

Grace Evangel Fellowship Pulpit

OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE

How Do the Various Parts of the Bible Fit Together?

A Message

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I admire those that commit to reading through the entire Bible, or that memorize Bible passages, or that even participate in Bible Quizzing competition that requires a great deal of memorization. But, it is one thing to know what God's Word SAYS – it is another, and far more important thing, to understand how all of God's Word fits together. For only then will we understand its meaning and application to our lives.

There are two key passages we must never lose sight of, for they are key to understanding what God has revealed to us in His Word.

Have a pattern of sound words, which you hear from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:13)

Endeavor to present yourself to God qualified, an unashamed worker, correctly cutting the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

When I think of “sound words” I think about the MANY Bible translations that attempt to be easy to read – but that conceal much truth found in the original manuscripts. To know the truth we must use a Bible translation that is a faithful rendering of the original. There are many translations to choose from today, and most have been created to make the Bible simpler and easier to understand. But in doing so, these translations incorporate the personal bias of the translator – and they inadvertently hide the

distinctions that exist in the original Hebrew (Old Testament) or Greek (New Testament).

“Sound words” also points to the need to consider which writings should have been included in the Bible (sound) and which should not (unsound). This would be a study unto itself, but for now let me recommend that you find and read an excellent book, “The Original Bible Restored” by Ernest Martin. This book does a great job of showing how the selection of writings to be considered inspired and included in the Bible was actually accomplished by several key figures in the Old Testament and several in the New Testament. So the selection of writings was actually completed before the death of the apostles – not leaving that task to the first century church which had already fallen away from the truth (per the later writings of Peter and Paul).

As for the second passage mentioned above which is concerned with correctly cutting (or “rightly dividing” in some translations) the Word of God – this is to think about the context of any given passage – the era and the group of people the passage was addressed to. God's revelation is a progressive unfolding – and we cannot simply reach in and grab a passage from early on, before God has revealed things later in His process.

Now, as you read thru your Bible remember these two important instructions found in Paul's second letter to Timothy!

Every believer admits the need for “rightly dividing” (or “correctly cutting”) to some extent, for they will see, for example, the sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament to be a thing of the past once Christ fulfilled this practice with His own sacrifice. But there are MANY more distinctions to be made between God’s early revelation and His later revelation. God “condescends” to mankind throughout history, revealing as much as can be grasped in each era – a little at a time – progressively – until mankind was ready to understand His later and most complete revelations.

So, we cannot simply reach in and grab a passage from anywhere in the Bible, and make it apply to our current situation. E. W. Bullinger called this “stealing.” It’s like intercepting a letter that your father has written to your brother. You might learn some things from that letter, but you cannot take the promises sent to your brother and make them your own. Yes, God is the same yesterday, today, and for the eons (Hebrews 13:8) – but to accomplish His will He deals with mankind differently as the ages progress.

The Bible is a history of mankind, and we see God working progressively from one era to the next. Therefore when we read what was written to a different group of people (e.g. the Israelites) in a previous era, we cannot make it fit our context today. Doing so will lead to extreme confusion, for God has moved on in subsequent eras as to how He is dealing with mankind.

As we read the Word of God from beginning to end, we will see God working systematically through the ages, and we will see Him revealing to mankind His plan in bits and pieces. Some information He revealed to the patriarchs in the Old Testament. Some things He revealed through His prophets. Some things He revealed through Christ Jesus. But some things were concealed until God was ready to reveal them through His servant Paul, after the Jews had been set aside for a time as God turned to the Gentiles as His means of reaching all of mankind (Romans 11:25-26).

Let’s consider how God has been working progressively in the history of mankind.

Creation

Genesis begins with an account of creation. We see the beginning of mankind in the Garden of Eden. It is interesting that despite this being a Paradise where Adam and Eve lived in the presence of God, and where there would be no death, evil existed even in this place. The serpent lived in their midst and had access to Adam and Eve so as to tempt them. This was not a neutral setting, where Adam and Eve would simply live in obedience to God. The evil one lived among them and tempted them.

What an interesting parallel to Jesus who was led by God to the wilderness to be tempted by the Adversary. (Matthew 4:1) Adam and Eve are “led” by God to the Garden of Eden to be tempted by the Adversary in the form of a serpent. The difference is the outcome. Adam and Eve succumb to the temptation, and death enters the world. Jesus overcomes the temptation and ultimately defeats death. Paul later makes the same comparison and reveals to us the impact of these events. As in Adam all are dying, thus also in Christ will all live. (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Mankind deteriorates

Once expelled from the Garden, mankind follows a steady course of self-destruction. Cain kills Abel. Evil runs rampant. In Genesis 6 we start over, with the wicked being destroyed and only the righteous Noah and his family surviving. But we read on, and mankind continues to show no promise. At Babel (Genesis 11) God finds it necessary to confuse the tongues of mankind and scatter them.

God chooses one man to bless all people

From all of mankind God chooses one man, Abram (later Abraham), promising to bless all people on the earth through him. (Genesis 12:3) We see here God’s purpose or intent: To bless all people. His method at this point is to choose one man, Abram, as His instrument (or channel) to bless all people.

Later God chooses a descendant of Abraham, Jacob. He repeats His promise to bless all people through Jacob. (Genesis 28:14) God later re-names Jacob “Israel.” (Genesis 32)

God’s purposes prevail

Joseph becomes the central figure in Genesis 37. He is sold into slavery, framed by Potiphar’s wife, thrown into jail, and forgotten. But God continues to raise Joseph up, and he eventually becomes the second most powerful man in Egypt, directly beneath Pharaoh. At the end of Genesis Joseph’s brothers stand before him after their father had died, and they fear what Joseph might do to them. They remember how they had plotted against Joseph and sold him into slavery years before.

Joseph says to them, *“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* (Genesis 50:19) God had purposed to “save many lives,” knowing that famine was coming to the land. He accomplished His purpose through Joseph. Nothing that was done to Joseph by his brothers, by Potiphar’s wife, or by any in Egypt, could prevent God’s purpose from being accomplished.

God chooses a nation

In Exodus 1:6 we read that the descendants of Jacob (Israel) are now “The Israelites.” Through the remainder of the Old Testament God will use the Israelites, His chosen people, to accomplish His purposes. Remember God’s promise to Jacob; to bless all people through him. Now Jacob’s descendants will be used for this purpose.

God does not choose Israel to show favoritism, or even because the Israelites are better than the non-Israelites. We will soon see that Israel also struggles with being righteous.

As God’s plan continues to unfold, we will see how He uses Israel, the nation, as His instrument to ultimately bless all nations.

“In you [Abram] all the families of the ground will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3)

“And all the nations of the earth will bless themselves in your [Abraham] seed ...” (Genesis 22:18)

“All nations of the earth will bless themselves in your [Isaac] seed.” (Genesis 26:4)

“All the families of the ground will be blessed in you [Jacob] and in your seed.” (Genesis 28:14)

The Kingdom

In 2 Samuel the Israelites become a powerful nation under David’s reign, and the success of the nation continues under the reign of his son, Solomon. But at Solomon’s death the nation divides. The northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah) have a series of kings as reported in 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles. Some kings are wicked, instituting or condoning the worship of idols and other evil practices. Other kings are good, bringing reform and a return to the ways of God.

Exile

The prophets of God warn the people that if they do not turn from their wicked ways and return to God, their land will be taken from them. Israel is more wicked than Judah and is the first to be taken from the land. (2 Kings 17) Judah goes on a bit longer but is later defeated and taken away into exile. (2 Kings 25) Sin and disobedience have resulted in exile. As Adam and Eve were once expelled from the Garden because of their disobedience, so also the nation of Israel suffers the same fate.

The Prophets

When Israel began to go astray God chose prophets to address the nation and to call her back to repentance and obedience. But continued rebellion led to exile. Still the prophets spoke and promised a restoration of the kingdom that had once been established by David. The people awaited this restoration and the promised Messiah (“Chosen One”) who would reign on David’s throne.

While in exile, a common message of the prophets is, “Return to God.” There are promises

brought by the prophets to the exiled nation. The scattered people will one day be returned to their land. (see Ezekiel 28:25) After a season of punishment, Israel will be restored. We see this “restoration” promised in Joel 2:18; Hosea 14; Amos 9:11; and Zephaniah 3:9.

Habakkuk 2:14 points to a day in the future when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. Daniel promises a new kingdom in the future; one that will come from heaven and be more powerful than all earthly kingdoms. (Daniel 2:44)

Return to the land

As promised, the scattered Israelites are returned to the land. We read in Ezra of the Temple being re-built. Nehemiah tells of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Awaiting the Messiah

As the New Testament opens, the people are back in the land – BUT -- they are under Roman rule. While a part of the promise of the prophets has been fulfilled, there is more to come. The people are awaiting the Messiah, the Son of God. They are looking for the days of David and Solomon to return, when the kingdom was strong and the people safe. The Old Testament prophets had foretold that a kingdom like this would be coming, so the people waited.

Summary of the Old Testament

So, God creates all things, including mankind. Man has a close fellowship with God, but man sins and death is the consequence. Humanity inherits this death condition – mortality.

To communicate God speaks not to the mass of humanity with an audible voice. Instead He selects individuals that He chooses to be His instruments. Signs and wonders validate their message to enable mankind to differentiate between the true prophets and those that are false.

God communicates His just requirements to Israel, His chosen instrument for reaching all mankind, but time and again Israel fails to be obedient. Experience proves that none have the

ability to be righteous according to God’s standards. All appears to be lost.

God never chooses a select person or group to be exclusive. His purpose is always to bless all of mankind. But His means for doing so is to work thru certain select individuals who are called to be His chosen instruments. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were God’s instruments, and God communicated directly with them. But always, the Bible tells us, God’s intent is to bless all mankind.

Jacob is renamed Israel, and his descendants become the nation of Israel. Thru Moses the Law is given to the Israelites. Always God desires to bless all mankind, but His chosen instrument; the nation of Israel; fails to be faithful. So Israel is removed from her land, and the line of kings ends as the nation is in exile. But even then God speaks thru His prophets of a time when Israel would be restored to her land, and when the Anointed One would come and reign upon the throne.

[A brief word on the punishment for sin in the Old Testament]

In Genesis we learned that the penalty for sin was death. Throughout the Old Testament we witness this time and again. Destruction (death) is the lot of the wicked. It is interesting that throughout all of the Old Testament we read of death and destruction, but never “eternal hell” as a punishment for those who sin. The sole penalty for sin is death.

The Four Gospel Accounts

After years of silence John the Baptist comes, preaching that *the kingdom is near* and it is time to repent and get ready (Matthew 3:1). Remember the prophets of old had said to the people, “Return to God, and He will restore you.” Now John is saying the same thing: “Repent, for near is the kingdom of the heavens.” But the Jewish leaders are skeptical of John, or perhaps they feel that no repentance is necessary on their part. After all, they reason, THEY are the chosen people of God.

Jesus follows with the same message; “Repent, for *near is the kingdom* of the heavens.”

(Matthew 4:17) Here was the Anointed One, ready to fulfill the words of the prophets by sitting upon the throne to reign, and thru Israel all peoples upon the earth would at last be blessed.

But Israel does not recognize the time of the king's "visitation" (Luke 19:44). The kingdom is rejected, and the king is crucified. Multitudes had followed Jesus, and as He talked of the coming kingdom His message was accompanied by many signs and wonders. But the Jewish leaders reject Jesus and ultimately crucify Him.

In the gospel accounts the Messiah (Christ) had come, speaking of the nearness of the kingdom to Israel, not to those of the other nations. This was the promise the Jewish people had been waiting for. But not recognizing Him as the Messiah/Christ, He was rejected by Israel, and as a result there was a delay in the kingdom's restoration.

The Kingdom is preached by Peter and the Twelve Apostles in Acts

The "kingdom message" is re-introduced in Acts, with Peter now the central figure. Jesus had promised that the keys to the kingdom would be given to Peter (Matthew 16:19) and this happens in Acts, as signs and wonders accompany Peter's proclamation of the coming kingdom. And, as was the case with the preaching of Jesus, the "kingdom message" is going to the Jews, not the Gentiles. Peter proclaims to the Jews,

"Men! Israelites! ... (Acts 3:12)

"Repent, then, and turnabout for the erasure of your sins, so that seasons of refreshing should be coming from the face of the Lord, and He should dispatch the One fixed upon before you, Christ Jesus, Whom heaven must indeed receive until the times of restoration of all which God speaks through the mouth of His holy prophets who are from the eon." (Acts 3:19-21)

This message is very similar to that of John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself. Repentance is called for. Peter is conditioning the return of the kingdom on this repentance. "Repent," he says –

so that seasons of refreshing come ... and so Christ Jesus will come.

In response to Peter's proclamation, had the "sheep of Israel" repented, Christ Jesus would have come and the kingdom would have been established. But throughout Acts, while the kingdom message is received by some, it is rejected by others – especially the leaders of Israel. As the kingdom is continually rejected, God begins to move among the Gentiles.

Peter is hesitant, but eventually goes as prompted by God to Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile. (Acts 10) Peter and his Jewish companions are "amazed" when the holy spirit falls on those Gentiles hearing the word. (Acts 10:44) They are not expecting God to work among the Gentiles as He had among the Jews. They had forgotten that God's plan is to bless all people through the Jews, who are acting as God's instruments to accomplish this purpose.

So following Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the apostles continued to proclaim the coming kingdom message to the nation of Israel – and to a small extent to some Gentiles – but only those who had become followers of Judaism.

Saul (Paul)

At this point, God did a new thing – an amazing thing.

In Acts 9, as Saul travels to Damascus to continue his persecution of the Believers, the risen Jesus appears to him. Saul is chosen as Christ's instrument to bear His name "*before both the nations and kings, besides the sons of Israel...*" (Acts 9:15-16) He is the first, then, to be specifically commissioned to go to the Gentiles ("nations and kings"), although he is also commissioned to go to the "sons of Israel" as had John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter.

This created no small stir, for Israel was offended by this "heretical" message. (Acts 22:21-23) THEY were the people of God, not the nations.

Elymas (Bar-Jesus) and Sergius Paul

One of the first incidents we read about in Saul's ministry is the encounter with Elymas, the Magician, also known as Bar-Jesus, in Acts 13.

Sergius Paul, a proconsul who is an intelligent man (a Gentile), calls for Saul and Barnabas, asking to hear the word of God. But Elymas the Magician *"withstood them, seeking to pervert the proconsul from the faith."* Saul chastises Elymas for *"perverting the straight ways of the Lord,"* and Elymas is blinded, *"not observing the sun until the appointed time."* The proconsul becomes a Believer.

Here, for the first time, we see that Saul "is also Paul." (Acts 13:9) Saul is a Hebrew name, while Paul is Greek. It is interesting that we are told of Saul's new Gentile name at the precise point where a Jew attempts to stop the word of God from going to a Gentile.

Also interesting are the words spoken to Elymas when he is blinded; "until the appointed time." This is very similar to Paul's explanation in Romans 11:25 that the callousness of Israel has come "until the complement of the nations may be entering," after which time all Israel shall be saved. The incident with Elymas seems to be a picture of God's plan to set aside (or blind) Israel, for a time, while the word goes to the Gentiles.

Paul Becomes the Central Figure in Acts

Remember Paul has received a dual commission. He is to go to the "nations and kings" and to the "sons of Israel." As he travels Paul goes first to the synagogues. He gathers some believers, but others reject him and even attempt to kill him.

Peter, who had been the primary figure in the early part of Acts begins to fade, and Paul becomes the primary figure after the incident with Elymas.

Rejection by the Jews – To the Nations!

Throughout the remainder of Acts we read of the persecution of Paul by the Jews who reject his message. Finally in Acts 28:17 Paul calls together the "foremost of the Jews." Some are persuaded, but others disbelieve. (Acts 28:24-25)

As they disagree with one another, Paul concludes the book of Acts with these words:

"Let it be known to you, then, that to the nations was dispatched this salvation of God, and they will hear." (Acts 28:28)

The final two verses in Acts report that Paul remains in Rome for two years, welcoming all who come to him. He heralds the kingdom of God, and teaches "that which concerns the Lord Jesus Christ." We learn what he taught as we read the letters of Paul.

After Acts – the Epistles

After Acts we come to a collection of 21 epistles, or letters. Of these letters, 13 are from Paul. The others are often referred to as "The Circumcision Letters" as they are written by Jewish believers and they are directed to "the church" comprised of Jewish believers.

Paul's letters are a bit more complicated. We must remember that Paul had a dual commission from the Lord. He was to go to both nations and kings (Gentiles) and also to the sons of Israel (Acts 9:15-16).

When we read the Circumcision letters, we can learn some things – but we must remember they are directed to the believers among Israel. Peter, James, John and the other writers of these letters had a commission only to go to the sheep of Israel. As the people of Israel were living under Roman rule – often a cruel Roman rule – they awaited the return of the Messiah. The Circumcision letters admonished them to keep the faith, not to turn away, and to persevere.

Paul's letters were written to clarify doctrine and to encourage proper behavior. His earlier letters were directed to a mixed group of believers – those of Israel and those of the nations. Again we must keep in mind the progressive nature of God's dealings with mankind. Most of Paul's letters were written during the period covered in the book of Acts – where Paul went to Corinth, Thessalonica, Galatia, etc. But then comes the conclusion of Acts, where Paul says in 28:28 *"Let it be known*

to you, then, that to the nations was dispatched this salvation of God, and they will hear."

When Paul finds himself imprisoned in Rome (late in his life) he wrote the letters that are most meaningful to us today – particularly Ephesians and Colossians. For it is here that we find the loftiest of God's revelation to mankind, where he tells of secrets that were previously concealed by God but now revealed (Ephesians 1:10; 6:19; 3:3). And in Colossians 1:16-20 we read of the magnificence of God's plan – that just as ALL was created by God, so ultimately ALL will be reconciled to God – ALL of God's creation.

And then in Colossians 1:25 we read that Paul was commissioned to complete the Word of God, thereby closing the door on any subsequent prophecies or proclamations claiming to be God's Word.

I cannot stress strongly enough the progressive nature of God's revelation to mankind, beginning in Genesis and moving forward throughout the history of mankind. And the resulting need to apply the principle of "rightly dividing" or "correctly cutting" the Word of God is just as important when considering the letters found in the Bible. Always consider the context. To whom was this written, and where was God in the process of working with mankind at this point in time?

Paul's Message Not the Same as Peter's

Paul was not one of the Twelve, but was an ADDITIONAL apostle with a new mission, unheard of in the past. He would speak to the nations, introducing the Body of Christ consisting of Jew and Gentile alike with no barrier or preference. The Law no longer pertained (see Galatians). God's grace reigned!

We err when we think there is just one "Gospel." From my youth I was taught that when we read the word "Gospel" in the Bible it is always the same. But this is to ignore the context, mixing together things that are different. It is a failure to "rightly divide."

"Gospel" is the English translation of the Greek "*evangel*." It simply means "good news" (eu or ev = good, angel = message). This is made clear in Luke 1:19 where the "*evangel*" is brought by Gabriel to Zechariah, and it is simply the good news concerning the coming birth of John the Baptist.

Throughout Matthew the "*evangel*" concerns the coming kingdom restored unto Israel. But as the kingdom is rejected, the "good news" being proclaimed changes. The heart of the good news in God's later revelation is different from the good news in earlier revelation. Remember, God's Word is progressive.

"My Evangel"

There are several instances where Paul refers to the evangel as "my evangel." Why does he use this terminology? Is there not just one evangel ... the evangel?

In Romans 2:16 Paul says,

"God will be judging the hidden things of humanity, according to my evangel, through Jesus Christ."

This is clearly not an evangel concerning the restoration of the kingdom unto Israel. It is a different topic; a different message; a different evangel.

In Romans 16:25-26 Paul again refers to "my evangel," and here he makes reference to

"the revelation of a secret hushed in times eonian, yet manifested now..."

Could Paul's "evangel," then, contain new information from God not previously revealed by the prophets of old, or by John the Baptist, or even by Jesus Himself?

Paul tells us in Galatians 1:11 that this evangel he brings

"is not in accord with man. For neither did I accept it from a man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

If Paul's "evangel" is simply a continuation of the same "evangel" being proclaimed by Peter,

why would Paul have not simply studied under Peter and the other apostles? In Galatians he feels it is important to tell us that he did not get his evangel from any man, but through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

In Galatians 2:7 Paul makes the distinction between the evangel “of the Uncircumcision” (Gentiles) and the evangel “of the Circumcision” (Jews). Grammatically, the genitive case is used, and not the dative case. This means that the proper translation is not the evangel TO the Circumcision or Uncircumcision, but the evangel OF the Circumcision or Uncircumcision. The distinction is not made between the *recipients* of the evangel. Instead, the distinction is made in the evangel itself. Paul has been entrusted with the evangel “of the Uncircumcision” and Peter is entrusted with the evangel “of the Circumcision.” We must keep this in mind when we read the epistles/letters other than Paul’s!

We struggle with this distinction today and try to blend the messages together into one “Gospel.” This is exactly what those in Peter’s day tried to do. It is the reason they challenged Paul for not requiring circumcision of the Gentile believers. They had a hard time understanding that God was doing a new thing, which is why Paul found it necessary to explain that his evangel came not from men, but was a revelation from God, and it was a *different* evangel!

Is the Kingdom Still to Come?

Is the restoration of the earthly kingdom still to come? Just before Christ ascended into heaven He is asked by His followers, “*Art Thou at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1:6) The Lord does not chastise them for missing the point. He does not tell them an earthly kingdom is not to come – that it is now a spiritual kingdom. Instead He tells them, “*Not yours is it to know times or eras which the Father has placed in His own jurisdiction.*”

The restored kingdom upon the earth is still to come. But for now Israel has been hardened “*until the complement of the nations may be entering.*” (Romans 11:25)

The Book of Revelation

Following the 21 epistles, we come to the book of Revelation – which is an *unveiling* of the kingdom that will one day come upon the earth. It is the kingdom in all of its fullness that was foretold by the prophets.

In Revelation we see the return of Christ to the earth, and the establishing of the kingdom of the heavens as prophesied by Daniel and proclaimed by Christ.

“And loud voices occurred in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of this world became our Lord’s and His Christ’s, and He shall be reigning for the eons of the eons! Amen!’”

(Revelation 11:15)

But even through the very end of Revelation the kingdom is for the Jews. The nations are blessed through Israel, but Israel is prominent.

Body of Christ is not seen in Revelation

Israel is mentioned time and again throughout Revelation, but whenever the nations are mentioned, it is always negative. It is Israel as contrasted with the nations. Nowhere do we see “the church” that is the Body of Christ.

Somewhere along the way the Body of Christ was removed from the scene in order that the turbulent times as seen in Revelation could proceed, and Satan could lead the ultimate rebellion without being impeded by the Body of Christ or the holy spirit that filled them. I believe we see this “removal” in 1 Thessalonians 4 when the dead in Christ rise, and the living in Christ rise – to meet Him in the air. And then the Body of Christ begins its commission of reigning in the heavens, for its expectation was always related to the *celestial* realm and not the earth. And then, sometime after this, Christ returns to the earth and restores the kingdom with faithful Israel reigning with Him.

The Body of Christ reigning in the heavens, and Israel reigning upon the earth, we enter the final phase of God’s restoration process. All of life to this point has been a process, but now we get closer and closer to the final goal. Paul records this in 1 Corinthians 15 where we see

death abolished, all subjected to Christ, and God becoming All in all.

So, as we study Revelation we must remember its context. While it may be positioned as the final book in the Bible, it does not reveal to us the “final condition” of mankind. At the end of the book the process continues, and only in Paul’s writings are we told of the conclusion; the consummation.

Today we live in an era of grace as revealed to us by the apostle Paul. God is conciliated to the world, not reckoning mankind’s offenses to them. (2 Corinthians 5:19) But a day will come when God takes the next step in His plan to reconcile all to Himself. Grace will not reign in that future era, but judgment; for judgment is what it will take to bring the most stubborn and rebellious into the fold. This is what we see happening in Revelation.

In that future era Christ’s ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) will be *recalled*, as is typically the case when conditions become perilous in the nations where ambassadors serve. War is about to be declared on the rebellious world. But rest assured, even this turbulence we see in Revelation is for constructive purposes as God continues His progressive work to bring every stubborn part of His creation into the fold!

Today mankind seems to have not only forgotten God, but has lost all consciousness to His existence. He is shut out of their every thought. And in the future era described in Revelation, this will be true to the extreme!

The world wants peace and satisfaction but *without* Christ. And while the world will not respond to Christ, they will receive the antichrist. Using Satan, God will send to mankind a strong deception that they should believe the lie. God wants mankind to acknowledge Him and the supremacy of His spirit. For some, the events described in Revelation are necessary to lead them to this conclusion. And so the bulk of Revelation records the waging of a brief but decisive war by God to recover a lost world.

A part of Paul’s message was that “*there is no distinction between Jew and Greek...*” (Romans 10:12) In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul tells us of this new thing God has done. Here he says that the nations were once, “*in that era,*”

1. Apart from Christ
2. Alienated from the citizenship of Israel
3. Guests of the promise covenants
4. Having no expectation

But now:

1. Christ razes the barrier
2. He makes the two (Jew/Gentile) into one new humanity
3. He reconciles both into one body

The rejection of the kingdom by the Jews seems to defeat God’s purposes, but God’s will cannot be defeated. The rejection of the kingdom evangel has resulted in the Gentiles being brought into the “*ecclesia*” ... the Body of Christ. Like Joseph’s rejection by his brothers which eventually led to the fulfilling of God’s purposes, now Israel’s rejection is being used by God to ultimately accomplish His purposes.

A quick word about “ecclesia”

The Greek word *ekklesia* (or *ecclesia*) is often translated “church” – though not always, since “church” does not fit in some instances. It is another example of the translator inserting his opinion as to whether or not “church” is the intended meaning in any given instance. I have learned over time that most translators fail to rightly divide the Scriptures, and their translations are biased with their own interpretations. Things that are different and distinct are mixed together – so these distinctions made by God as He revealed things to us are now hidden from those reading the Bible.

What *ecclesia* literally means is “called-out-ones” – a group of people called out as a subset of the larger group of people. In fact there are times in the Scriptures where *ecclesia* is translated “mob” or another secular group of people, to distinguish them from the larger group of people. It’s advised that the reader look up every instance where the word *ecclesia* is

found in the New Testament, to determine from the context exactly which group of called-out-ones are being referenced.

And one final hint – even when it is a group that God has called out, it is not always the present day “church” (or body of Christ) – as the group in the past might be exclusively Jewish, for example – as was the ecclesia in the period described in Acts. But for now, let’s move on ...

Remove Paul

To help us understand Paul’s function as God’s chosen instrument, let us remove him from the scene for a moment. In the classic movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” the viewer (and George Bailey) is shown what would have happened in Bedford Falls had Bailey never been born. What if Paul had never been born, or what if he had been judged and destroyed for persecuting and killing the early Believers?

Without Paul, our Bible would contain 13 fewer books. We would jump from Acts to Hebrews. The kingdom that was foretold by the Old Testament prophets and proclaimed in Matthew through Acts would have come once Israel repented. There is no setting aside of Israel until the complement of Gentiles comes in, which Paul spoke of. The Gentiles are only blessed indirectly through the nation of Israel.

The kingdom which was preached by Christ, and which was later proclaimed by Peter and the other apostles after the resurrection in Acts, now comes in Revelation. As Revelation ends we have the Jewish kingdom restored, and the nations are blessed through Israel.

Christ reigns upon the throne. Satan is in the lake of fire. Those whose names were not found written in the scroll of life have also been cast into the lake of fire.

Without Paul, this is where things end. At least this is the extent of God’s plans that would have been revealed to us, if Paul had not been given more revelation to be shared.

Add Paul

George Bailey is brought back to reality. His mouth is bleeding, his clothes are wet, and Zuzu’s petals are back in his pocket (my apologies to those who have never seen this movie).

Paul did live! Paul did see the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, as undeserving as he was. God did reveal things to Paul, which he shared with us in his evangel.

With Paul, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, as both are on equal standing as joint heirs. Just as in Adam all died, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. Through one offense for all mankind for condemnation (Adam), thus also it is through one just award (Christ) for all mankind for life’s justifying. It is God’s will that all men are saved (1 Timothy 2:4). God is operating all in accord with the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11). Christ is the Saviour of all mankind, especially (but not exclusively) of believers (1 Timothy 4:10).

But if the book ends with the lake of fire burning, how can these things come to pass?

When we read a book, we are used to events that flow chronologically as we read. But the Bible is not an ordinary book. The end of all things is not found in Revelation, for God showed things to Paul which had been secrets in the past, but which were revealed to him. Things were revealed to Paul which were not revealed to John, the writer of Revelation.

As John was given the revelation, he was shown the events upon the earth as the promised kingdom was restored. As Daniel had prophesied, it was a kingdom which was greater than any previous kingdom. Christ Himself is upon the throne. The righteous live, and the wicked are punished.

But it is within Paul’s writings that we are told what will happen even beyond the events of Revelation.

The Climax of History

As Revelation comes to an end, we see the end of the ages upon the earth. But as the last “Amen” of Revelation 22 is uttered, there is more to come. The crowning event of the ages is found in 1 Corinthians 15, the “consummation” of the ages. Here God reveals what happens when the ages have concluded.

Yet now Christ has been roused from among the dead, the Firstfruit of those who are reposing. For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead.

For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified [made alive beyond the subsequent touch of death]. Yet each in his own class:

The Firstfruit, Christ; [Step 1]

Thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence; [Step 2]

Thereafter the consummation, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. [Step 3]

For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy being abolished is death. For He subjects all under His feet. ...

Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all. (1 Corinthians 15:20-28)

Many believe the end of Revelation is a description of the eternal heavens that we will experience when the resurrection takes place. But there are a number of reasons to conclude that this is not the case, and that 1 Corinthians 15 happens after the end of Revelation 22.

In Revelation 21:1 John perceives “a new heaven and a new earth,” and he sees “the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven...” The New

Jerusalem is not heaven itself, but it descends out of heaven.

In Revelation 22:5 we see the slaves of God are reigning. And in Revelation 21:24 there are “*kings of the earth.*” But in 1 Corinthians 15:24 all sovereignty, authority, and power are nullified.

In Revelation 21:5 Christ is seated on the throne. In 1 Corinthians 15:25 we see that Christ must reign UNTIL He places all enemies under His feet, and in 15:28 we see that when all is subject to Christ, He then subjects Himself to God. And as previously stated, in 1 Corinthians 15:24 all sovereignty, authority, and power are nullified. So Christ at this point is no longer on the throne, having accomplished His commission.

In Revelation 21:8 the lake of fire (second death) is in existence. But in 1 Corinthians 15:27 the last enemy – death – is abolished.

In Revelation 22:2 there are leaves on the tree for “*the cure of the nations.*” This implies there are corruptible bodies needing the leaves to sustain life. But in 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 we see incorruptible, spiritual bodies.

Note the Jewish character throughout Revelation. There are twelve tribes (21:12), twelve apostles (21:14), and nations *outside* the city. But in 1 Corinthians we see a more universal character – no Jewish connotations. And in Paul's writings we read there is no barrier between Jew and Greek.

Compare the letter to Ephesus in Revelation 2:1 with Paul's letter to the Ephesians and you will clearly see the stark contrast between Paul's later letter to the body of Christ and the earthly, Jewish focus in Revelation.

Overall, Revelation provides a picture of a *physical* place, with mortal bodies much like our present world, except with Christ reigning and keeping evil out (22:14-15). But in 1 Corinthians 15 we see a picture of a *spiritual* realm, with no corruption, no reign, and no power. All are subjected. There are no enemies. There is no death, no sin, and no rebellion. The purpose of

the ages/eons has been achieved. God is now All in all. (How could He become All in all with death, the enemy, still present?)

In short, Revelation is a description of the final age/eon upon the earth. 1 Corinthians 15 is a description of the consummation which occurs after the ages/eons upon the earth have been completed.

The Saviour of All

The culmination of human history is found in 1 Corinthians 15 when God becomes All in all. The book of Revelation does not take us quite this far. [While 1 Corinthians is one of Paul's earlier letters, and while it does not reveal the many details provided in God's subsequent revelation through Paul in his later letters, it does reveal the grand conclusion of human history upon the earth.]

With God All in all, all things have been reconciled to God, despite the plans of the enemy and the rebellion of the flesh which have seemed to triumph at times. Corruption is eliminated, and even our bodies are now incorruptible, not even needing the leaves from the tree of life to sustain life. The worst enemy of all, death, has been abolished.

In 1 Corinthians 15 we finally see every knee bowing before the Lord. The Salvation of all has not meant the ignoring of sin. The lake of fire, the second death, has accomplished its work. All men now recognize the wondrous ways of God, and His grace as provided through the work of Christ.

The Salvation of all does not negate or minimize the work of the cross. The work of Christ upon the Cross, and the power of God as displayed through the resurrection, were both very necessary. But now, at the end of the ages, we see the true scope of God's work. Despite the sin and rebellion of humanity, God has found a way to bring every soul to the point of acceptance, and every knee now bows before Him.

The ages have ended. The purpose of the eons has now been fulfilled; to reconcile all to God. Wickedness and evil are gone. Death is no more.

God is love, and He is All in all. Eternal life in perfection has begun!

Let's think about this ...

Since the day God told Abraham, "*All peoples of the earth will be blessed through you,*" God has been working through the people of His choosing to accomplish this very purpose. But His chosen instruments have not cooperated. It appears that God's plan is at an impasse. How can the kingdom come upon the earth, and how can God bless all peoples thru Israel, when Israel herself continues to reject the message from God?

But we learn that this too is a part of God's plan. This rejection may not have been prophesied before, but it fits right into God's plan for the ages. Israel rejects the kingdom, so God now turns directly to the Gentiles. Paul is not one of the select twelve apostles; but he is an apostle chosen by God nonetheless. He is an apostle of a different kind, and he did not simply continue the same message that had been borne by the others who preceded him. When Paul became a believer he did not study under the other believers. This might have seemed like a good idea in the ways of man, but God had different plans; and He revealed new things directly to Paul; things that had not been revealed to mankind ever before.

Today God is no longer working thru Israel as His instrument. He now works thru the Gentiles, who are joint heirs (equals) with Israel. The focus is no longer on Israel being born again, but on an entirely new creation. No longer is the focus on the nearness of the kingdom to come upon the earth; but upon God's broader kingdom overarching the entire universe. No longer do we wait for the Lord to come to reign upon the earth; we wait for Him to call us to meet Him in the air – to serve Him in the celestial realm. (See Ephesians and Colossians.)

Israel has been set aside – but not forever. Israel will still serve a purpose when Christ prepares to return to establish the kingdom upon the earth. But for now Israel has been temporarily set aside as God works thru a new instrument; an instrument that had not been mentioned by

the prophets of old; the Body of Christ. This plan had been God's secret that He kept concealed until the time was right – when it was revealed to the apostle Paul. And this new instrument, the Body of Christ, would be the example of God's grace to the entire universe. This was the next step in God's unfolding plan, not previously revealed – until Paul came along.

The day will come when Christ descends, calling the Body of Christ away from this earth to be with Him – to play a part in the heavens. And the day will come when Christ returns to reign upon the earth, when again Israel will play a part. And the day will come when all of God's creation will be subjected to Him, under the reign of Christ, when all are reconciled to God; when not one sheep remains lost; when even death and evil are defeated; when all are saved; and when God becomes All in all.

It all began with God alone, in perfection. Then He created. And now mankind is on a journey, guided by the sovereign God, toward a perfect conclusion.

When we step back and consider this revelation, can any dispute the wisdom and love and power that is displayed? Just as God's fingerprint is upon His visible creation, letting us know that He does exist and He did create all that we see around us, so also God's fingerprint is upon the Bible – His message to mankind – when we consider the wisdom, the genius and the perfection of the message.

When we consider the other writings that some claim are from God, we know enough of the message being conveyed to see that there is not the same wisdom and perfection that permeates the Bible. God's fingerprint is missing! In no other case do we see the perfection of God, the flaws of mankind, and the perfect plan where not just some; but all of creation is reconciled to God, ending in perfection.

And so – consider the perfection of the message being conveyed, a perfection we would expect if the communication has truly come from God.

The world today is filled with plans to redeem mankind. Peace conferences are planned with

great hope. Democracy is promoted as the great deliverer of mankind. Band together all nations into one and wars will cease. But democracy is inadequate. Dictators, even the most charismatic and well-intentioned, are inadequate. No one is able! It is God's intention that man come to this realization and turn to Him; but throughout Revelation in the final ages upon this earth we see a rebellious mankind turn to any scheme or person other than God to accomplish peace and satisfaction without Him.

Yet ... as God completes His work in the final eons, using the Body of Christ in the celestial realm and Israel upon the earth – He will bring about the grand conclusion to the eons. Every knee will bow. Every part of creation will be reconciled back to God Who created all things.

“For in Him is all created, that in the heavens and that on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones, or lordships, or sovereignties, or authorities, all is created through Him and for Him, and He is before all and all has its cohesion in Him.

And He is the Head of the body, the ecclesia, Who is Sovereign, Firstborn from among the dead, that in all He may be becoming first, for in Him the entire complement delights to dwell,

And through Him to reconcile all to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross), through Him, whether those on the earth or those in the heavens.” (Colossians 1:16-20)

A word about “the Eons”

To properly understand the events unfolding in Revelation one must know what the word *eon* (*aion* in the Greek) means. The inconsistent manner in which this word is translated has *hidden* much of God's truth that He intends to *reveal*.

Since the Greek *aion* is often translated “eternity” unless that rendering will absolutely not fit within any given context, we miss the fact that there are a number of individual eons, each

with a beginning and an ending. Refer to “Young’s Analytical Concordance” or the Keyword Concordance found in the “Concordant Literal New Testament” to look up each passage where a variation of “aion” (or eon) occurs. You will find:

- Eon (singular)
- Eons (plural)
- Before the eon
- Before the eons
- End of the eon
- End of the eons
- Eon of the eon
- Eon of the eons

When we consider these different variations, we see it is important not to ignore the distinctions. God must have had a reason to use each variation, each with a distinct meaning. And it is clear that “eon” was not intended to represent the notion of endlessness – but instead a period of time with a beginning and an ending.

In Revelation the phrase *the eons of the eons* clearly speaks of at least two eons (eons is plural) out of ALL of the eons. A study of this phrase will lead us to the conclusion that *the eons of the eons* refers to the final two eons within God’s revelation concerning the earth. Much of the content found within Revelation is occurring in these final two eons. When we encounter the phrase *eonian life* in the Scriptures, often in the gospel accounts during the Lord’s earthly visitation, this refers to life in these final two eons.

When the final eon concludes, this does not mean that existence ends. The eons are simply the period of time covered by the Bible as God reveals things to us. Once the final eon concludes, life continues – as immortality has been bestowed to mankind (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). And this is the true beginning of endless, eternal life – God having completed His purpose for the eons.

This overview contains the thoughts and opinions of the author and is a work in progress as his study of the Scriptures continues. Some things that God has revealed are very clear. That Christ died for our sins; that He was entombed; and that He was roused (1 Corinthians 15:3) is clear. That all are to be ultimately reconciled to God thru the work of Christ is also very clear (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). But on many specifics in the Scriptures there are a variety of interpretations and opinions, and none should conclude they have the complete and final understanding on these matters that are less clear. The reader is encouraged to consider various opinions, but to study and to think for himself. Within the Body of Christ we should study and discuss our understandings so as to mutually reach a more complete understanding of that which God has revealed.

*Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures are taken from the Concordant Literal New Testament
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