program, of course, is that of The Church.

The church is distinct from Israel. It has its own distinct beginning, and ending (as concerns the earthly scene, as a program). It is distinct from the dispensation in which the program is active. It is distinct from those scriptures speaking to Israel, or the gentiles.

Already, one may see in this section a strange term, even to staunch dispensationalists. Years of studying have constantly and consistently been satiated with the phrase, "The birth of the church." Where in the Holy Scriptures can we find that terminology, or the idea that the church was born? Nowhere, neither in declaration, typology, nor by inference.

While one rightly recognizes that typology does not establish doctrine, when that is all we have to go by--the Word is silent elsewhere, and all the imagery supports an idea--one uses what is given him. There is no Word for saying the church was "born," or colloquially, "birthed," into existence. There is support from typology for saying it was created. It is a distinction to be made.

It is clear that Adam is presented as a type of Christ (I Corinthians 15:45). Ephesians 5:30-32, similarly infers the typology of Eve, representing the Church, Christ's Spiritual Body. Eve was not born. She was created, and from the bone and flesh of the body of her Head. When Christ began the Church, it was created by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:3). He took those approximately 120 believers gathered in the upper room (Act 2:1-4), and baptized, or placed, them into one brand new entity, called the Body of Christ (Colossians 1:18). The Holy Spirit is the "Baptizer," and continues so in this program, as Christ shall be in the kingdom age.²²

If the evidence is sketchy, the logic verily screams this truth. It fits. Nothing contradicts it. It quells another error, the alleged embryonic beginning of the church in the upper room. There was no embryo, for there is neither conception nor birth. The individual is birthed into the family of God, but is baptized into the body of Christ. The body itself, however, originated through an act of creation, not procreation.

The argument contends, referencing John 20:22, that when Christ breathed on them and commanded them to receive the Holy Ghost, the Church began in embryo form. But, the word "receive," is in the Greek (λαβετε), both the aorist tense, the active voice, and the imperative mood, denoting a one time commanded act in which the actor participates. It is not the passive, as sitting while something is dumped into one's lap, but actively reaching out to get something. The imperative mood, by its very nature, is futuristic. Our Lord is simply, in breathing on them, showing His authority to send them this Pentecostal Person, and instructing them to be ready and take Him when He comes. Both the theology and the typology are in agreement. The type and antitype eliminate any concept of an embryonic beginning for the church. As Adam was restored in Christ (Colossians 1:15), so is Eve, in the church. If the church was born, then, when a person is born again, they should automatically be members of some local body. Our churches would be filled with saved, but unbaptized (in water), converts, before we ever get a chance to vote them in!

The Pentecostal Beginning

That the church began at Pentecost is clear. Our Lord said that until He went back to heaven, the Holy Spirit could not come (note John 16:7), because He was not yet glorified (7:39). Establishing the exact moment of His glorification is difficult. But all Scripture is in harmony that all the blessings began at the exaltation, and seating of Christ at the right hand of the Father (John 17; Acts 2 & 3; Ephesians 1 & 2; Colossians 1, et al). In Peter's sermons in Acts Two and Three, he never mentions the ascension. But note the close relationship his words concerning the "raising up" of Christ, have with His exaltation. There is a lot of implied support for John 7:39 referring to Christ taking His rightful seat on His Father's throne. To view His glorification as occurring at the instant of His resurrection, would contradict His own words in John 16:7. There can be no Church until the Holy Spirit comes to earth. He could not have come in John 20, in the upper room, for Jesus had not yet departed, and was not yet glorified.

If the church began in the lifetime of Christ, the prophetic language of Matthew 16:18 has to be strangely twisted. There is no statement or inference that Christ meant to convey the meaning of "I will build up my church," as opposed to the Bible statement, "I will build."

If the church existed in His lifetime, who was the Head? Colossians 1:15-18 and Ephesians 1:20-23 unequivocally show that His Headship over both Creation and the Church, are inseparably bound to His post-resurrection exaltation to the right hand of the Father.

If the church existed in the lifetime of Christ, how was the body formed? Only the Holy Spirit could do this work. It is by Holy Spirit baptism. Such never occurred, and could not, until Christ was exalted, and Pentecost arrived. While Acts 2:4 speaks only of the "filling of the Holy Spirit," chapter 11:14-16 establishes the fact of the Baptism by the Holy Spirit. They both occurred, just as they continue to do, effectively simultaneously. Only the grace of filling is repetitious (Ephesians 5:18, note the Greek); the Baptism is permanent.

If the church existed in the lifetime of Christ, it was a church preaching a kingdom gospel, practicing a kingdom baptism, and under the restrictive authority and orders of the kingdom commission.²³ It was a church under the Law!

If the church existed in the lifetime of Christ, it is involved with two dispensations. It is not a new program at all, but a mere facelift of the kingdom endeavor. True, God's program with Israel covers more than one dispensation, but there are no major changes occurring concerning the nature of that nation, therein. For the church to exist within both the pre-cross era, and post-cross era, would have it changing in its very nature and makeup:

1. From law to grace;
 2. From the message of a coming kingdom, to the message of individual salvation;
 3. From the promise of a coming King, to the message of a returning Savior;
 4. From Gentile exclusion, to a "whosoever will" inclusion;
 5. From a limited area of ministry, to worldwide evangelism;
 6. From a band of followers, to members of a body;
 7. From followers who are saved by promise, to a family of regenerated believers: Saved and safe!
 8. From an accompanying Holy Spirit, to an indwelling Comforter;
 9. From a physical sanctuary, to an indwelt human temple;
 10. From the anticipation of a King reigning on earth, to the expectation of the Rapture;
 11. From the Rod of Iron, to the rule of Grace;
 12. From the demand for signs, to the Faith of, and faith in, His Word.
- C. The church is a new program, beginning, and completing its course within the confines of one dispensation.

The Spiritual Contrasted with the Visible Body

This issue is profusely treated in many volumes of author's good works, but the citing of the distinctions is justified here. The honest look at the matter, dispensationally, will show that both the spiritual body exists, as does the visible, or, local church. It is understandable that the titles, Holy Catholic Church, Universal Church, or, Invisible Church, would be distasteful to Bible believers who see the overwhelming emphasis in the New Testament on the local assembly. However, one need not tear down the whole building for the sake of a couple bad write-ups about it.

The very theology of the church requires the existence of a spiritual body. It is comprised of all believers since its creation on Pentecost, to the present day, and continuing on through eternity. As a program it ends at the rapture, but the Bride will continue on forever. Ephesians 3:21 is clear about the everlasting character of the Church. No idea of a building is mentioned. Does it refer to a local assembly? No! If so, to which does it refer? Are we to understand that there will be local churches assembling throughout eternity? No, for "Church," in the verse, is singular. It can only be the church to which Hebrews 12:23 refers. The program is the local, organized assembly—multitudes of them, the churches of this dispensation. They have a location, a Pastor, and deacons (Philippians 1:1). The Body of Christ is the Church, composed of all believers world wide, from Pentecost to the Rapture, "written in heaven," and waiting for it's first gathering together, in Glory. This Body has no Pastor but its Head, no deacons, and has never yet assembled. But, it shall!

But if the church was created, then there is an unseen body into which all are placed at salvation, by Holy Spirit baptism. It was not born, nor is anyone born into it. However, it is the local churches upon which majority emphasis is placed in the New Testament, to one of which every Christian should belong.

A related parallel is often ignored: As the Holy Spirit baptizes regenerated people, fresh born into the family of God, into the spiritual Body, so, the proper entrance into a local, visible body is through baptism--water baptism. This would change the practices of a lot of fundamental churches, who baptize any convert, anytime, whether or not they join that church, and whether or not they ever will see them again.

The dividing line between these two positions is consistent in parallel. The one purports a pre-Pentecostal beginning (or, at least an embryonic beginning in John 20), and believes only in the local church. The other consistently holds the alternate position and practice, when sufficiently executing the command of II Timothy 2:15.

The Ethnic Development

In Matthew 16:19, Christ promised to Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." He was addressing Peter, and "thee" is dative, singular. Possession of the keys is meaningless, unless he in some way, at sometime, used them. Since they are the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and three chapters earlier, the Lord had explained the new form it would take, that is, the new program He would begin, the Book of Acts is the logical place to look. Further, as the new program does not begin until the Day of Pentecost, one would not expect to find Peter locking or unlocking any doors prior to that. With no pun intended, it would be good to have a key, to Peter's using the keys. Such is found in Acts 1:8.

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

The Greek text reads:

αλλα ληψεσθε δυναμιν επελθοντος του αγιου πνευματος εφ υμας και εσεσθε μοι μαρτυρες εν τε ιερουσαλημ και εν παση τη ιουδαια και σαμαρεια και εως εσχατου της γης

The delineating of the geographical locations in the Greek text is significant. It shows the four locations to be in three divisions. They are:

1. Jerusalem;
2. Judea and Samaria,
3. the uttermost part.

- D. This does not quite show through in our English Bible. The significance will be discerned when we see Peter using his keys accordingly.

Nowhere are we told that Peter is using the keys. Nowhere is the procedure laid out for us. Only systematic, principled exegesis can uncover it. If the following is unprincipled to the reader, or perceived as flawed, then the author simply requests that one demonstrates it to be another way, according to the same standards. Only a dispensational approach, and the literal method of interpretation, can uncover it and establish a consistent view. Even the highly revered and honored Dr. C. I. Scofield missed it on this one.²⁴ He only lists, in his note on Matthew 16:19, two uses of the keys.²⁵

Where can one find Peter involved in anything that could be considered using keys to unlock, or lock, any kind of a door, in the geographical locations cited?

Acts, Chapter Two, is a good beginning place. It is the beginning of the new program, the beginning of Peter's Spirit filled ministry in Jerusalem, and the first record of any conversion of Jews to the resurrected Christ. Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, unlocks the gospel door to the Jews, and the new program is underway with its first converts.

But, had not the prophets, and our Lord, prophesied that salvation would be for the Gentiles as well? Are the hated Samaritans (by the Jews of that day), included in God's plan?

Acts 1:8, as noted, shows Judea and Samaria together comprising one geographical entity. There is no ministry of Peter recorded in Judea, after the fashion of that great Day in Jerusalem. But, he is next seen in Samaria, Acts 8.

Philip is central figure in a great evangelistic campaign, being conducted by the Holy Spirit, in Samaria. Sinners are converted, and baptized. The Apostles in Jerusalem hear the buzz, and send Peter and John to Samaria, expecting to find some kind of heretical happenings. These converts were water baptized, but not yet Holy Spirit baptized (verse 16). The phrase "only they were baptized" could be understood, as, "although they were submitting under the baptism." Even though they were submitting to that baptism which John the Baptist instituted, which Peter had preached at Pentecost, adding to it, "in the name of Jesus Christ," they were not yet placed into the Body of Christ. Were they regenerated? One thinks not, but were in this time of transition, as the Old Testament believers of old.

Peter and John's observation, upon their arrival, must have convinced them that this was of the Lord. That is what the sign gifts were for, and they accomplished their purpose on this occasion (verses 7.13). They prayed for them, and laid hands on them. John participated, but it is Peter who has the keys. The Holy Spirit falls on the converts, regenerates them, and places (baptizes) them into the Body of Christ, the Church. Key number two is now used.

Samaria, being the utmost of the two regions, covers Judea. The two regions are encompassed in the unlocking of the door, in the location of Samaria.

All that now remains is for the final location named in Acts 1:8, to be visited. But, this is gentile country. All know that the only way a gentile can get saved is to come through the Jews. That is in accord with Old Testament prophecies (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 60:3; Jeremiah 16:19). Hearts must be prepared, and Heralds must be procured, before this next door is opened. Saul must be converted, and Peter must be convinced, before another door is unlocked. For this gospel door will send the new gospel to the ends of the earth, over the ensuing years.

Saul joins the persecution that had already begun, and becomes a leader in search and destroy missions against these propagators of this newest of heresies. Preaching threats, and delivering edicts consigning the offenders to death, he sets out for Damascus (Acts 9:1, 2). On the way, he is converted, and immediately engages that same zeal in the service of the Lord. Barnabas takes up his case and brings him into favor with the Apostles. He then retreats to his hometown. On the surface it is because of the fear of the disciples, and the great persecution now being directed toward him, the turncoat, that he leaves town. However, while the gospel record is silent concerning the purpose of Paul's disposition, the overview verily shouts that God is simply piecing together the elements of this new program, in preparation for the third key's employment.

Though the Apostle (Missionary) to the Gentiles is now converted, before he can be commissioned to warfare, he must be trained. God had reserved this student for Himself. While his education is occurring, Peter is brought into line. Acts 9:32 begins the process to get Peter to Joppa, and then Peter and Cornelius together. In Chapter Ten, Peter receives an introduction to the new program's attitude of Gentile inclusion. That which his Jewish upbringing had taught him to consider unclean, now must be included in--indeed, will become the heart of the new program. While the Gentile will not be his main area of ministry, it is he to whom God gave the keys. The door must be unlocked.

He winds up in the home of Cornelius, and preaches a great gospel message to all assembled therein (10:34-43). Peter now understands the message of the great sheet, and its application (verses 35,43). Suddenly, interrupting his sermon, the power of God falls on that assembled household. The door bursts open! The first Gentile convert is made.²⁶ Without any "laying on" of hands, they are saved, baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit--the new order, for the new program. The tongues were for a sign to unbelievers present (I Corinthians 14:22). In this case, it is Jews who did not believe Gentiles could be converted, without becoming Jewish Proselytes. Just imagine, Gentiles, saved, without "laying on" of hands, without any message of baptism (verse 42), and without being water baptized. In fact, there has been no baptism for Gentiles established, only commanded (in the Revised Commission). Only John's baptism had been practiced until now (even Philip preached and practiced it, for the first words out of the Eunuch's mouth in Acts 8, were, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?"). So, Peter asked the question in 10:47, as to whether these Gentiles can be baptized as well as we (i.e., Jews). The implied answer expected is that no one can forbid it, especially since the Holy Spirit has already baptized them into the Spiritual Body. As John the Baptist commanded the Jews to be baptized, now, Peter so commands the Gentiles (verse 48). The original commission in Matthew 10:5-7 said nothing about baptism. Baptism was already in place, dating from John's ministry. But now, the baptism commanded in the revised commission (Matthew 28:19.20, which incorporates the Gentiles), is now personalized to these first Gentile converts, and enacted, for the first time!

Again, Apostles in Jerusalem got wind of this. When Peter came back to Jerusalem, they called him on the carpet concerning the affair in Caesarea. But, he gave good account of his actions, and they also became convinced of this final step in bringing about God's new program, the Church. It now has Gentiles in it, on equal footing with Jews (Ephesians 2).

The message has changed. It is no longer the Gospel of the Kingdom, but the preaching of the Gospel of Grace.

The Baptism has changed. It is no longer a repentance baptism, to the Jews, but a baptism of confession, for the Gentiles.

The makeup of the Body has changed. It is no longer an exclusive privilege of the Jews, but now includes Gentiles. The third key has done its work.

More changes lie ahead.

The Center of Activity is Relocated

While the churches of the New Testament are local, independent churches, on the Day of Pentecost (and for some indeterminate time thereafter), there was just one church. The local church in Jerusalem, and the Spiritual Body, were one and the same (Acts 2:41,47). As the membership grew, there not being any one building large enough to accommodate the thousands of new members in one gathering, they would have met in houses throughout the city. These congregations eventually would have become local churches: Independent and autonomous. But for some time, during the lifetime of the Apostles, they were under their control. Whatever doctrine or practice was proposed, the Apostles--the foundation stones (Ephesians 2:20)--approved or disapproved (Ref. Acts 11;15)

Now that the Gentiles are included, and, as God knows they will become the primary component of the Body, and that a new ministry is about to be instituted, God shifts the center of operation from Jerusalem, to a Gentile city. These Gentile churches would also operate independently of Jewish control, and of one another.

A New Name

The message continued being preached primarily to Jews (Acts 11:19), though some did dare present the gospel to some Grecians (verse 20, *ηελληνιστας*), Hellenists), in Antioch. When Jerusalem heard of it, they sent Barnabas to investigate. He saw the evident grace of God at work, and as a prophet, stayed there to exhort them. Having exhausted his ability to lead the church into further spiritual development, he traveled to Tarsus to find Paul. Jerusalem is not the place for Paul, for he is the Apostle to the Gentiles. The Gentiles at Antioch need a man of his conviction and abilities.

Paul's formal training had been completed. He came with Barnabas to Antioch. They taught them for a year. Such spiritual growth occurred that these Gentile church members were tagged with a new title: Christians (Acts 11:26). Antioch is destined to become the center of operations, for the new ministry about to be initiated. Peter unlocked the Gentile door, but Paul is the one who will step through it. He will pioneer a path of ministry for future Apostles and Evangelists to follow: The proclamation to the world of the person of Jesus Christ, and His gospel of grace.

Barnabas and Paul prove themselves faithful servants, through fulfilling an assignment by the Church at Antioch (Acts 11:27-30), and faithfully serving in that local assembly (Acts 13:1).

A New Outreach

The Holy Spirit then separates Barnabas and Saul, to institute a brand new ministry--the one which is to be the heart of the ministry of all Bible believing local churches. The Jewish cry was "Come to Jerusalem." The (revised) Great Commission shouts, "Go forth to the world." Peter continues the Apostle to the Jews, but it is Paul and Barnabas whom God has chosen to pioneer the New Testament church program of worldwide evangelism. It is a new concept, a new method, never done before.

It is the Holy Spirit Who enables (I Corinthians 12:7, the Bible definition of a spiritual gift), calls, and commissions God's servants. The church did not send them forth. It only loosed them, and gave a demonstration of its approval and support (Acts 13:3, 4). In verse three, the word for "sent," is "to loose from" (*απελυσαν*) and in verse four, is (*εκπεμψεντες*), which is simply to send forth as a messenger boy. All the church did is give them permission to go with their blessings, recognizing that the authority lay in the call and commission of the Holy Spirit.

They go forth to begin the first missionary ministry of the local church. There had been much evangelism, but this is the beginning of what we call missions, or New Testament Church missionary activity.

An interesting phrase is observed in Acts 13:2, "For the work whereunto I have called them." One would expect that as there is a specific work to which they are called by the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Instructor would enable us to identify that work. Since this text is silent, one could hope to look at the ministry of Barnabas and Paul and discover the nature of that work. Not until the end of this first missionary journey, as it has come to be called, do we make that discovery.

A summary statement of their ministry objectives and accomplishments in several churches, appears in the last verses of Chapter 14. From it, one may deduce a four-fold ministry that fully defines the work of a New Testament Church Missionary:

1. Ministry of Evangelism. Verse 21 speaks of their preaching the gospel. Folks were saved, in accordance with the (revised) Great Commission;
 2. Ministry of Strengthening. Verse 21 says they taught them, as in imparting of facts, but Verse 22 goes further. They established them in The Faith, and stirred them up to serve the Lord and not turn back;
 3. Ministry of Establishing Churches. They took the churches planted in the ministries just cited, and established them with their own trained leaders, pastors. In this case, the leadership was indigenous, but it was not so in every case, even as it is not today;
 4. Ministry to the Sending Church. In verses 26-28, the missionaries returned to Antioch and gave account of their ministry, taking time to rest and recuperate.
- E. This is the Biblical definition of New Testament Church Missions. Nothing else qualifies. It is good to operate schools, build hospitals and minister to the homeless. But they are not New Testament Missions, by definition. They are good benevolent works, and worthy of church support and involvement, so long as they are operate from and through the local church. But they need to be recognized as such: benevolent ministries. Missions is evangelism, and church planting and establishing, properly related to the local church.

An Inadequate Name

In the above, we have continually spoken of missions, seeking to establish a Bible definition for the same. One thing is greatly lacking: The use of the name in the scriptures. We neither have the term missionary, or missions. It is what modern day churches call it, and there is no real problem with that. However, if one would agree to the validity a certain asserted principle, a problem is created.

The Principle: There is no calling to ministry without a spiritual gift. It is not the purpose here to prove this statement, but a parallel truth is offered, to illustrate the principle. One would not expect a member of the church congregation to be called upon to play the piano for the gathered assembly, if that person had absolutely no talent for it. Neither would one expect the Holy Spirit to call one to do a service for Him, for which the Holy Spirit had not enabled and equipped him.

Then, just what is the gift for a "Missionary?" There is no listed gift entitled "Missionary." It is established that the Holy Spirit commanded and initiated this ministry. The title is rooted in the movement's modern day origin and development. But what gift is listed that could be the basis of this wonderful ministry?

Paul, in Ephesians 4, lists for us the gifts, or rather, the gifted men, the Holy Spirit has given to the church. They are:
"...apostles...prophets...evangelists...pastors and teachers..."
(και αυτοσ εδωκεν τουσ μεν αποστολουσ τουσ δε προφητασ τουσ δε ευαγγελιστασ τουσ δε ποιμενασ και διδασκαλουσΙσ...).

Some would say that one or more of these gifts is no longer operative. On what basis? Because it does not fit the Baptist, or some other denominational or sectarian concept of the form of the ministry? Because modern usage does not allow for the term? Because some groups misuse, and make false claims for the gifts? None of these is adequate to determine that the gifts are no longer operative. The only solid foundation for determining if a gift has ceased, is, "Does the Bible say that it will cease?" And, if so, then the time frame concerning such cessation must be established--again, based solely upon Biblical testimony.

Where is it stated that any one of these four gifts is to cease? Only one appears to be so, prophets. However, it is actually, "prophecies" (I Corinthians 13:8), of which it is stated. Neither does it necessarily follow that the former cannot function apart from the latter. There can be no prophecies, without a prophet to deliver them. But, there could be a prophet, if, the function of the office is amended: Not to "foretell," but to "tell forth."

Herein lies a principle in need of recognition. The consistent dispensational view is that the church program is absolutely distinct from God's program for Israel. They involve, at least, different people, a different purpose, and different beginning and ending points. Why would one think it strange, then, that an office could change in its function, between the two programs? For example, that an Apostle in Israel, during the life time ministry of Christ (when the kingdom was being offered, and the kingdom gospel declared), is in function different from a New Testament church Apostle. As is developed later on the matter of Paul's call to be an Apostle, it will become clear that this is indeed the case.²⁷

Likewise, a prophet in the New Testament church does not coincide with the Old Testament office of the same name. The former declared both exhortations and predictions. The prophet of the latter era did the same, until such time as the revelatory element of that gift ("prophecies") ceased.

Now, he continues the ministry of declaring God's present truth, and proclaiming the predictions already recorded, in the local church, in some official capacity. It is the same title, but the function of the office is different in the two programs.²⁸

Now, to return to build on, and finish, the original discussion--the absence of the word "missionary," in the New Testament.

While the Greek for Apostle, whether in the noun or verb form, never occurs in the Acts 13 passage, Paul did receive the title from God. In Acts 9, the record of his conversion, it is likewise absent. However, in the two recorded testimonies he gives of his conversion, the word is significantly present. Acts 22:21 uses an intensified form of the word, with 26:17 also incorporating the term. These statements occurred at his conversion. Spiritual gifts are given at conversion. Paul's status as an apostle dates from his conversion. However, as one does not do physically that for which they have no talent, neither does a talented one exercise that talent until the possessor is mature, and the talent developed. Need the parallel be stated? Paul is saved, immediately gifted as an Apostle--a Church Apostle--but not sent forth to exercise that gift until he is mature. The possessor is proven through service in the local church (Acts 13:1,2), and the program developed to the point where the Holy Spirit is ready to initiate the ministry of that gift.

Lingering doubt that the gift of Apostle--as manifested in the local church program--is what we call our modern day missionary, must surely be erased by these enlightening considerations:

First, nowhere are we told that the gift of Apostle would ever cease. However, neither is there Biblical authority for apostolic succession. Judas was replaced only because the Old Testament prophet said he would be--because he committed suicide, rather than dying naturally. Though there is no apostolic succession, nevertheless, the gift is never prophesied to cease. Consequently, one has no right to exclude it from our local churches today. But, one must determine, biblically, its proper place.

Second, we have two knowns, involving two unknowns: A title, Apostle, without a job description, and a job description, the ministry of a missionary, without a Biblical title. If a tie between the two can be legitimately established, the unknowns will disappear, and the knowns will become clearer.

Third, is the inclusion of Barnabas. He is introduced in Acts 13:1,2, as primarily a prophet. "Teacher" is also used there, but Barnabas was the first of all, a prophet. Two reasons support this: One, he is seen in chapter 11:23, exhorting the church family. Two, he brought Paul into the church, and then they stayed and taught the people. When Barnabas had reached the limits of his ministry as exhorter, he brought in the one whom God had prepared for that ministry of teaching God's people, training called servants, and building up of planted churches, to finish the task. The exhorter brought in a master teacher to help in his own inadequacy.

Note Acts 14:4, "But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles." After the Antiochan Assembly had released them to this ministry, the title is changed! Whose title is changed? The ones to whom were granted power to do signs and wonders--Apostles. They are the two (note verse 1, "both") who have gone forth, Paul and Barnabas. We know Paul is an Apostle, but, Barnabas? Verse 14, confirms it: "Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul...". Barnabas is also called an Apostle. Is "The Twelve," now, "The Thirteen? Or, "Fourteen?" Or, rather, has a change taken place in the identity of an Apostle, in the change over from God's program for Israel, to the Church Program?

Barnabas is revealed under a new title, the one he received at the church in Antioch. When the Holy Spirit sent Paul and him forth (both who had been gifted at their respective conversions), from that Antiochan assembly, God gave them their title. We call them missionaries; God called them Apostles! Surprisingly, even the secular dictionary has it right:

a·pos·tle *n.* **1.a. Apostle.** One of a group made up especially of the 12 disciples chosen by Jesus to preach the gospel. *b.* A missionary of the early Christian Church. *c.* A leader of the first Christian mission to a country or region²⁹

The definitions quoted distinguish between an Apostle in the lifetime of Christ, and one in the church program. Our modern day Missionary, Biblically, is an Apostle. The gift of Apostle still operates, but in the context, definition, and identity of the local church. Whether we call them Apostles, or Missionaries, is not the point. The importance of the issue is to recognize that a spiritual gift must be possessed, in order to have the call of God upon one's life. The gift exercised by the missionary, is the gift of Apostle.

But, in the Great Commission, are we not all sent forth to witness? The word apostle, (αποστολος), might be illustrated in the military, in the authority of a commissioned officer, as contrasted with an enlisted man. The latter may be sent with a message, but he is but a "messenger boy." The officer takes the message with authority--the authority to command and enforce it. He serves in an official capacity with authority. We all are commanded to go forth and witness. But the gifts of Ephesians 4:11 place a man in an office, with God's power behind him (II Corinthians 10:7,8) and commissioned to a specific ministry.

Further reinforcement of the concept may be seen in the Book of I Thessalonians 2:6. From Acts, Chapters 16 and 17, it can be determined who was in Paul's company, when he first went to Thessalonica. Comparing that with the salutation of Paul in his first Epistle to that church (1:1), and tracing the pronouns through 2:1-6, it can be clearly determined whom he designates, in verse 6, Apostles! Silas and Timothy are included, for they are, at this time of ministry, missionaries.

There is another point that needs to be faced. It is the matter of who qualifies to be a missionary. Should a woman be ordained as a Pastor-Teacher? Will God call a woman to be a Prophet? An Evangelist? If one believes not, in accordance with Biblical principles, then one must likewise be consistent concerning the office of Apostle, or Missionary. Only a man, gifted, proven, called of God, and going forth to do the four-fold ministry defined in Acts 14:21-28, can be a Missionary. The precious ladies may assist their husbands and engage in all kinds of benevolent ministries--even on the mission field (note I Corinthians 9:5). But, they do not qualify to be called, commissioned, or sent forth as Apostles, or Missionaries.

The Church is Supplied

What great gifts the Holy Spirit has given to the local churches:

1. Apostles, to go forth and pioneer new churches;
2. Prophets, to exhort the local church family to faithfulness to God, and service for our Lord. These may not have the gift of pastor-teacher, but are only gifted as prophets, to serve in the local church, and local church ministries, as preachers of the Word. Otherwise, they one day will be loosed from the local assembly where they have so served, and take up a ministry according to one of the other endowments they may have received;

3. Evangelists, with a special endowment for bringing lost sinners to Christ. Where is the Bible mandate for the use of the office of evangelist, as the fundamental churches of our day practice? One cannot say it is wrong, anymore than one can contend that Sunday schools are wrong, because they are not mentioned in the scriptures. The point is, our use of the gift today is at best, an escalation of the original intent. A word often translated "preaching" (εὐαγγελίζω), means to "announce glad tidings." It is the foundation word for Evangelist. So an Evangelist is one who announces glad tidings, or, as one would understand it, the gospel. But, is not everyone supposed to do that? Yes! But all are not endued with the gift. (I Corinthians 12:8-10 is a listing some gifts given by the Holy Spirit to believers. Verse 9 mentions the gift of faith. Now, every believer has faith. Yet, there is a gift of faith, such as was observed in the life and ministry of George Mueller, to cite only one obvious example. It enables a man to exercise such faith as is not common to man, but extraordinary. So it is with this gift of "Evangelist.")

All are to be "soul winners." But some have a special enablement from God, placing upon them a greater responsibility, and rendering the faithful exercise of the gift more effective, than others. It is no more than saying that, while all are commanded in the great commission to teach, yet, there is a gift of teaching that renders that possessor more able to engage in a ministry of teaching. It is identical to the gift of Apostle: All are commanded to go and witness, but some are specially commissioned.

The gifts in Ephesians 4:11 are to the local church. The gift of evangelist is to be used within the local church to bring sinners to Christ, and build up that church membership. As in Acts 13:1,2, the Holy Spirit may, out of such faithful servants, call one or more to engage in ministry out from the local church.

4. Pastor-Teacher, for the leadership of the local church. The Greek text indicates the close connection of these two gifts. Like the proverbial horse and carriage, they just go together. There is a separate gift of "Teaching," given to individuals. But in the local church, the Pastor is the Teacher of the Assembly. All others need exercise their gift in subjection to his leadership.

II. The Boundaries of the Age of Grace, and the Church Program.

Very often, good Bible teachers and preachers speak of the present dispensation, and the church age, as one and the same. They are not! Dispensational distinctions are readily discernible in contrasts between the two.

Confusion is evidenced by the variety of terms that are used. Some call this the Dispensation of Grace. Some are not sure of that title, as grace also operated in the previous ages. But, neither are they certain what other name to give to it.

Confusion is betrayed in the titles by which the church program is called. Some call it the Church Age, others, the Dispensation of the Church. A few call it the Church Program.³⁰

It is not the similarities that will clear up the confusion, but the distinctions.

The Beginning and Ending Points

The time of the end of the previous dispensation is easily established. When our Lord said, "It is finished," dismissed His spirit and physically died, a great change occurred. The Law was fulfilled in His perfect life; exhausted in His suffering, and satisfied in His death. The Temple veil was unnaturally and supernaturally torn apart. That is the end of the Dispensation of the Law.

A beginning point for the next dispensation is not so easily determined. Did it begin immediately at the ending of dispensation number five? Or, at His resurrection? Or, at His ascension? Or, at the coming of the Holy Spirit? What chapter and verse so declares it? Without engaging in a theological treatise, or debate, which lies outside the stated purpose, Hebrews 10:1-18 is offered to establish the correct position. This passage continually points to the offering of Christ, as the dividing line between the old and the new systems.

God gave Adam the instructions for the new dispensation about to be instituted. Did it begin at that point? when God clothed them? Or, when they were expelled from the garden? Is it necessary to pinpoint it to an exact second, moment or hour? The important thing is that one ended with the failure in the garden, and the other began with their ordering life in accordance with the new guidelines from God. Each of the dispensations follows this pattern. Even number five could be seen as beginning at the first giving of the law, the second one, events interspersed in between, or when it was actually delivered to the people. It is not necessary to be that precise. The old order ended; the new one began, and we know when: At the fall and expulsion; on Mt. Sinai, et al. Grace began when law ended, at Calvary. Place whatever degree of preciseness to it one can, but that is when the one ended, and the other began.

The ending point of this present age is also in much dispute. Some place it at the Rapture, with the Tribulation Period being a separate dispensation, else, transpiring outside the confines of any dispensation. Of course, others hold the correct position. The key to identifying the correct position is a correct view of what the dispensation involves, and to whom it pertains. It is unique among all the others, and likely is why there is so much confusion concerning it.

Dispensation may be viewed in four components: (Luke 16:1-8)

- A. The Charge (1a "had a steward")
- B. The Corruption (1b "wasted")
- C. The Chastisement (2 "called him...mayest be no longer steward")
- D. The Correction (8 "commended," by implication, a new stewardship established).

God charges, or commits, to the people of the dispensation certain guidelines, principles, or rules, by which they are to live, and for which they shall be held accountable. When they fail (they always do), judgment is meted out, and a new order is established.

Dispensation Number Six differs from all the others, in that it involves three categories of people: The Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church. Every previous dispensation is for some one group, exclusively (if, in the first one, Adam and Eve can be termed for sake of argument, a group). An argument could be made for numbers four and five, that two groups existed--Jews and Gentiles. However, the Gentiles are not included in God's charge, except as a promise is given to Abram concerning them. They are not charged directly. They are simply left to their own devices, having so utterly corrupted themselves (Romans 1:18-32), until redemption is accomplished (Acts 17:30).

In this present age, there are three charges given:

- A. The Jews are commanded to repent, concerning their unbelief (i.e. rejection of Christ, Acts 2:38);
- B. The Gentiles are commanded to repent, concerning God (Acts 17:30), and exercise faith toward Christ (Acts 4:12 "must be saved"; 20:21);

C. The Church, composed of both Jews and Gentiles who have been saved, is commanded to faithfully proclaim the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19, 20).

By examining these, the asserted beginning point can be reinforced, and the ending point established.

Concerning the Jews, once they had consummated their rejection of Christ, by crucifixion, the need to repent immediately becomes incumbent upon them. Their repentance, nationally, will not take place until the end of the Tribulation Period, at the Return of Christ. They shall look upon Him, and national repentance among the remnant will transpire, shortly followed by the establishing of His kingdom--the beginning of the next dispensation.

Likewise, the chastisement of the Gentiles will occur in the Tribulation Period (Acts 17:31), as the plagues are poured out upon the "earth dwellers" (The Revelation 13:8). While multitudes will be converted from among the Gentiles, this is not a time of converting the mass of mankind, but of punishing them. Mankind will not repent. Jesus will return. Multitudes will be slain, and a host will be cast alive into hell.

Christ's command was given before Calvary (Matthew 10:5-7). Along with its revision (Matthew 28:19, 20), it was only given to the Apostles, not to everyone. But, Paul establishes that the Apostles are the foundation stones of the Church. So His revised command to them concerns their establishing of the Church Program. The revised Great Commission is to be carried out by the local church. The Church Program began at Pentecost, and will consummate at the Rapture.

One can clearly see, then, that the dispensation must extend to the time of our Lord's return to earth; from Calvary, to the coming of Christ. God's purposes for all three entities must be fulfilled within the dispensational period. Two of them require the Tribulation Period to transpire and come to consummation.

Ours Lord says the same? In Matthew 24, He plainly declares when the end shall be: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." The "end" of which He speaks is defined, in context, by the question previously asked of Him by His disciples in verse 3. They inquired of two things: One, When these things would occur, and two, what would be the sign of two things--His coming, and the end of the world. "End of the world," is equated with the time of His coming. It is also, in the Greek, (του αιωνος) (note the definite article), referring to the end of the dispensation! Verse 14 settles the matter: The end of the age, dispensation, is at the return of Christ to the earth.

The church program is distinct from the dispensation. The Dispensation, or Age, of Grace (John 1:17; Ephesians 3:2), stretches from the Crucifying to the Crowning. Within those boundaries is seen the Church Program, flowing from the coming of the Holy Spirit, until the catching away of the saints: 53 days after the dispensation began, until some seven years prior to its end. The Church Program, or as some would call it, Church Age, is not synonymous with the Dispensation of Grace, but that which occurs within the confines of its duration.

III. The Gospel of the Kingdom and The Gospel of Grace.

A popular concept inherent in the Trinity Broadcasting Network, is often verbalized and declared by various personages. It goes like this: "Jesus cannot come until we have preached the gospel to all the world." Or, "You must help us get the gospel out to every person in the world, so Jesus can return." The statement betrays their confusion between the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the Gospel of Grace.

The Kingdom of God Differs from the Kingdom of Heaven

First, one must understand the identity of the title Kingdom of Heaven, and how it differs from the Kingdom of God, and from the church program. Much of this explanation has been previously presented, so duplication will be avoided as much as possible.

It is good to let the Word of God define our terms.

A. The Kingdom of God is defined in I Chronicles 29:11,12--

11 Thine, O LORD, [is] the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all [that is] in the heaven and in the earth [is thine]; thine [is] the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. 12 Both riches and honour [come] of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand [is] power and might; and in thine hand [it is] to make great, and to give strength unto all.

Simply, it is God's rule over all His creation.

B. The Kingdom of Heaven is prophesied in Isaiah 40:3-5--

3 The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: {straight: or, a straight place} {plain: or, a plain place} 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see [it] together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken [it],

And defined, in Matthew 6:10--

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as [it is] in heaven

It is simply the time when the promise of the prophets shall be fulfilled, and the prayer of our Lord will be answered: The will of God shall be done on earth, as in Heaven.

It has already been established herein that a kingdom is to be established. The message of that kingdom is distinct from the gospel proclaimed in this present dispensation.

All Gospels are not the Same

There are several gospels found in the scriptures. One must learn to distinguish between them.

For instance, in Romans 1:1,9,16, there are three distinctly declared: The gospel of God, of His Son, and of Christ. The gospel of God (verse 1), is simply the good news that God has provided salvation; verse nine informs us that the salvation is in His Son, and the Gospel of Christ (verse 16), is the very message we preach, as defined in I Corinthians 15:1-4. However, practically, these all are but different angles of, or different views into, the one gospel preached in the Church Program.

But, the Gospel of the Kingdom is entirely different. It simply announces that the King is coming, and the subjects are to get ready to receive Him. It was preached to an exclusive audience. It does not preach salvation, but the coming of the One Who would bring salvation.

John first introduces us to the message in Matthew 3:2. It concerns a King about to appear on the scene to announce the setting up of His kingdom. The message becomes the core preaching of Christ (4:17), and of the disciples (10:7). It was to be preached only to Jews (Matthew 10:5,6). With the worsening rejection by the ones to whom He came, as already noted above, the shift to the unveiling of the new program occurs. The message is no longer relevant, as the people have fully rejected it: They crucified the King; they crowned Him with the wrong crown.

For the new program, a new gospel is needed. It is a gospel, not restricted to one family group, but offering God's salvation to all people everywhere. Thus, the Matthew 10: 5-7 commission is revised, becoming what is now commonly called, "The Great Commission." Five clear changes comprise the revision:

1. Their going forth is assumed. In Matthew Ten, the disciples are commanded to go. They need no such command now; the original command has not been rescinded. Instead, in Matthew 28:19, a participle is used, assuming their obedience to the command.
2. The whole world is included. Not just to the Jews of the whole world, but to all the people of the world.
3. Baptism is commanded. John had ordered it, therefore the disciples practiced it. The original commission is silent concerning it, for it was already being done. In the revised version, it is commanded, as it is to be a different baptism.
4. Propagation of a program is ordered. Nothing was to be propagated concerning the kingdom of heaven. It would be established, and all believing Jews would be in it from the beginning (Jeremiah 31:34). It would only remain for the Gentiles to come and enjoy the benefits of it. The commission, and the gospel of the kingdom, were only to call Jews to prepare for its establishment. The revised commission instructs to announce to individuals, worldwide, the accomplished redemption, bring them into the local assembly, and teach them to repeat the exercise. This change, then, includes two inherent component parts:
 - a. The message changes. Originally, they proclaimed the coming of the King to establish His kingdom, and commanded the people to so prepare. Now, it is the message of the grace of God for salvation. We are to preach the gospel, as defined in I Corinthians 15:1-4.
 - b. The activity changes. They were commanded to engage in a ministry of healing and exorcism. The Church is only to preach the gospel, lead sinners to Christ, and teach them to do the same.
5. The Apostles of the kingdom program were to make no provision for their own sustenance (Matthew 10:9-13). However, this was rescinded by our Lord, as His plan involved a coming new program, in which such contingency would not be needed (Luke 22:35,36). In the Church Program, Christ's servants are to walk by faith, depending on God to supply their needs, through His people. But, there is no prohibition concerning laying up for the future. This new gospel concerns the death, burial and resurrection of the Saviour; that through His finished work, all may be saved. It will be preached until the church program ends. Then, the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached, with two revisions! Matthew 24:14 declares: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." The "end," refers to the end of this age. Before Christ returns, all the world will hear of His (second) coming. The original commission excluded Samaria and the rest of the world, from hearing it. This verse has nothing to do with the Church program, or the gospel inherent therein. It is the gospel of the kingdom. It will be preached to all peoples, the first revision. The second? They will proclaim the coming of the crucified, risen and returning King.

IV. Salvation in the Old and New Testaments as Concerns the New Birth.

Outside the dispensational method, few distinctions are seen between what went on up to Calvary, and that which is transpiring since. It is just simply God's major plan, as it would be viewed, to bring redemption to mankind, or the elect, or whomever. But, with all the distinctions contrasted above, one would be wise to carefully examine the doctrine of salvation, to see if something changed concerning it after the cross.

God promised Abram a land, a seed, and a blessing. The Seed promise was fulfilled at Bethlehem. The blessing refers to all the benefits Abram received, and shall receive, because of his faith. The land...his descendants had it, but lost it. They got it back and lost it again. Why?

The Palestinian Covenant promised the land to Abram's descendants on the condition of their obedience. They disobeyed, and, in time, the curses pronounced in Deuteronomy 28-30 were imposed upon them, continuing to this very day. Chapter 30, however, promises a coming day when Israel will obey the Lord, and the land will be their possession, never to be taken from them again. The question that should be obvious is, what is the difference in then, and the future? Why could they not obey in that day, but will obey in that future day?

The most renowned verse concerning the new birth is found in John 3:3,5. Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to enter the kingdom, he would have to be born again. He would have to be born, not only of water (the natural birth), but also of the Spirit. Of which kingdom was Jesus speaking? the kingdom of heaven, or, the kingdom of God? The answer is easily ascertained by considering the well known ministry of John the Baptist, and the message he preached, as previously considered.

Jesus had come for the purpose of setting up His kingdom. According to Ezekiel 37:14, the initiation of His kingdom will involve, among other wonderful acts, "put(ting) (His) spirit in (them)." It will be the day when Jesus becomes the Baptizer, and pours out His Spirit upon "all flesh" (Joel 2:28; Matthew 3:10-12). Ezekiel said:

24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. 25 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and ye shall keep my judgments, and do [them]. 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God (36:24-28).

We have abundant Old Testament prophecies and promises that God will regenerate His people at the setting up of the millennial kingdom. The reason they could not obey Him before, and lost the land, is because of their unregenerate state. God's law was not written in their hearts, but on tables of stone:

...I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"(Jeremiah 31:33,34).

If the people of Abraham's day, Moses' day, and David's day had been regenerate, they would have obeyed and retained possession the land.³¹ They were not, for there was no regeneration in the Old Testament.³²

And, again:

...and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them]. 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your Fathers...(Ezekiel 36:26-28).

Why, then, did Jesus tell Nicodemus that he must be born again? Simply because our Lord was offering the kingdom, and had Israel received it, in just a matter of days this regeneration would transpire. It is similar to the troubling question as to why Jesus healed the infirm man at the pool of Bethesda, but not the others. Had the kingdom been established on time, they all (believers) would have then been healed, as they entered into the kingdom (Isaiah 35:5--note the context).

One must understand that nothing in these above prophecies took place at Pentecost. Peter said so: Acts 2:16, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel...". Peter then commenced to tell what Joel had said. After disclosing the things Joel had said would happen at the time of which he (Joel) was speaking, Peter then said: "He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear," i.e. that which has happened today. It was the same kind of thing, but not the same thing that was prophesied! Joel's words provided the foundation for believing that the occurrences of the day were of God. Throughout the Book of Acts, and in all the writings of the Apostles, a two fold foundation is laid for all their doctrine:

A. The Old Testament scriptures;

B. The accompanying signs and wonders (until the time of their cessation).

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit changed His method of operation (John 14: 16, 17), from abiding with, to dwelling within believers. It is peculiar to the church program. At no other time has this been the norm. Regeneration is bound with the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is He in us, that is the new birth we enjoy. If Old Testament Jews were regenerated without an indwelling Holy Spirit, it is a theological position that is without description in Holy Writ. They were more safe, than saved. Their sins were covered, not eradicated. The supreme price had not been paid. They were saved on the (sure) promise that the redemption was coming, based on their faith concerning that promise. They were not saved by the offering of sacrifices. Burnt offerings only testified to their faith in God's promises (Hebrews 11:4). It was faith in something to come, but which had not yet transpired.

When the redemption price was paid on Calvary and the Redeemer went back to Glory, the Holy Spirit came. His began a new work of indwelling believers, baptizing them into the formation of the new Body, and sealing them unto the time of the full redemption of the purchased possession. The objects of His work were, and are, regenerated. That work will come to an end at the Rapture. At the Return of Christ to the earth, His kingdom will be established in righteousness. The Holy Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh (everyone who enters the kingdom will be a saved person). Some form of regeneration will occur in them. The Holy Spirit will be in them: "...and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live..." (Ezekiel 37:14; note 36:27). In what sense is not clear. Will He continuously indwell each individual, as He does in the church program today? He will be "in" them in some sense that will allow for regeneration and control, but that may, or may not be, the identical mode of the church program indwelling.

If I Peter 1:11, is troubling, as touching the possibility of regeneration in the Old Testament, just consider this: If the Holy Spirit was in the Old Testament saints, in the same way that He shall be in the Kingdom saints, why was the law not written in the hearts of the former, as prophesied to be in the latter?³³ So that they would have been able to obey, and possess the land. There must be a distinction in the state of the two settings. There is. It is that the Old saints were not regenerated, but that state is reserved, as concerns Israel, for those saints to come.

Then, one might inquire as to the reason saints today do not obey God fully, since we each individually have the indwelling Holy Spirit. The answer is based on another distinction between the nature of the relationship of the Spirit to those future generations, and that which we now experience. Believers today have a dual nature. We retain the sin nature, until the Day of Redemption, when we receive the "end of our salvation" (I Peter 1:10), and become like Christ (I John 3:1-3). For church saints, after the rapture, there will be no more sin nature. But until then, one is in constant warfare as to who is in control: God? or one's Self? In the millennium, God's people likewise will not be plagued with sinful flesh, tempting them to walk contrary to the King. Neither will there will be any devil around to fool them concerning the Truth (Revelation 20:1-3), nor any world to allure them from God (i.e. the world will be ordered by its Creator, not the god who it stole it away in the Garden [II Corinthians 4:3,4]). In the Millennium, the Kingdom citizens will have the Spirit "on," "upon," or "in," them, as all these terms are used, for power in godly living. Those resurrected at the return of Christ, and the remnant ushered alive into the kingdom, will have bodies and natures like Adam and Eve, prior to the Fall, except they will be established in righteousness. With no temptation, no sinful nature, no devil around, and with God's law written within, by the power of the Holy Spirit they shall follow the Lord in perfect obedience.

For a detailed study on Baptism, click [What The Bible Says About Baptism](#) (Article can also be found on the Main Menu, "Doctrinal Studies/Baptism").

¹ Study completed on 5/5/99. First revision completed on 5/7/99. Revised again on 1/11/00, 5/25/00, 11/03/09, and 7/8/11.

² All Bible quotes from the (King James) Bible.

³ See [The Law Prophesied](#), Ralph Mount

⁴ All Hymns quoted from [Great Hymns of the Faith](#), 1968, Zondervan Press.

⁵ If the doctrinal confusion alleged is not immediately clear, see below, where additional distinctions, relating to the matter, will be noted and explained.

⁶ [Thayer's Lexicon, Pp 561,562](#)

⁷ Reference note in [The Scofield Reference Bible](#), Dr. C. I. Scofield, Oxford University Press, p. 996

⁸ [Great Hymns of the Faith](#)

⁹ There has to be, theologically, some distinction between regeneration then, and now, in the church program. See below.

¹⁰ Verse 42 is a strong verse in the foundation of the dispensationalist's method of literal interpretation.

¹¹ See the study within for consideration of distinctions concerning the Great Commission, the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of grace, and the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of God.

¹² Reference Dr. Scofield's heading at Matthew 12:31.

¹³ The structure of this study necessitates dealing with the distinctions in order. One cannot help but mention them, prematurely, on occasion. See below.

¹⁴ I credit this position to a definite experience in a class, at my college alma mater, taught by Pastor Elmer Day, when for the first time, this student heard an explanation of "Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" that made sense. It has been almost three decades. I trust my development and presentation of the position here in no way falsely represents the view held by Mr. Day

¹⁵ See the study within, for consideration of the distinction in baptism here, and the baptism we now practice in the church.

¹⁶ One may reject the gospel more than one time, however. The question is, "Is there a time when the Holy Spirit will, as it were, decree that one has blasphemed, and no more opportunity to repent and believe will be granted?" The question is raised here, but is outside the scope of this study.

¹⁷ Application of this principle to the war against those who practice abortion could be valuable.

¹⁸ The author plans a study on Satan's Great Lie.

¹⁹ Statistics could be presented, but even without them it is so obvious as to render such citation unnecessary.

²⁰ The dictionary doesn't give such a definition. In the secular books, Christianity would be included in their definition. But, biblically, there is a distinction between all that is called religion, and the Faith of Christ. All those others conform to the definition devised herein. Christianity alone is distinct, and absent of those damning characteristics.

²¹ Here is the battleground of our present day. Identification. You independent Baptists who share the bed with those belonging to a corrupt and perverse convention, hearken to God's Word: Separate! not, Infiltrate. Separation, not association. Identify with the Truth, not with error; with those who reject and cry against error, not with those planted and rooted in that same false system.

²² See the study within concerning kingdom baptism and church baptism.

²³ See the studies within, in these areas.

²⁴ This author would never dishonor this great servant of God by criticizing him. Had he another number of years to study and teach, I have no doubt that he would have discovered some of his shortcomings in his

dispensational order, and corrected them. But, it was left for others to do it in succeeding generations.

Thank the Lord for the foundation he laid.

²⁵ Scofield Reference Bible, p.1022.

²⁶ Some may question this concerning Acts 8, the Ethiopian Eunuch. But he, assumedly a Gentile, was also a Jewish proselyte, as the text infers.

²⁷ This principle accepted and applied, readily solves the long debated issue of whether Paul was supposed to be the replacement Apostle for Judas, or if Matthias was, after all, the correct one.

²⁸ The cessation of this gift is prophesied, in I Corinthians 13:10, to occur when the perfect state arrives, i.e. the establishing of the Kingdom.

²⁹ American Heritage Dictionary on computer.

³⁰ It was a long time before I understood what Dr. Hoyle Bowman, Theology Professor at Piedmont Baptist College, meant by the title. I had never heard it before, nor do I recall reading or hearing others use it, in the days since.

³¹ Theologically, the matter of the sin nature must be considered. Even if the O.T. personages were regenerated, they still would have been no more faithful to God than believers are today. But, the kind of regeneration prophesied in the O.T. precludes the absence of that sin nature. Such will not occur until the Regeneration comes, i.e., the prophesied making of all things new

³² There are often exceptions to rules, in the Bible. The issue of King Saul has been debated by the best scholars, as to his experience of receiving a new heart. If it is regeneration, he certainly did not act like it. But if it was, only the continuing presence of the old nature can explain his conduct. In the millennial kingdom, regeneration will be without the troubling presence of the old nature.

³³ The Greek (εν) could possibly be translated “among”, in the sense of “in their presence”. However, theology should probably settle the matter of translation, rather than vice versa.