

Sorting Prophetic Material

The predictive prophecies of the Word of God are great in number. They deal with a multitude of things which must come to pass if the Scripture is not to be broken. The subjects of prophecy are numerous indeed. Those who make a study of the Bible will soon find that they have upon their hands many predictions which deal with “*things to come.*” In time they must begin to sort this material or else the truth that they have found will be lost in irretrievable confusion.

Many years ago Lord Bacon wrote of the imperative need for men to undertake the task of “sorting prophetic material,” and he felt that devout men could undertake no work that would be more fruitful. The task of sorting prophetic material is most certainly a part of the work laid upon us by God when He, through the Apostle Paul, exhorted us to be “*rightly dividing the Word of Truth.*” To have assigned one prophecy to the wrong time is a violation of this precept.

If one undertook the task of sorting a quantity of nails of all kinds and sizes, it would be evident at once, even to the most simple, that a bin, box or pile would be needed for each kind and size. Even so it is when we attempt to sort the predictive prophecies of the Word of God. We will need to learn from Scripture and have firmly fixed in mind certain time periods in which each one must be placed. If, in the course of sorting, we find unfulfilled prophecies which will fit into none of the periods we have in mind, then it is evident that we are lacking a truth from God’s Word which reveals a time period which we have not yet discovered and which we do not have in our calculations.

The New Heaven and New Earth

If the whole of God’s revelation in the Scriptures is traversed, we will find that at last we come to a period of time (since it has a definite beginning) which is properly called “*the New Heaven and New Earth*” (Revelation 21:1). Once this period and its character is clearly fixed in our minds by the Word of God, we have one large bin in which to place certain unfulfilled prophecies. For example, in Revelation 21:2 we read,

And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Again, in Revelation 21:4 we read,

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things passed away.

The mere reading of these passages shows that in them we have two very definite predictions, and that these are two unfulfilled prophecies. The logical questions that come to mind at once are: When will these things be? When will the heavenly Jerusalem descend to the Earth? When will God wipe away all tears and there

be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain? To these questions there can be only one correct answer — “*the New Heaven and New Earth.*”

However, there are not many prophecies that can be assigned to this period of time. The one who gathers prophetic material will soon find certain predictions which tell of events that must be fulfilled before the New Heaven and New Earth begin. This naturally leads the student to look for other prophetic times in which these things can find their proper places.

The Thousand Years

In harmony with a great host of prophetic students and teachers, this writer understands and believes that *preceding* the New Heaven and the New Earth, the Word of God sets forth another definite period of time which in popular language is more simply and properly called the Millennium. In Revelation 20:1-3 we read,

And I saw an angel come down from Heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled.

The Little Season

In sorting prophetic material there are many predictions which must be placed in the Millennium, and, as we have already seen, there are other predictions which must be assigned to the New Heaven and New Earth. However, a careful reader of the Word of God would be sure to ask where one should place the event predicted in Revelation 20:7-9. This undoubtedly will not fit in either the thousand years or in the new creation that follows it. Turning to this portion we read,

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of Heaven and devoured them (Revelation 20:7-9).

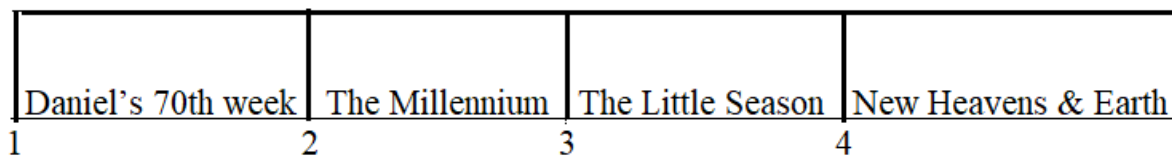
Careful consideration of this passage with its contexts reveals that it does not belong either to the Millennium or to the New Heaven and Earth. It cannot be rightly sorted by placing it in either one of these, for this event belongs to a short period of time called “the little season.” This follows the Millennium, and it is characterized by Satan being “*loosed out of his prison.*” Thus, we have in their Scriptural order, first the Millennium during which Satan is bound, then the Little Season during which Satan is loosed, and finally the New Heavens and New Earth. This gives us three major time periods into which we can assort prophetic material. While these three time periods will take care of every event prophesied in the last three chapters of Revelation, they will not take care of the numerous events that are predicted in the first nineteen chapters of Revelation

and in numerous other places in the Word of God. These chapters have to do with tribulation and wrath, graphically set forth under such symbols as seals, trumpets and bowls. These events do not fit into any of the time periods already set forth, so another division is required.

Daniel's Seventieth Week

Again, in harmony with a host of students and teachers of the prophetic Scriptures, this writer understands the Bible to teach that a definite period of time will precede the Millennium which is seven years in length. This unique and distinct period of seven years is the amazing final week of years of Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks determined upon Israel.

After gathering all available facts, it seems beyond question that the last half of this seven-year period is the Great Tribulation, spoken of numerous times in Holy Writ. Therefore, if a question should arise as to where this writer places the events of Matthew 24, the answer is given without hesitation that the greater part of them belong to the seven-year period that precedes the Millennium. The explicit directions in this chapter (see :16-20) were written to guide men of God who will live in a future time, not in the present time. Thus, we now have four future time periods under which we can classify prophetic material. A simple chart of a few lines will help in making this plain.



Four future time periods.

Now if this writer should be asked where he places the Second Coming of Christ, his answer would be that he places it at that point marked by line number two, which is after the Tribulation and before the Millennium. This makes him an avowed Pre-millennialist, since he believes that the Second Coming precedes the Millennium, but it does not mean that he accepts all the details of popular Pre-millennial Theology as it is proclaimed today. However, it would be the most willful misrepresentation for anyone to call him a Postmillennialist.

The Character of the Millennium

Because of their positive bearing on the character of the Millennium, certain other predictions need to be classified in relationship to the outline presented above.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul solemnly affirms, *And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that*

*obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with eonian destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall **come** to be glorified in His saints and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day*
(II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

The time referred to is most certainly the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is declared at the beginning, and it is repeated at the end of the passage: “shall be revealed from Heaven” and “when He shall come.”

When He “comes” He will take vengeance on those who know not God and who obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The punishment of these will be eonian destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

Therefore, since this takes place at His coming, before the Millennium begins, it is absolute truth that there will not be a human being left to enter the millennial earth except those who know God and who obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. These words mean what they say. All who lack the knowledge of God and who lack a record of obedience to the gospel of Christ will be purged before the Thousand Years begin. Not one of these will be left to enjoy the blessings of that glorious time. The Millennium is preceded by a purging of the earth of all who do not know God. All who enter the Millennial earth must know God. They must have a record of obedience to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From this Scripture we can establish positive facts in regard to the character of the Millennium. There will be none in the Millennial Earth except those who know God and who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Those who cannot pass these two divine tests will be purged from the Earth before the Thousand Years begin. Once we have from God’s Word the truth concerning the moral and spiritual conditions of the Millennium, it will be a positive aid in the correct sorting of prophetic material.

At the beginning of the Millennium Satan is to be bound. He is cast into the abyss. He is imprisoned there and a seal is set upon him (Revelation 20:1-3). These words can mean nothing else but that all of his power, wisdom and skill is rendered completely inoperative for the Thousand Years.

These Scripture facts reveal the character of the Millennium. It is righteous from the beginning, and it remains in that condition until Satan is loosed for a Little Season. These are positive facts based upon the plain testimony of Scripture, and they cannot be overthrown except by direct attacks upon the Word of God which declared them. Therefore, in view of these truths, we must never place in the Millennium any prophecy if it in any manner jars against these facts or is contrary to them. If any prophecy does not harmonize with these plain facts, then it does not belong to the Thousand Years.

Sorting Other Prophecies

If we were to take every unfulfilled prophecy in the Scripture, and if we would sort them as far as possible into the four future time periods that have already been set forth, we would find that we have no place for some of the most glorious predictions in the Word of God. These prophecies speak of great blessings which are to come upon Israel and the world, and while it has always been customary to dump them in the Millennium, they do not belong there as they do not harmonize with the revealed facts concerning the character of that time. To demonstrate this, we will make an examination of some of these predictions. The first we will consider is spoken to the people of Israel.

Isaiah 60:1-5

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the Earth and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee.

This glorious prophecy has been frittered away by many who say that it was fulfilled when Christ came to the earth as a babe in Bethlehem. But this is not a prophecy of kings coming to Christ. It is a prophecy of kings coming *to Israel*. This passage speaks of a time when a great divine light shines upon Israel. This being a reality, she is called upon to “*Arise! Shine!*” This takes place at a time when darkness covers the Earth and gross darkness the peoples. At the very time when gross darkness covers the Earth and its peoples, Jehovah arises upon Israel and causes His glory to shine forth that enlightens Israel and brings them to Jehovah. The Gentiles are also attracted by this light and are drawn to Israel. The rulers of the Earth come to participate in Israel’s clear light, as the Queen of Sheba came to the wisdom that God had given to Solomon. Furthermore, Israel’s own sons and daughters who are scattered come from afar to be joined and to be blessed by her. But this is not all, for the prophecy continues to speak of other blessings.

And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee: for in My wrath I smote thee, but in My favor have I had mercy on thee. Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day or night; that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For that nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted (Isaiah 60:10-12).

If an honest attempt is made to sort this portion of prophetic material, it will be found that it does not fit into any of the time periods set forth. It will not fit into Daniel’s Seventieth Week, the Millennium, the Little Season, or the New Heaven and Earth. As a rule, this prophecy is arbitrarily placed in the Millennium, which means that this

enlightenment and blessing of Israel and Israel's subsequent blessing of the Gentiles will occur after the Second Coming of Christ. But this is an impossibility as the following facts will show.

Consider that we today are living, as described by Isaiah, in a time when darkness covers the Earth and gross darkness the peoples. The people of Israel dwell in darkness that is so deep that it arouses the pity of all who have a grain of divine compassion.

They do not know God, and the majority of them loathe the gospel of Jesus Christ. The overwhelming majority of Gentiles fall into the same category. Unless God intervenes and brings light to Israel and the nations, they will still be in this same pitiful darkness when the Lord returns to the Earth. Therefore, He will have no alternative but to keep His word as recorded in II Thessalonians 1:8-9 and destroy Israel and the vast majority of mankind. Being an Israelite will not shield anyone from this wrath (Romans 2:9).

If this should happen there will be no "Israel" in the Millennium to whom this magnificent prophecy can be fulfilled. Lest the Lord "*come and smite the earth with a curse,*" this prophecy must be fulfilled before He comes again. Furthermore, in this prophecy Isaiah speaks of the Lord shining forth to give light to those who are in darkness. This cannot take place in the Millennium.

The only people who pass into that time are those who know God and who obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who measure up to these tests cannot be described as being in "*darkness.*" Hence, not even at its beginning can the Thousand Years be described as a time when darkness covers the Earth and its peoples, since from its very inception all men in it will "*know God and obey the gospel.*" It should also be noted that, since all of those who "*do iniquity*" will have been purged at the Second Coming before the Millennium even begins, it is out of the question that there should be present in the Millennium any nation of such rebellious spirit that it would not willingly serve Israel (see Isaiah 60:12).

These facts force us to the conclusion that if this glorious prophecy of blessing for Israel and the nations is not fulfilled before the Second Coming of Christ, it can never be fulfilled after He comes. We cannot sort this prophecy by giving it a place in any of the four periods that have been set forth. Another period is demanded by this prophecy. This must be a time of blessing for Israel and the world, and it must precede the Second Coming of Christ. Let us consider another great prophecy from the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 2:1-4

The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, "Come ye, and let us go

up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will **teach** us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths”: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall **judge** among the nations, and shall **rebuke** many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

Here is another glorious prophecy which has, as a rule, been assigned to the Millennium, but its words make it impossible for us to assign this to the Thousand Years. It must be remembered that *before* the Millennium begins the ignorant and disobedient are removed, so that all that remain are those who already know God and obey the gospel (II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

This prophecy of Isaiah 2:1-4 describes the nations or peoples of the earth taking counsel together and encouraging one another to go to the center of light and truth and there to learn the ways of Jehovah. This shows that there has been divine intervention of spirit, and it is not that catastrophic intervention related to the Second Coming of Christ. It is impossible for us to imagine the nations of today confessing that they can learn anything from Israel. This passage reveals an entirely different state of affairs from that which is seen among Israel and the nations today. The blessed state which is described here does not come about from God intervening in cataclysmic punishment, taking vengeance on all who do not know Him. It comes from God intervening to give light and to reveal Himself to Israel first and to the nations afterward. This is a prophecy which must be fulfilled to its zenith *before* the punishments take place which accompany the Second Coming of Christ. If we do not have time for this in our tight little systems of prophetic interpretation, then we must enlarge them in order that we might find a true place for every prophecy in the Word of God.

To enlarge their system of prophetic interpretation seems to be impossible for those who have adopted the idea of the *imminent* Coming of Christ, the idea that He may come at any moment. This is a mistake, even though it is devoutly held by many sincere people. If any statement is frequently made and greatly emphasized, it stands a good chance of being accepted as absolute truth, without any questions as to whether it harmonizes with the facts in the case. The statement so commonly made from many pulpits over an open Bible that, “Christ is coming, it may be today,” is a sample of this. That Jesus Christ is coming back again in person is a Bible fact that no one believes any more strongly than this writer; but that He may come today, tomorrow or this year is contradicted by a thousand facts in the Word of God. His coming is accompanied with wrath of such drastic nature that were it to take place now, to a world in darkness, it would make impossible the literal fulfillment of most of the glorious predictions recorded in the major and minor prophets. The prophecy under consideration is one of these.

Another reason why Isaiah 2:1-4 cannot be assigned to the Millennium is that the Spirit has declared expressly that the things predicted here shall come to pass “*in the last days.*” The term “*the last days*” stands for a definite period of time which cannot be the same as the Thousand Years. The Hebrew phrase which is here translated “*the last*

days” occurs fourteen times in the Old Testament, though it is translated “*latter days*” in ten of these occurrences. These fourteen occurrences are Genesis 49:1; Numbers 24:14; Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 2:28; 10:14; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1. The term “*the last days*” also occurs in the New Testament.

When all passages are examined, one would reveal himself to be a very crude expositor if he insisted that this term always refers to the same period of time. However, of this we can be sure and speak with certainty: There is no prophecy of anything that is to come to pass in “*the last days*” that can rightfully be assigned to the Millennium. That period of time which is called “*the last days*” in Isaiah 2:2 can be positively identified in Scripture. It is not the Thousand Years.

The Last Days

We need to seek the true meaning of this important phrase – “*the last days.*” With us the word “*last*” is usually taken to mean “that’s all there is” in regard to the matter concerning which it is used. Thus, a man’s last dollar means that when it is gone he has no more money. But it cannot mean that in Isaiah 2:2, Acts 2:17, or II Timothy 3:1. “*The last days*” of Acts 2:17 precede “*the Day of the Lord,*” which is definite proof that there are “*days*” that follow “*the last days.*” And it is doubted if anyone would want to take the stand that “*the last days*” of II Timothy 3:1 are the final days that mankind will experience.

In the Hebrew the word “*last*” is a noun, not an adjective. Great difficulty is found in translating it as a noun in English. This Hebrew word occurs 63 times and is translated in the *KJV* as follows:

“*end*” 21 times;
“*hindermost*” 1;
“*last end*” 4;
“*last of them*” 1;
“*last*” 5;
“*latter end*” 8;
“*latter time*” 1;
“*latter*” 13;
“*length*” 1;
“*posterity*” 3;
“*remnant*” 1;
“*residue*” 1;
“*reward*” 2;
“*uttermost*” 1.

This shows that this word gave the translators quite a bit of difficulty. They translated it “*end*” more times than any other, and this probably comes nearest to expressing the

meaning of the Hebrew. It is as if one should say, "I gave him the message, but I do not know what the end will be."

After carefully considering every occurrence of this word, and its corresponding Greek word in the New Testament, this writer finds that the idea of *outcome*, or *result* is the true significance of this term. Notice Psalm 37:37 where it is translated "end"; Proverbs 20:21, translated "end"; Proverbs 24:14, translated "reward"; Proverbs 24:20, translated "reward"; Proverbs 29:21, translated "at the length"; Jeremiah 29:11, translated "end." The idea of *outcome* or *result* is the prominent thought expressed by this word in these passages.

Applying these truths to Isaiah 2:2 will show that it means that the things predicted there will come to pass in "the result of the days," or as we might say it "the resultant days." The days referred to here are all the days of God's dealings with Israel, all the days in which He worked in their behalf from the call of Abraham to that moment when the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles at Acts 28:28. The outcome or the result of all of these days will be the glorious condition described in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4.

It will be helpful here if it is remembered that a day or days in Scripture is put for what transpires in them, the things done in them, or existing in them. We still do this when we report that "it has been a good day," meaning that the things that took place were good. Read Psalm 78 for a partial record of some of the days of God with Israel. In Isaiah 2 we have a prophecy of what it will be in the *outcome* or *result* of the days of God's activities in behalf of Israel.

The time of "*the last days*" of Isaiah 2 in relationship to the time periods already set forth can be accurately fixed by Scripture. In Acts 2:16-20, Peter, quoting from and enlarging upon the prophecy of Joel, sets forth seven distinct things that will come to pass in "*the last days*," and he also declares that these things will take place "**before** the great and notable Day of the Lord comes." Since these things take place in "*the last days*," and since they take place "**before** the Day of the Lord comes," only one conclusion is possible: "*the last days*" is a period of time which precedes "*the Day of the Lord*."

The Day of the Lord

An induction of all the truth revealed in Scripture concerning "*the Day of the Lord*" will bring the conviction that it is a long period of time which includes Daniel's final week of seven years, the Millennium, and the Little Season. It does *not* include the New Heaven and Earth, for that is "*the Day of God*."

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ is an event that takes place early in "*the Day of the Lord*." Therefore, it logically follows that "*the last days*" of Isaiah 2 and Acts 2 is a period of time which precedes the Second Coming of Christ. All events which take place "*in the last days*" as related to Israel, take place "**before** the great and notable day of the Lord

comes.”

Thus, it can now be seen that the acceptance of the plain testimony of Scripture will give us another time period to which we can assign many prophecies. The book of Isaiah is filled with predictions of divine blessings which must be fulfilled *before* the Millennium. Even a casual reading of Isaiah will reveal many more promises of future blessing, which if they are not fulfilled *before* the Second Coming of Christ, then the people to whom they should be fulfilled will no longer remain. They will have been removed by the return of Jesus Christ to the Earth. We will next consider a major prophecy in the book of Ezekiel, which even on the first reading will show that it must be fulfilled *before* the Lord returns.

Ezekiel 20:33-38

“As I live,” saith the Lord God, “surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured [passion] out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein you are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury [passion] poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you,” saith the Lord God. “And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against Me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and you shall know that I am the Lord.”

This passage should be carefully read until its contents are mastered. The divine activity in behalf of Israel described in this prophecy begins while they are still scattered among the nations. God reveals His determination to rule over them. His ruler-ship over them is to be accomplished with a mighty hand (great skill), a stretched-out arm (mighty and miraculous power) and with fury poured out (visited upon those who resist or hinder His purposes). He will bring them forth from the peoples (denationalize them) and from the countries wherein they are dispersed (repatriate them). They will be brought by Him into “*the wilderness of the peoples*” (the place of separation) and there He will plead with them face to face. This does not mean that He begs them, but that He brings to bear upon them every fact, every truth and all evidence that has a bearing upon His claims upon them, like a lawyer pleads a case in court. Those who rebel against this gracious work are purged. The end of all of this will be that Israel will come to know the Lord (see Ezekiel 20:38, 42, 44).

It is certainly pointing out the obvious to say that the action described here is diametrically opposed to that of punishing with eonian destruction those who know not God. Here we read of God taking those who do not know Him and doing a work that brings them to knowledge and submission. In II Thessalonians 1:9 we read of God destroying all who do not know Him. God can do either one of these works, but He cannot do both at the same time. This prophecy from Ezekiel must be fulfilled in every detail *before* the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It will be too late to fulfill it after He comes.

Malachi 4:5-6

*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet **before** the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the Earth with a curse.*

Elijah the prophet will be sent "**before** the coming of the great Day of the Lord." Elijah will be used of God to bring about a great spiritual work which is here described in highly figurative language as turning the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers. The first of these phrases means to bring to submission, the second means to bring to wisdom. To turn the heart of "*fathers to children*" is to take the worldly wise, experienced, self-sufficient ones and bring them into the submissive character of children. Then to turn the heart of "*children to fathers*" is to take the submissive ones and bring them into the wisdom of the just (see Matthew 18:3; Luke 1:17). This is to be done by Elijah the prophet. It is futile to say that this prophecy was fulfilled by John the Baptist.⁵ John himself declared that he was *not* Elijah (John 1:21). This prophecy speaks of a gracious work which *precedes* the Second Coming of Christ. If after this any man remains obdurate or rebellious, he will be purged from the Earth (Matthew 3:12).

The Kingdom of the Heavens

As prophecies such as these are considered (and there are many more) it becomes increasingly evident that the four time periods set forth earlier in this study are not adequate when we begin to sort prophetic material. Another definite period is needed, and it must be a period which is characterized by the *blessings* of God. We do not need to manufacture this period. It is already clearly set forth in the Word of God. It is that period of time and state of things called in the Old Testament "*the Last Days*" but which is more fully set forth in the New Testament as "*the Kingdom of the Heavens.*" It is a period of time characterized by Heaven's government upon the Earth. This was announced by John the Baptist and the Lord as being "*at hand.*" Its foundations were being laid by God throughout the Old Testament and the final work was done by Christ in His death, resurrection and ascension.

With these facts in view the following order can be established which will appeal to all who have a working knowledge of the Word of God, and who have faced the innumerable problems that arise when a penetrating study of the prophecies have been made. We proceed on the grounds that the Hebrew and Greek words translated "*kingdom*" mean *government*, a fact that is fully established in Scripture.

The Old Testament Times

The inspired writers through whom God gave us the Old Testament are unanimous in their testimony that the day is coming when God will overcome Satanic influences and will establish His government in the Earth. "*He shall crush thy head*" (Genesis 3:15) is the first statement concerning this, and Malachi 4:5-6 is the last. These inspired writers from Moses to Malachi recognize and point out the hand of God in the affairs of

men at that time, yet they proclaim that a time is coming when God will manifestly govern the Earth and its inhabitants in a manner that would leave no detail untouched or unregulated. *“He maketh wars to cease to the ends of the Earth”* (Psalm 46:9) is a characteristic passage that speaks of this coming time. *“The Lord has prepared His throne (the seat of His government) in the Heavens; His kingdom (government) ruleth over all”* (Psalm 103:19), is another glorious testimony concerning the character and extent of this government.

The Gospel Period

By this term “Gospel period” is meant the thirty-three years in which our Lord was upon the Earth, of which the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are the history. This period began with the birth of Christ and ended with His resurrection. This time, in relationship to that government of God which the prophets predicted, can best be designated as, **The Kingdom Heralded**. This was first done by John the Baptist and later by the Lord Jesus. Their simple proclamation was, *Repent, for the Kingdom of the Heavens is at hand*.

In a wealth of other statements our Lord went on to reveal many details as to the character of this coming kingdom, even revealing secret truths that had not been made known before. One of the most important truths He revealed was that this kingdom would not begin with great outward show, but that it would be progressive in its development, comparable to seed developing into ripened grain (see Mark 4:26-29). The heralds of this kingdom gave the most positive demonstrations as to what men could expect under Heaven’s beneficent rule. They were to *“heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils”* (Matthew 10:5-8).

The Acts Period

By the term “the Acts period” is meant the thirty-three years of which the book of Acts is the recorded history. In relationship to that kingdom which was prophesied in the Old Testament and heralded as being at hand during the earthly ministry of Christ, the Acts period can best be described as the kingdom in progress. Heaven’s government began the moment Christ arose from the dead. This was openly affirmed when: *Many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many* (see Matthew 27:52-53).

Following this, all of the strange events that took place as recorded in the book of Acts had to do with those preliminary labors which were necessary before the kingdom entered into its next great stage. The kingdom in the Acts period was in a stage that was comparable to the blade stage in growing grain. The next stage would be one of more definite manifestation, comparable to the ear of growing grain.

The bright prospects of the early Acts period were never realized. The kingdom did not advance from *“the blade”* to *“the ear”* (Mark 4:28). Why? What happened? These are questions that demand answers. There is only one truth that explains this. God’s kingdom purposes have been suspended and are now in abeyance. The event that

marks this historically is Paul's declaration found in Acts 28:28, *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

The Present Period

In "*rightly dividing the Word of Truth,*" no more important distinction can be made than between grace and government [*i.e., kingdom*]. In the Acts period both grace and government are seen in action. Both were playing their parts at that time, so neither principle was operating to its fullest extent. This is clearly seen in Corinth where grace had reached down and saved some of the vilest (I Corinthians 6:11), but government had brought sickness and death to some because of their walk (I Corinthians 11:30).

The time in which we now live is "*the Dispensation of the Grace of God,*" during which divine government is not in operation. The grace of today does not bring us under divine government as in the Acts period. It leaves us entirely under human *miss* government. At this time all of God's manifest kingdom purposes are suspended or in abeyance. His present purpose in this "*Dispensation of Grace*" is to demonstrate and establish once and for all the graciousness of His character. This is a study by itself, and it can be referred to in only this study.

God's Next Move

The one great question which is now before us is, "What is next?" This "*Dispensation of Grace*" is not going to continue forever, so, "What follows it?" The time will come when God will have completed His demonstration of His grace, "What will He do then?" There are numerous answers given to these questions, one of which is so popular today that we will need to examine it briefly before going on to give what is believed to be the true answer.

The system of prophetic interpretation which can be accurately designated as the *Darby-Scofield* system holds that this dispensation will come to a cataclysmic end by the sudden removal from the Earth of all living believers. This is commonly called "the rapture," and it is supported by quoting the declaration of Paul in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. It is further held that this will mark the beginning of the final week of years of Daniel's seventy weeks of years, at the end of which Jesus Christ comes back to the Earth to establish His Millennial Kingdom, in which He will fulfill all of the glorious prophecies of peace and blessing that are found in the Old and New Testament.

That events such as these are predicted in Scripture, all who believe the Bible will freely admit; but that they happen in this order or that they are the next great event to take place, this writer *firmly denies*. Those who stand for these ideas steadfastly refuse to recognize that I Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a promise made to those "*who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord*" and that this Greek word translated "*coming*" is *parousia*.

If they would trace the use of the word *parousia* through Matthew 24, they will discover that the *Parousia* of Christ is an event that takes place at the *close* of the Great Tribulation, *not* at its beginning. If their order were the correct one, if the next great

event is the sudden removal of all living believers, then all left upon the Earth would have to be classified as those who “*know not God and who obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ.*” Since all such are to be destroyed at the Second Coming, this would make impossible the fulfillment of *most* of the glorious prophecies of the Old Testament.

The Kingdom Manifested

In answering the question concerning that which will follow “*the Dispensation of Grace,*” it will be well to begin by pointing out that the followers of the Lord Jesus in the time when He was upon the Earth confidently expected that they would soon see “*the Kingdom of the Heavens*” come in its initial stage. As stated before, this would be a stage comparable to the blade stage of growing grain. They rightfully expected this, and they were not disappointed, for their hopes were realized when He arose from the dead. Ten days after His ascension there was a public display in which men saw the curse of Babel lifted for 120 disciples, allowing them to speak freely the language of any nation.

In the Acts period the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ confidently expected that the next thing would be the second great stage of Heaven’s Government. This stage would be a more open manifestation in which God would bring forth His power in such manner as to insure the complete triumph of Divine Government in the Earth. However, the time of this second great stage was purposely left indefinite (see Acts 1:6-7). We know now that there was another purpose in the mind of God which had never been revealed to men. The fulfilling of this purpose demanded a temporary suspension of all Kingdom purposes.

The Kingdom was suspended in order that God, by means of an Administration of Grace, might demonstrate the graciousness of His character. This demonstration will stand as a monument throughout all ages to come. When this purpose is complete, our God will resume His Kingdom purposes which were suspended at the close of the Acts period. He will bring in the second great stage of “*the Kingdom of the Heavens.*”

God’s present display of grace is not to be brought to an end by catastrophic punishments being poured out upon men. Neither is it to be brought to an end by the sudden removal by “rapture” of all believers, nor by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. It will come to an end by God reversing that which marked its beginning. The salvation of God will return to His people Israel.

The next stage of Heaven’s Government is not characterized by Jesus Christ being personally present upon the Earth. Its character is clearly set forth in Psalm 103:19.

The Lord has prepared [established] His Throne [the seat of His government] in the Heavens; and His Kingdom [government] ruleth over all.

The next stage of Heavens’ Government is related to the Lord sitting at the right hand of the Father until His enemies are made His footstool. This is quite different from the Lord

coming to destroy His enemies.

The Character of the Kingdom

God's Government, when it is a reality in the Earth will be so different from anything that man has ever known or experienced under human government, that many are inclined not to believe when some of its features are pointed out. Human government is limited to the abilities of men, while Heaven's Government is as unlimited as the ability of God.

From the Word of God, we can learn many things which will be true when God through Christ rules over the Earth. We will consider some of these things in a series of numbered paragraphs, repeating some things in order to present a more complete picture.

1. God's present purpose, to provide a demonstration of the graciousness of His character, will close when His present purpose is complete. His present graciousness will stand as a memorial through all ages to come, as the trophies of His grace extoll the glories of His grace to all of the Universe for the ages to come. When His present purpose is complete, His Kingdom purposes will be resumed. Then the salvation of God will return to His people Israel, reversing the great declaration made in Acts 28:28. This will bring Israel again into direct contact with God's channel of blessing, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Through this channel the Spirit will be poured out upon Israel from on high, bringing an end to their long isolation from God, and bringing them under full accountability to light and truth (Isaiah 32:13-18; 29:18, 24).

3. God will then miraculously bring them out of all peoples, and gather them out of all countries wherein they are now scattered (Ezekiel 20:34). He will bring every pertinent truth to bear upon their hearts. He will plead with them face to face, that is, directly, apart from all human instruments (Ezekiel 20:35-36). All who rebel against this work will be purged from Israel (Ezekiel 20:38). This is the process by which He thoroughly purges His floor (Matthew 3:12).

4. Their long-awaited light comes to them. The glory of the Lord rises upon them. Other nations are attracted to and are blessed by their light (Isaiah 60:1- 3). They rebuild their temple on its ancient site, and it becomes a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7; 60:10). God removes all dross from them (Isaiah 1:25). They remove every detestable and abominable thing from the land of Israel (Ezekiel 11:17-18).

5. God pours out of His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). The world (mankind) is reprov'd (enlightened) concerning sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-11).¹ All men are drawn to Christ. This puts upon mankind the greatest responsibility ever laid upon the human race. These acts of God bring every man on Earth under full accountability and responsibility to God-given light and truth. This will result in the

submission of the overwhelming majority of mankind to Jesus Christ. Those who rebel will be purged from mankind.

6. God's judgments (His due order) will be established in the Earth. The inhabitants of the Earth will learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:9; 29:18, 24).

7. Under God's Government, by means of the Heavens where Christ reigns, the righteous dead will be raised progressively and in order (John 6:39-40, 44; I Corinthians 15:23). The believers of God's present calling will enter into their glorious allotment as the Lord Jesus judges (sets in order) the living and the dead (II Timothy 4:1).

8. Longevity will be restored. Physical health will be the portion for all under Heaven's Government (Psalm 118:17; Matthew 8:17; John 14:19).

9. "*The Kingdom of the Heavens*" which precedes the Millennium will not be of short duration. The blessings under it which are to come upon Israel are perpetuated through many generations (Ezekiel 28:25-26; 37:25). This writer's studies have convinced him that the next great stage of "*the Kingdom of the Heavens*" cannot be less than 500 years in length. It may be much longer than this.¹⁴ The development of the Kingdom is progressive. Under it men are taught God's ways. Jesus Christ will not fail nor be discouraged until He has set justice and judgment in the Earth (Isaiah 42:1-4).

10. Under Heaven's Government the Spirit will act as an effective restrainer of evil to such an extent that the flow of sin will be stopped. Yet in order that men might be fully tested, this restraint will in time be loosened and removed. This will not affect the overwhelming majority of men for they have learned righteousness, but it will demonstrate that some are held in by restraint and not by character. These will come forth in open revolt against the Kingdom (II Thessalonians 2).

The Revolt Against "The Kingdom of the Heavens"

The revolt against "*The Kingdom of the Heavens*" is set forth in numerous passages. In Psalm 2 the nations are seen taking counsel together against Jehovah and against His anointed. They encourage one another to revolt, to break the bands and to cast off the cords which He has laid upon them.

Inasmuch as God today permits all nations to walk after their own ways, there are no bands or cords upon them. This Psalm speaks of a revolt that takes place only *after* God has intervened and imposed His order upon men and nations. When they first begin to grow restive under these restraints and plan to rebel, they are openly warned against such steps, and are told that retribution will be swift and sure.

In Matthew 24 when the Lord was asked about the sign of His *Parousia* He spoke of a resurgence of false prophets, of wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes. These are to be the beginning of sorrows. It is natural to ask how these things can be of any

significance when they have been the constantly recurring experiences of mankind ever since these words were spoken. How can these events mark the beginning of sorrows to a world that has never been free from sorrows? Yet if these things should cease for many centuries (and they will!), their reappearance would be highly significant.

In II Thessalonians 2 we read that “*the Day of the Lord*” will not come *except* there come a falling away (an apostasy) first. These words speak of men suddenly standing apart from a position in which they *formerly* stood. This links up with and is explained by Psalm 2.

In the true meaning of the word there is no apostasy today. It cannot be shown that the bulk of men who stand apart from God today ever stood with Him. There is an apostasy at the end of “*the Kingdom of the Heavens.*” In this, men who had been submissive to God’s Government will become rebellious. This apostasy will be immediately followed by the Coming of the Lord to put down the revolt against His Kingdom. Those who have willfully participated in the revolt will be removed from the presence of the Lord.

A Key to Scripture

The world still waits to partake of the glorious results of Christ’s redemptive mission. The Second Coming will not take place until *after* mankind as a whole has begun to reap the benefits that were purchased by the first coming of Christ. The glorious blessings that were to come to mankind through His great self humiliation and sacrifice have never yet been realized. To recognize that these blessings are coming, and that they are next on the program of God’s declared purposes is the true key to Old and New Testament prophecy. The truth that, as a result of God’s intervention, the world will enjoy a long period of peace, righteousness and blessing *before* the Second Coming of Christ explains many difficult passages of Scripture, causing them to shine forth with a new glory. This writer feels that he renders a real service to students of the Word when he points out the fact that some parts of the New Testament were inspired by God with men of the future primarily in view, and that **they are inapplicable in this “Dispensation of Grace.”**

Take, for example Hebrews 6:4-6, and read this in the light of the truth presented here. This passage can be applicable to a time only when men have been enlightened, have tasted of the heavenly gift, have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come.

Under grace, if these facts were true, they would establish an indissoluble relationship between God and man that could never be altered. Yet under Heaven’s Government such blessings as these can be the privilege of men without such relationship being established. The fact that these blessings will be granted to men will bring them under such responsibility that if they should fall away it will be impossible to renew them again to repentance.

Conclusion

From all of the foregoing we see that these truths not only make possible the sorting of prophetic material, but it also makes possible an honest interpretation of many passages which heretofore have been most obscure.

In the interpretation of Scripture, the greatest possible confusion has been caused by making “*the Kingdom of the Heavens*” and the Millennium to be one and the same. Such an interpretation eliminates the first altogether, although some of its truth is salvaged by wrongly dividing it between the present time, the Great Tribulation, and the Millennium. However, this modifies the true character of all three periods. Grace is no longer grace, the Great Tribulation is a mixture of affliction and blessing, and the Millennium is neither righteous nor unrighteous.

This traditional method of sorting prophetic material is destructive to much truth. It places prophecies where they do not belong, reinterpreting their message so that they will fit. It can create nothing but confusion if we fail to distinguish between that time when the Seat of Government is in the Heavens, and the time which follows when the Seat of Government will be upon the Earth.

In the next great dispensation of God, the Seat of Government will be in the Heavens. This is clearly portrayed in Psalm 103:19.

The Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom rules over all.

The day is going to come when God’s Government is going to reach out to *reclaim* the Earth and bring it into subjection to Christ. As His light comes in, darkness must flee, error must yield to truth, sin must give way to righteousness, and sickness will be replaced by health. Then, Human government will be replaced by Heaven’s Government, men will submit to God, and “*Man’s Day*” will be superseded by “*the Day of Christ.*”