

DISPENSATIONAL COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS

The Age of LAW and The Age of GRACE

By Jack W. Langford, June 1995

The Bible reveals many Ages or Dispensations. Yet only two, "the Dispensation of Law" and "the Dispensation of the Grace of God," actually concern the vast majority of the revelations in the Scriptures. The Hebrew Scriptures focus on the Age of Law and the Greek Scriptures focus on the Age of Grace. An interesting phenomenon in the Greek Scriptures is the fact that two of the inspired writers, John (to a lesser degree) and Paul (to a greater degree), often draw our attention to different facets of comparison between these two dispensations. These comparisons will not only show certain similarities between the two ages but quite often they will also show striking contrasts as well. This Bible study will point out most of these major examples of which I am aware. Then I will make some important observations, especially concerning the relationship of prophecy to these comparisons.

FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN. Most Bible teachers recognize that, of the four Gospel writers, John dealt more often on the spiritual truths that Christ conveyed to His disciples which were preparatory to the coming Dispensation of Grace. In this respect John is often led to compare and/or contrast Christ and Moses. Below, I will give eight examples of this.

As the signature in the beginning of a sheet of music tells us in which key it is written, so John 1:17 gives us, at the outset of the whole book, the very key in which the Gospel is written. Law and Grace are held up in contrast to one another. Though Christ is living under the Law Age yet something far different is coming—and what is coming is presented to the reader as being far more desirable. Christ, as to His person, will be the fruition of all that the Law and the Prophets anticipated. John will then emphasize Grace and Truth principles in the ministry of Christ contrasted to Law principles. The Gospel of John, therefore, is *transitional* in nature. This will enable the first generation of Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, to better appreciate and accept the distinctive revelations given to the Apostle Paul about a change in the Law and the establishment of "the Dispensation of the Grace of God." Please read each of these following verses in its context as well—

- 1.) John 1:17, "For the Law was given by Moses,
Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."
- 2.) John 1:45, "Of Whom Moses in the Law and the Prophets, wrote—
Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."
- 3.) John 3:14, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,
Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."
- 4.) John 5:46, "If you believed Moses,
You would have believed Me..."
- 5.) John 6:32, "Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My
Father gives you the True Bread from heaven."
- 6.) John 7:22,23, "Moses has given you circumcision...and on the sabbath you
circumcise a man...I have made a man totally whole
on the sabbath."

- 7.) John 8:5, "Now Moses in the Law, commanded such to be stoned,
But what do You say?"
- 8.) John 9:28,29, "You are His disciple,
but we are Moses' disciples."

FROM THE LETTERS OF PAUL. As Moses stood in relationship to the Law, as its steward, so Paul stands in relationship to the great Dispensation of the Grace of God. Paul was God's special messenger to convey the Word of Christ for the Gentiles of this Age. The unique truths that characterize this Age were revealed through Paul (Eph. 3:1-7). Under the Law, God called out one Nation to be His peculiar witness to the world. Under Grace, God is calling out of all nations a new spiritual entity, the Church which is Christ's body, to also be His witness before the world.

Paul makes many comparisons between the Age of Law and the Age of Grace. These comparisons have practical lessons, doctrinal lessons and important dispensational lessons which, in a prophetic nature, concern the course of this Age.

I. I Cor. 10:1-11. Here the Apostle Paul is inspired to draw ten (10) comparisons between the people of Israel under the Law with the Church saints in Christ today. These comparisons are both doctrinal and practical for our daily lives. What happened to the children of Israel (called "the church in the wilderness," Acts 7:38) under the Law are vital and practical lessons for our admonition today. In verse 11 Paul concludes this section by saying, "*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come.*" The striking similarity about how both Ages began is portrayed before us along with the practical lessons. Yet the differences are clear as well.

Israel under Moses

- a. Under the Cloud
- b. Passed through the Sea
- c. Baptized unto Moses
- d. Ate Spiritual Food (Manna)
- e. Drank Spiritual Drink (Water)
- f. The Spiritual Rock (physical)
- g. Idolatries
- h. Fornications
- i. Tempted the Lord
- j. Complaining

Church under Christ

- (Under the Holy Spirit)
- (Placed into Christ's Death)
- (Baptized unto Christ)
- (Eats Spiritual Food)
- (Drinks Spiritual Drink)
- (The Spiritual Rock)
- Do not become Idolators
- Do not commit Fornication
- Do not Tempt the Lord
- Do not Complain against the Lord

II. II Cor. 3:3-11. The Apostle Paul draws our attention to additional contrasts between factors that occurred at the beginning of each of the two Dispensations?

under LAW

- a. Table of Stones
- b. the Letter

under GRACE

- Table of the Heart
- the Spirit

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| c. the Letter kills | the Spirit gives life |
| d. the Glory | the Glory that excels |
| e. Veiled | Un-Veiled |

III. Rom. 5:20,21. Here the Apostle Paul will stress basic theological contrasts
Between the two Dispensations—

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| <u>under LAW</u> | <u>under GRACE</u> |
| a. The offense abounds | Grace abounds |
| b. Sin reigns to death | Grace reigns through righteousness |
| c. Serve in oldness of Letter | Serve in newness of Spirit |

IV The Beginning History of Each Age

Thus we can see that the inspired apostle was moved to sometimes emphasize for us the dispensational comparisons in order for us to have a better understanding of the actual functioning in our own Age, both in practical and doctrinal matters. We can also understand by this revelation from Paul a very important dispensational truth—namely, that each Age OPENED in a similar manner. There are clear parallels in the opening of both Ages. These parallels are very important because they give us clues about the whole course of this particular Age in which we live.

In further reading through the historical book of Acts along with the epistles of Paul we can gain a fundamental perspective on the beginning history of this Church Age. When we compare the beginning of the Church Age with the beginning of the Law Age, we can see additional parallels in this same pattern between the two Ages. These parallels are paramount for a better perception of dispensational questions which have often plagued Christendom. Therefore, the parallels between the opening of both Ages are highly important.

One illustration of the importance of this observation are the problems caused by modern Pentecostalism, which wants a revival of miraculous manifestations at the close of this Age, such as were done at the beginning of the early Church. This group has obviously failed to recognize the dispensational purposes for these miraculous manifestations and their transitional nature. This could have been understood by simply comparing the beginning of the Church Age with the beginning of the Law Age. In both Ages miraculous manifestations were designed to be of a temporary nature only. They were not to continue throughout the Law Age, nor were they to continue throughout the Church Age.

The Law Age opened with at least nine different miraculous manifestations being given to the church (Israel) in the wilderness: 1.) The Cloud, 2.) the Pillar of Fire at night, 3.) Miraculous Guidance through the wilderness, 4.) Manna for food, 5.) Water out of the Rock, 6.) Clothes that did not wear out, 7.) The Holy Spirit upon Moses, 8.) The Holy Spirit upon the Seventy, and 9.) Miraculous Healing. However, all these manifestations stopped when Israel crossed over Jordan. As when they ate the "old corn of the land," the manna ceased—so it is in the Church's beginning. When the Church came to its "maturity," the ninefold miraculous gifts were to "cease" (I Cor. 13:8-10).

Note the following comparisons for the beginning of each of the two dispensations—

Beginning of LAW Dispensation

- 1.) Israel "called out" of Egypt
- 2.) 3000 killed—death
- 3.) Moses to mountain top
- 4.) 40 year transition period
- 5.) progressive revelation
- 6.) miraculous provisions
- 7.) ceased after crossed Jordan

Beginning of Grace Dispensation

- A New Man "called out" of the world
- 3000 Saved—life
- Paul to 3rd. heaven
- 40 year transition period
- progressive revelation
- miraculous provisions
- ceased after "maturity"

V. Further Parallels. In taking the cue from the above truths, some Bible teachers have further noted that the middle and final time periods of Israel's history during the Law Dispensation are likewise followed in a similar manner by Christendom in this Grace Dispensation. This is fortified by the fact that the last book of the Greek Scriptures, the book of Revelation, makes reference to idolatrous and apostate Christendom as "Mystery Babylon" (Rev. 17,18). As the physical Babylon of old was the center of all heathen idolatries under the Law Age, so this "Mystery Babylon" is the center of idolatrous pollution for the whole world during this present Age of Grace. In this regard, notice the following similarities between Israel and Christendom during the whole course of their Ages—

Under LAW

- 1.) Starting as a small, insignificant people
- 2.) Israel's rise to greatness
- 3.) Defection from the Law
- 4.) Babylonian Captivity (physical)
- 5.) Rebuilding under Ezra & Nehemiah
- 6.) Drifting into Sadducees & Pharisees
- 7.) Final total Apostasy

Under GRACE

- Starting as a small, insignificant people
- Christendom's rise to greatness
- Defection from Grace & Truth
- Babylonian Captivity (spiritual)
- Reformation under Protestants
- Drifting into Liberals & Conservatives
- Final total Apostasy

The parallels between the courses of both Ages are highly significant. This is illustrated by the fact that the final total apostasy of both Dispensations is carefully brought to the forefront of our attention by the Apostle Paul in that great dispensational chapter of Romans 11.

VI. FROM ROMANS 11:15-27. In this chapter the Apostle Paul focuses on the closing days of both the Law Age and the Age of Grace. As we observed parallels at the opening of both Ages, so we will see parallels at the closing of both Ages. The Spirit of God has laid these truths before our eyes that we may not be deceived by religious trends in apostate Christendom in these last days. Furthermore, this is also very important because it enables the spiritual Christian to know exactly what is going to happen at the close of this Age. Therefore believers should not be deceived into thinking some great "Revival" will come at the end—it definitely will not happen! Instead, there will be the culmination of the prophesied great apostasy.

Paul gives the revelation here in Romans 11 that both Ages or Dispensations CLOSE in the SAME MANNER. Paul gives these truths in the context of warning Gentile peoples that they should not be guilty of following in the same footsteps as did the Jews. Paul then reveals

that the Gentiles will indeed follow the same path at the end of this Age of Grace, as did the Jews at the close of the Law Dispensation. When that happens not only will the Age of Grace end, but Israel will be accepted once again before God. Whereas the Gentiles are now in the forefront of God's dispensational dealings, then they will be broken off, and Israel will once again be in the forefront of God's dispensational plan. This is a highly important revelation as to the close of our particular Dispensation and the final restoration of the nation of Israel. Paul emphasizes that we should not be "ignorant" of this most significant "mystery."

Notice the sequence that is actually applicable for both groups. Though Paul will start and close this scenario with reference to the Jewish people, yet the middle warning will be directed to the Gentile peoples. The top and bottom lines will indicate the beginning and end of the present Age.

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| V.17,20 | 1.) | By "Unbelief" the natural branches (Jews) are "broken off." |
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| V.17,20 | 2.) | Wild branches (Gentiles) "grafted in," "by faith." |
| V.18 | 3.) | Do not "Boast" (Gentiles) against the discarded "branches" (Jews). |
| V.19,20 | 4.) | Do not be "HAUGHTY" (Gentiles), "but fear." |
| V.21,24 | 5.) | God "may not spare you (Gentiles) either." |
| V.25 | 6.) | "The Fullness of the Gentiles shall come in." |
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| V.22 | 7.) | "You (Gentiles) also will be broken off." |
| V.23,24 | 8.) | "And they (Jews—the natural branches) will be grafted in again." |

In order to get the maximum appreciation for these truths that Paul is giving, I want to repeat the course of the Age of Law and the Age of Grace separately. First we will rephrase this scenario entirely for the Jewish people under the Law Age. Then we will do the same for the Church under the Age of Grace. The top line speaks of the beginning of the Law Age and the bottom its close. Under the Law the cycle would go like this—

THE DISPENSATION OF LAW

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| 1.) | The Jewish nation was given a favored position by God. |
| 2.) | The Jewish people came to be characterized by unbelief. |
| 3.) | They were boastful of their covenant relationship to God. |
| 4.) | They became prideful over Gentiles by their Abrahamic lineage. |
| 5.) | They apostatized and did not heed the warnings of the prophets. |
| 6.) | The fullness of God's dealing with them finally came. |
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| 7.) | They were broken off from their place of nearness to God. |
| 8.) | The Gentiles, as wild olive branches, were now grafted into this place of nearness to God. |

Now let us phrase this scenario entirely from the aspect of what happens in this Age of Gentile prominence. We will follow the same pattern, only view it entirely from the perspective of the Gentiles being in the favored place.

THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

- 1.) Gentile peoples grafted into a place of nearness to God after Israel has been set aside.
 - 2.) The Gentile world of professing Christendom will also come to be characterized by unbelief.
 - 3.) The Gentiles of professing "Christendom" became boastful of their favored position before God.
 - 4.) Professing Christendom became prideful against the Jews and arrogant as those who have supplanted the Jewish people.
 - 5.) They have totally failed to take heed to the warning of the apostles of Christ about apostasy.
 - 6.) The Fullness of the Gentiles will come in by God completing the outcalling of His people for this age.
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- 7.) Simultaneously, the Gentiles as to their dispensational position of nearness to God will be broken off.
 - 8.) The natural branches, Israel—or the Jews, will be grafted back into a place of nearness to God.

According to this distinctive revelation through Paul, the same scenario that closed the Law Dispensation WILL CLOSE the Dispensation of the Grace of God. The two Ages are similar in this regard. Each Age follows the same cycle from its beginning to its apostasy and rejection. In order to get the fullest comprehension of this truth, we separated each Dispensation and placed each group in its own distinct cycle. As there were lessons to learn by comparing the beginning of each Age so there are lessons to learn by this comparison of the close of each Age. As we already stated, this present Age of grace will close by apostasy—not revival! Perhaps the most important lesson is the pathway of apostasy. It will be a duplication of what happened to the Jews under the Law Dispensation.

VII. The Distinctive Revelation From Romans 11 *Is A Forewarning of How This Dispensation Will Terminate*

Consequently, according to this revelation, we are to be expecting this Age to close in a similar manner as did the Age of Law. As we scrutinized the *beginning* of each Age, so we are doing to the *close* of each Age. When we do this in detail, as we did at the beginning of the two Ages, it will show to us some startling revelations and some amazing parallels.

Exactly how did the Age of Law end?? What brought about the termination of God's dispensational plan with Israel? Paul answers that question in essence by saying that the final total apostasy of Israel was marked by the Jew's rejection and crucifixion of CHRIST (see Rom. 10:1-4; 11:7-10 & 28). They committed the most heinous crime that could have been committed. It is quite true, according to the four Gospels, the book of Acts and the later epistles, that the Jewish nation became guilty of *deicide*—the rejection and death of the God-Man. In final unbelief they had their own Messiah, through Whom their Covenant blessings were assured, turned over to the Roman governmental authorities for execution. The Romans were ruthless in expediting His death.

Furthermore, the death of Jesus Christ is portrayed in the Bible as the singular greatest catastrophe ever to occur in this world. Its singularity and uniqueness are seen in Who He was and how the Son of God was treated. A perfectly righteous One had all the sins of all mankind placed upon Him. His sufferings passed out of sight of man and into the fires of hell where He took our sins. Christ's death is described in the Bible as being the antitypical "holocaust" (Greek for "whole burnt offering") for our sins (Hebrews 10:5-10). Likewise, this was portrayed in the sacrifice of Isaac as a "burnt offering" ("holocaust" in Greek Sept.), see Gen.22:2,3,6,7.

However, exactly three days later, Jesus Christ was spectacularly re-born and/or resurrected from the dead. Then, exactly fifty (50) days later (counting from the day of His resurrection) the Church of Jesus Christ was born. The Law Age had been abruptly terminated in God's reckoning, and the Age of Grace began.

This is how the Dispensation of the Law ended: Israel's final "apostasy" was marked by the crucifixion (Holocaust) of the Messiah, the resurrection of Messiah (Christ), and the counting of days (50) until Pentecost.

And Now We Ask, How Will The Age of Grace Close??

What brings about the termination of God's dealing with the Gentiles in this Age of Grace?? Is it not a fact that the final total apostasy of Christendom was marked by their rejection of the Jews in the Holocaust? In fact, the Holocaust has been described by Jewish, Catholic and Protestant writers as "*the crucifixion of the Jews*" (see the Appendix to my study, "*The Gospel of The Holocaust*"). The Gentile world of Christendom committed the most heinous crime ever to be cataloged in the annals of human history. The Holocaust stands uniquely alone. In a manifestation of final unbelief, the "Christian" nations totally rejected the very people through whom the nations were to receive their future Kingdom blessings. They allowed (even encouraged) the cruel governmental power (Nazi Germany and their fellow assistants) to destroy the Jewish people (6,000,000). It has now been shockingly stated that "*Christendom also committed deicide.*" To reject, envy, hate and kill the Jews is to reject, envy, hate and kill "THE JEW," Jesus Christ, and the God Who ordained them. The hatred and murder of the Jews is the same as the hatred and murder of The Jew—Jesus Christ. In Romans 11 the Apostle Paul clearly indicated that the apostasy among the Gentiles will manifest itself in a hostile attitude towards the Jewish people. This is exactly what happened!

We have actually seen in our day that what happened to Jesus Christ on an individual scale has also happened to the Jews on a social and national scale. Please see the details of my study, "The Gospel of The Holocaust." Under 40 different headings, I traced the history of the modern Holocaust and found that every single one was parallel to a similar event or condition in the life and holocaust of Jesus Christ.

The Jews' catastrophe has come to be called "The Holocaust." It stands as a unique event in all the annals of human history. Its uniqueness is not necessarily in the numbers who died nor in the fact of their slaughter. Its uniqueness stands in who they were as innocent victims, their systematic de-humanization, the total confiscation of all their possessions, their destruction often in an industrialized assembly line fashion, their bodies transformed into ashes to fertilize the ground, their hair used to stuff mattresses, their clothes and bones and gold teeth used to suffice every greed and need of society. Their bodies were tortured, experimented upon, gassed and cremated. They experienced a living hell.

However, exactly three years later, Israel was spectacularly re-born (or resurrected) as a nation. What happened to Jesus Christ as a singular person in His third day resurrection has now happened to the Jews of Israel on a social or national scale exactly three years after their Holocaust.

At the time of the rebirth of Israel many Evangelical, Dispensational Bible teachers properly stated, "**The countdown has begun.**" Just exactly what that "countdown" meant became obscure during the intervening years. The one thing it meant for sure was that now the Age of Grace, and the Dispensation of the Mystery, as a great and long theatrical performance, is in its final act. The typical value of the number 50 as used in the Bible simply signifies Completion—Divine, Perfect Completion.

We believers who are living at the end of this dispensation of time have the advantage of looking back over the whole panorama of Church history. From this perspective the whole view is breathtaking and revealing in all its details. In reality, however, every generation of believers was living in anticipation of the Lord's promised return. The events that were prophesied to immediately precede the coming of Christ could have taken place in any generation. Therefore, even the first generation were expecting Christ's return. However it is also true that we have lived to see most all the prophecies concerning the course of this age come to pass. And now we are seeing in the background, behind the curtain, as it were, the stage hands setting up the props for the Great Tribulation time period.

Then, the true Church will suddenly disappear and God will deal once again in and through Israel.

The End