

**GOD'S PLAN OF THE
AGES
IN FOUR ECONOMIES OF
EVANGELISM**

By Larry N. Baker

© 2007, Larry N. Baker, Our Bible Seminars

Four Agencies of Evangelism through the Ages

“And to bring to light for all what (is) the Economy of the Mystery
having been hidden from the ages in God,
the One creating all things through Jesus Christ,
in order that there might be made known now to the rulers and the authorities in the upper
heavenlies through the Church the multifaceted Wisdom of God,
according to a Plan of the Ages, which he made in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Ephesians 3:9-11

Through the Bible one can trace a very simple and helpful pattern by asking the simple question: *How and by whom is God evangelizing lost men and women at any given time of human history?* This question answered for any given passage will offer a very nice framework for a rather consistent method of interpreting the Bible.

God through the ages has chosen to use people to evangelize other people with His gospel of redemption and salvation. As He has moved from using one group or individual to another through history, an interesting pattern can be found through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. God began with Adam's family by using various individuals and then families to evangelize other families with the special revelation that God had given them. These families became the nations, as listed in Genesis 10. The Hebrew term for “nations,” *goyim*, is often translated “Gentiles,” when referring to peoples outside of Israel. Albeit before Abraham, all people were Gentiles. It was with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 that God began to use one nation, the Hebrews, as His avenue or agency of evangelism. In Genesis 14:13, Abraham is specifically called “the Hebrew,” as “one who passed over” the river (that is, the Euphrates River), to be used of God in a land which He was giving to Abraham to fulfill the ministry which He had planned for him. So in a sense Abraham began, as a Gentile, and became a Hebrew through faith and regeneration. God continued to use this one nation through Isaac and Jacob who was renamed Israel. It was through Jacob's son, Judah, that among his descendants (called Judeans or Jews) the Messiah or the Christ would come.

When Israel, as a nation, rejected their Messiah, Jesus, God changed His administration of evangelism from Israel to a new entity called The Church being composed then of Jewish believers and Gentile believers alike. Presently this new administration of evangelism called “The Age of The Church” is made up of believers who are awaiting the imminent return of Jesus, as He comes and takes His Church in the resurrection to heaven. After this, God has prophesied of seven more years of an evangelistic ministry by Israel here on earth. In this yet future period God will continue and finish His prophesied and promised plan of a final period of The Age of Israel described, a Tribulation by Jesus in Matthew 24:29. At the end of this seven-year period, Christ will come a second time to earth and establish a 1,000-year kingdom, a future golden age of righteousness.

As a plan of the ages, God did not reveal all of this to Moses in his Book of the Law, Genesis through Deuteronomy, or even to the rest of the biblical writers. But portion by portion in His progressive revelation from Genesis on God revealed details of His Plan the Ages even on through Revelation. For example, in this progressive revelation the animal sacrificial system was developed in detail in the Law of Moses. But, after Christ's resurrection, this animal sacrificial system was set aside in the Church during the Church Age. However according to Jesus in Matthew 24:15 His reference to "abomination of desolation" during the future Tribulation is in the context of Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 that describe a resuming of these animal sacrifices which will then be a memorial to the cross.

So the key to understanding God's panorama of Bible history and prophecy is to ask, "Whom has God placed on earth to be responsible for evangelism?" at any given point in human history. This responsibility or administration has commonly been called "a dispensation". This term, "dispensation", came from *dispensatio*, the common translation in Latin versions of the Bible for the Greek word, *oikonomia*. Interestingly, this is the word from which the English word, "economy," is derived.

The original meaning of "economy" in English, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*¹ is "management of a house; management in general." It came to mean "a society ordered after the manner of a family" and "in a wider sense: the administration of the concerns and resources of any community of establishment with a view to orderly conduct and productiveness." This is the *basis* for the original, popular usage of the word, "economy," from which the current usage of the word developed in English with its financial connotation. In reference to the Gospel and evangelism, as "concerns and resources," this latter, original meaning can be applied directly to the New Testament Greek word, *oikonomia*,² commonly translated "dispensation." This word could then be transliterated *and* translated with this general, derived meaning, as "economy".

In the New Testament, *oikonomia* is used four different ways according to its context and theological thrust:

1. The management of an estate, as in Luke 16:2-4.
2. Training in the faith, as in 1 Timothy 1:4.
3. A commission or stewardship by God of a ministry and revelation, as in 1 Corinthians 9:17; Colossians 1:25; and Ephesians 3:2.
4. An administration of God's plan for evangelism, as in Ephesians 1:10 and 3:9 concerning The Church.

This last meaning is the best description of how God has and will set up His "Divine Plan of the Ages" for evangelism. However, in Ephesians 3:2 and 9 Paul has a play on words between usages 3 and 4 above, where he wrote in verse 2 regarding his commission and stewardship of revelations from God to him concerning *To Mysterion* which is The Church; and then in verse 9 he wrote of The Church itself having a commission and stewardship in its own evangelistic ministry. A parallel to this is in Colossians 1:25 and 26, where Paul has a similar development of the connection. Presently, those in Christ's Church are the center of this plan. The focus of the Gospel in each age is always Jesus Christ's atonement and redemption, be it

¹ Volume 4, page 34.

² The Latin Vulgate translates this word, as *dispensatio*.

prophetic or historical. Salvation in each age comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, as Lord, either prophetically or historically.

The following chart diagrams this very pattern from Genesis to Revelation:

God's Four Economies of Evangelism:	I. The Age of Gentiles	II. The Age of Israel	III. The Age of The Church -The Mystery	The Tribulation (cont. of The Age of Israel)	IV. The Age of Christ -The Kingdom Age
Scripture	Genesis 1-11 and Job	Genesis 12 through Acts 1 (excluding Job)	Acts 2 through Rev. 3 (including John 13-17)	Revelation 6-19	Revelation 20:1-9
Time Period	Adam to Abraham (4000 BC - 2090 BC)	Abraham's Call to Pentecost (2090 BC - 30 AD)	Pentecost to the Harpage (30 AD - ?)	The Harpage to The 2 nd Coming (7 years)	1,000 years
Agency of Evangelism	Gentile Families and Nations	The Jewish Nation, Israel (Acts 13:47; Esther 8:17; Jonah 3:2)	The Church (Eph.3:9-10) [fulfilling Matthew 28:19-20]	The Jewish Nation, Israel, living in peace/hiding 3 ½ years 3 ½ years	Christ Himself ruling from Jerusalem, as High Priest and King.
Salvation by	Faith in the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15)	Faith in the Promised Messiah (Heb. 11:13)	Faith in the Historical Messiah (Acts 16:31)	Faith in the Historical Messiah	Faith in the Historical Messiah

Past Evangelism within The Age of Gentiles and The Age of Israel

The Age of Gentiles

The first stage of God's plan of the ages began with Adam's family and included all that is found from Genesis 1 through 11 and The Book of Job. It involved about 2,000 years from about 4000 BC to 2090 BC, that is, to the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. In Genesis 2 and 3, God dealt through *individuals*, then in Genesis 4 through 8 *families*, and then in Genesis 9 through 11 *nations*, until the problem at the Tower of Babel developed. In this period, there was only one language for the most part (through Genesis 11). There was not yet any extant, written canon of Scripture but only direct revelations from God. Salvation was first described in Genesis 3:15 concerning "her seed," that is, the seed of the woman, as a reference to Jesus Christ. The gospel in this age was well described in Hebrews 11:13, "According to faith, these all died, not [yet] receiving the promises, but seeing them from afar and embracing [them], and confessing that they were aliens and pilgrims on earth."³ The priesthood was focused upon family and community leaders, as Noah in Genesis 8:20; Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18-20; and Job in Job 1:5.

The Age of Israel

The second age of God's plan began with the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 and included the rest of the Old Testament. It also includes the period between the Old Testament and New Testament and the ministry of Jesus in the Gospels. However, the Jesus' teachings concerning the Holy Spirit in John 13-17 and a couple of prophetic references to the Church in Matthew 16 and 18 would actually be included in the Church Age, although the yet future seven-year Jewish Tribulation which is given in the most details in Revelation 6-18 would be a part of this Age of Israel. Jesus Himself gave us much detail of this future part of the Age of Israel in Matthew 24-25 and Mark 13 and Luke 17:20-37 and 21:5-38. The first part of this age was concluded in Acts 2 at Pentecost. The Book of Acts described the *transition* from this age to The Age of The Church. The last part of The Age of Israel will be resumed for this seven-year period after Christ comes for the resurrection of His Bride, the Church, and take her to heaven.

The first part of The Age of Israel involved the period of The Patriarchs, from Abraham to Moses. After this came the period of The Law from Moses through the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus, as so described in The Four Gospels. During this Age of Israel, there was (and will be) a specialized priesthood which was restricted to the sons of Levi concerning the Tabernacle, as described in Numbers 3:6ff, and later the Temple, as described in 1 Chronicles 23:24ff. Within this Levitical tribe were the descendants of Aaron, who were denoted as "priests" in Exodus 28:1; 30:30; 40:15. Their duties involved the offering of sacrifices and the service in the sanctuary itself.

The *Sabbath* was to be a sign of the covenant which God had made with Israel according to Exodus 31:13-17. Its covenantal importance and gravity can be seen in the extreme measure of punishment for its violation, namely capital punishment, as specified in Exodus 31:14; 35:2-3;

³As an interesting commentary, a fourteenth century Greek manuscript (#1518) and a few other late manuscripts along with the *Textus Receptus* used by the King James Version have ". . .but seeing them from afar and being persuaded [or convinced by them or believing them] and confessing. . ."

and Numbers 15:32-36. Jesus spoke much about the Sabbath and the proper perspective that believers were to have about it. The observance of the Sabbath is found in the Gospels and on into the Book of Acts during the first few years of The Church Age, at least through Acts 18:4. This weekly observance of the Sabbath is also to be a part of the religious activity in the future Tribulation according to Jesus in Matthew 24:20.

There was and will be also again in the Tribulation a certain, specialized working of the Holy Spirit in His ministry to believers. In John 7:39⁴, Jesus described that the Spirit had not been given, (as He has been in the present Age of The Church.) In the Old Testament and during the days of the Gospels, He would come upon certain believers, such as Joshua in Numbers 27:18; 11:19, Samson in Judges 15:14, and workers on the Tabernacle in Exodus 31:3. But He could be removed for discipline purposes, as described of Samson in Judges 16:20 and King Saul in 1 Samuel 16:14, as recognized by David in Psalm 51:11; or when the task was completed, as with the workers on the Tabernacle. However, today in the Church Age since Pentecost in Acts 2, all believers in regeneration are “baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13) with a universal, permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

In Daniel 9:24-27, God had promised or “determined” 490 prophetic Jewish years to Israel. Exactly 483 of these years have been historically fulfilled, as they were described in verses 25-26. However, verse 27 has never historically found a detailed fulfillment and is still future. It will be a seven-year period that Jesus descriptively called “the tribulation” in Matthew 24:29 and “great tribulation” in Matthew 24:21 in reference to the second half of it. Revelation 11:2 and 11:3 together also describe this seven-year period in two, successive 3 ½-year sections with the one in verse 2 following the one in verse 3. Hundreds of prophecies are given about this seven-year period in Revelation 6-19; Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-11, 20-33; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-5, 8-12; and Daniel 9:27 and 11:36-45.

God chose Israel as a missionary witness and agency to take the gospel to the nations, beginning with Abraham, the Hebrew. Isaiah articulated this quite well in Isaiah 44:8, when he addressed Israel with “You are my witnesses,” within the context describing God’s redemption plan for all mankind and Israel’s evangelistic part, as witnesses. He further prophesied in Isaiah 42:6, “I, Yahweh, called you [my servant, verse 1] in righteousness, and I will take hold of your hand, and I will guard you, and I will give you for a covenant of people for a light of [or to] [the Gentile] nations.” Walter Kaiser argues that this “servant/Servant” prophesied is fulfilled in the nation of Israel and in Jesus Christ. Initially,

‘The light for the Gentiles’ is also assigned as a specific mission for the Servant. If we are correct in seeing that the Servant is a corporate term here, then it is clear that Israel is being addressed and encouraged by the Lord to be that witness to the Gentiles.⁵

This ministry of being “the light for the Gentiles” is further explained in Isaiah 49:6 — “And he said, ‘It is too small a matter for you to be a servant for me to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to

⁴Literally translated, “But this he said concerning the Spirit, whom the ones believing in him were about to receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet [given], because Jesus was not yet glorified.” In light of John 13:31; 14:16-17; and 16:5-15; the interpretive “given” appears proper.

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books (2000), p. 61.

restore those preserved within Israel; I will give you for a light to the nations for you to be my salvation to the edge of the earth.” This was the messianic ministry to be found in the call and purpose of God’s use of Israel in evangelistic ministry, which found its ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Paul quoted this in Acts 13:47, as he saw himself in this ministry passed on from Israel, as a nation, to The Church made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, “For thus the Lord commanded us, ‘I have placed you for a light to the nations, for you to be for salvation unto the end of the earth.’” Within this context Luke recorded how Paul’s ministry at Antioch in Pisidia became a turning point for him in particular and The Church in general. In the synagogue, the unbelieving Jews became incensed and jealous of Paul’s ministry to the believing Gentiles; but the believing “remnant” of Jews joined Paul and these Gentile believers, as they understood Isaiah 49:6 which Paul applied originally to the nation of Israel but found its fulfillment now with the believing Jewish remnant and believing Gentiles in The Church. Later, Paul would explain this to the Gentile Roman Christians in Romans 15:8-12, “Now I say that Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy, as it is written: ‘For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And sing to Your name.’ And again he says: ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people!’ And again: ‘Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!’ And again, Isaiah says: ‘There shall be a root of Jesse; And He who shall rise to reign over the Gentiles, In Him the Gentiles shall hope.’”

The gospel that Israel was to carry to the Gentile nations of the world was described well in Genesis 12:3; 15:6; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; and Daniel 2:26. Moses explained in Exodus 19:5-6 how that, “The people were to be God’s ministers, his preachers, his prophets to their own nation as well as to the other nations. . . Her role as a nation was a mediatorial role as they related to the nations and people groups around them.” (Kaiser, 2000 p. 22-23) In fact, this “stewardship of evangelism” is the basis for a proper understanding of The Book of Jonah. In fact, though Jonah may appear to be the exception, he is the clearest example of the rule for Israeli evangelism of the Gentiles, even depicting Israel’s reticence to the task. Among the other prophets, one finds Joel prophesying of “all flesh” in Joel 2:28, Amos possessing “all the Gentiles who are called by My name” in Amos 9:12, Micah envisioning “many nations” in Micah 4:2, Jeremiah calling for a gather of “all the nations” in Jeremiah 3:17, and Zechariah looking to the day, “When many nations shall be joined to the Lord” in Zechariah 2:11. An interesting situation developed under King Ahasuerus in Persia, where Esther 8:17 records, “Then many of the people of the land became Jewish, because the fear of the Jews fell up on them.” This is the same idea of fear found in Psalm 36:1 and personified, as God, in Genesis 31:42 and 53. Even here God was using Israel, as an agency of evangelism.

So Jonah was not the exception the rule for the Israeli prophets. The Book of Jonah offers an interesting bridge between Jewish/Gentiles believers in Yeshua and unbelieving Jews. It is a summary of God’s choosing of the Jews here on earth. Its evangelistic message reminds Jews of why they were chosen:

In Jonah 1, note how Jonah’s interaction with the Gentiles in an interesting way parallels Israel nationally in her interaction with Gentile nations both friendly, as well as others used of God in discipline. Jonah in particular, as Israel in general, had a reticence, or even a reluctance, to evangelically proclaim the gospel of the prophetic, coming Messiah to save all peoples from their sins. He was among Gentiles but yet aloof and asleep, when the storm came. When confronted, he did confess of his faith in the LORD, and in his disobedience they did throw him into the sea, where Gentiles nations are also so used to discipline Israel.

In Jonah 2, his experience in the belly of the large fish resembles the current Church Age where unbelieving Jews in Judaism are presently in “darkness,” as of a “veil,” as Paul described in 2 Cor. 3:13-16. This began at Pentecost in Acts 2 and continues until the Harpage [Rapture]. After this, during the future 7-year Jewish Tribulation, Israel like Jonah will be cast forth again into the world for her chosen evangelistic mission.

In Jonah 3, Jonah’s ministry parallels what the 144,000 and the Two Witnesses in the Revelation will do during this Tribulation. Their message like Jonah’s will be a message to repent or perish, though many did in Nineveh, most will not in the Tribulation, although like those in the Tribulation, Nineveh according to the prophecy of Nahum eventually rejected the LORD and were so judged.

In Jonah 4, as an epilog, Jonah illustrates what Paul describes in Romans 11:11, 14, where God’s goodness in salvation toward Gentiles will provoke Jews toward a reactionary jealous zeal. So in this last chapter is a general assessment of God’s dealing with Israel and God pleading with His chosen people in general, the Jews, to have an evangelistic heart for lost people everywhere who hence are destined for Gehenna, as described in Isa. 66:24 and Mark 9:44-48 (which, as a name, is mentioned in Neh. 11:30) and is identified with “the lake of fire” in Rev. 20:11-15, that is, to fulfill Isa. 42:6; 49:5-6; 52:10.

Genuine salvation came by faith in the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, as described in Romans 10:1-13; Hebrews 11:13; Galatians 2:16. Just as Abraham first found salvation, as it was so described in Genesis 15:6, “And he trusted in the LORD, and He accounted to him righteousness,” so even also all who followed him in that same faith would find salvation.

In “God’s Plan for the Ages,” from Genesis 12 through Jesus’ ministry in the Gospels, God sought to use the people of Israel to evangelize all the various nations of the world. This line of God’s agency for evangelism was through Abraham (the “Hebrew”), Isaac, Jacob (renamed “Israel” whose descendants are called “Israelis” (as an English transliteration) or “Israelites” (as an English transliteration from the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word, “Israeli”)), and Judah (whose descendants are called “Judeans” or “Jews,” as simply an Anglicized, shorten form for Judeans). In John 3:29 John the Baptist called himself “the friend of the bridegroom,” as the last great prophet of the Age of Israel before the Church Age. He would be included in the group called “the sons of the bridal chamber” in Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:19; and Luke 5:34 who are attendants of bridegroom who are the wedding guests who stood closest to the groom and played an essential part in the wedding ceremony as what we call today the “groomsmen.” They are the believers of the Age of Israel (incl. the Tribulation) and the Age of Gentiles (and not Church Age believers).

As the Old Testament prophets understood it, God’s apparent plan was to continue with the 7-year Tribulation after Jesus’ ministry, as described in the Gospels, and to have no break or parenthetical Church Age between Daniel 9:26 and 27 or between Daniel 11:35 and 36 or Daniel 7:7 and 8 or Daniel 2:40 and 41. After this seven-year period, He would then bring in His Millennial Kingdom in about 37 AD. But this did not happen. In Acts 2, He called forth The Church which would be made up of the believing remnant of Israel and believing Gentiles who were yet to come, to bring in The Church Age which is described from Acts 2 to the yet future translation of The Church. Thus from all of this came an understanding of “the first advent” and “the second advent” of Christ or Messiah, where the Old Testament prophets saw only a single advent of Messiah. Although Daniel in Daniel 9:24, 26-27 did see some twofold coming of the Messiah with seven years between the Messiah’s being “cut off” and His bringing in of “everlasting righteous” with His anointing. With this change in God’s providential plan from an

apparent original plan for Israel, it would be very natural for many to confuse the prophesying of “the coming of Elijah” with John the Baptist and the “Elijah” in the Tribulation, since all of this would have been about the same time, if the intervening Church Age had not come into play. Jesus discussed with his disciples this coming of Elijah in Matthew 17:11-13,

¹¹But Jesus answering said to them, ‘Elijah, on the one hand, is coming first and will restore all things. ¹²Nevertheless, I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not know him, but they did to him, as they wanted. Thus even the Son of Man is about to suffer under them.’ ¹³Then the disciples put it together that he said this to them concerning John the Baptist.

It would appear that verse 12-13 described John the Baptist and would then be historical; however verse 11 described a yet future Elijah with his ministry of restoration of all things. There will be some person in the Tribulation fulfilling this prophecy of Elijah. It would then appear that such a person would be Jewish and not a part of the Church and would find himself initially not a believer in Jesus as Messiah during the close of The Church Age. He would then afterward come to some dynamic faith in Jesus [or Yeshua in Hebrew] as his Messiah during the first part of the Tribulation. Then God will use him to help “reestablish” Israel or to “restore all things” to Israel, as God’s agency of evangelism for the Tribulation to prepare the world for Christ’s Millennial Kingdom.

Present Evangelism within The Age of the Church

This third age of God’s plan for the ages began on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and will continue, until Christ returns and translates his Church to heaven. This Church Age is described in Acts and the Epistles of the New Testament, specifically Acts 2 through Revelation 3, along with Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 and John 13-17. It was by God’s providential design parenthetically inserted at a point seven years short of the end of The Age of Israel. In other words, it began and continued since about 30 AD, some fifty days after Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, i.e., some 10 days after His ascension, with seven more years of The Age of Israel yet to be accomplished but unfulfilled. The Church Age was unrevealed in the Old Testament but would be chronologically inserted in Daniel 9:24-27 between verses 26 and 27. It was referred to as “The Economy (or Dispensation) of The Mystery” by Paul in Ephesians 3:9. Also, in Colossians 1:26, this term, mystery, is used as a special term for the Church and the Church Age.

In Ephesians 3:1-12, Paul described this “mystery” in some detail, where the Church was to be composed of Jews and Gentiles:

¹For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the [Gentile] nations— ²since, indeed, you [have] heard of the economy of the grace of God, [which was] given to me for you, ³that according to revelation he made known to me the mystery, (accordingly as I wrote beforehand a little, ⁴with which you are able [by] reading to perceive my insight in the mystery of Christ), ⁵which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as now it was revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the spirit: ⁶for the [Gentile] nations to be co-heirs and co-body and co-partners of his promise in Christ through the

gospel ⁷of which I became a servant according to the gift of the grace of God, [which was] given to me according to the working of his power. ⁸To me, the least of all the saints was given this grace to preach evangelistically among the [Gentile] nations the untrackable wealth of Christ ⁹and to bring to light for all what [is] the economy of the mystery having been hidden from the ages in God, the one creating all things through Jesus Christ, ¹⁰[in order] that [there] might be made known now to the rulers and to the authorities in the upper heavenlies through the church the multicolored wisdom of God, ¹¹according to a plan of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus, our Lord,¹² in whom we have the boldness and the access in confidence through faith in him.

Paul wrote of his commission or administration in verse 2, literally translated here as “economy”, concerning the revelations about the mystery, the Church Age, and how that these revelations were a part of “the economy of the mystery” in verse 9 regarding the Church in God’s “administration” of this mystery during the Church Age. God’s plan was and presently is to have the Church, as His agency of evangelism, to be made up of the believing remnant of Israel and believing Gentiles in every generation inheriting together, living together, and working together “in Christ” to evangelize the world, as angelic “rulers and authorities” look on. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 10:32, he described humanity as being divided into three groups: those in the church of God, the (unbelieving) Jews, and (unbelieving) Greeks (a figure of speech for Gentiles.) The Church according to Ephesians 3:10 is to be God’s avenue or agency for evangelism in carrying out Christ’s commission of Matthew 28:19-20.

The Unique Characteristics of The Age of the Church

Paul described believers who are a part of the Church as uniquely being “in Christ” (such as in Ephesians 2:10; Romans 6:23b; and 1 Thessalonians 4:16). The Church Age believer is placed “in Christ,” as a part of his or her salvation. This is brought about by the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13. There is a *permanent* indwelling of Jesus Christ in every believer according to John 14:20 along with a *permanent* indwelling of the Holy Spirit according to Romans 8:11, which is described in an interesting way by Jesus in John 14:17, “The Spirit of truth, whom the world is not able to receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; but you know him, because he remains with you and will be in you.” Jesus’ contrast of prepositions, *para* and *en*, here is very telling along with His contrast of verb tenses from present to future, in that He described the working of the Holy Spirit at that point of time as being “with” them but in the future, i.e., during The Church Age, He would be “in” them in a special indwelling relationship. This special working of the Holy Spirit during The Church Age stands in contrast to His working during The Age of Israel, as described above. In previous times, the Holy Spirit would leave or be removed, but for believers in The Church Age He has and will always have a permanent indwelling.

In regards to this permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Paul explained in Eph.5:18 by way of a command how believers in the Church Age are to be filled with the Holy Spirit which brings about his description in Gal.5:16-23 of how believers are to walk in the Spirit and not fulfill the desires of the flesh. John described the same thing, as “walking in the light,” which come by way of confession of one’s sins (1 John 1:5-10).

The aforementioned specialized priesthood belonging to The Age of Israel can be contrasted with the universal priesthood of believers, which is a part of God's plan for the Church. Peter referred to this in 1 Peter 2:9. Even though some denominations within Christendom have designated certain clerical leaders among them with the term, "priest," concerning a local church's pastor, this term within The Church Age, as found in the New Testament Epistles that describe the Church, refers to any believer in Jesus Christ through whom he or she has "access by one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).

The Church is uniquely called "the body of Christ." In Ephesians 1:23 and Romans 12:4-5 Paul specified and delineated this understanding of the Church, which he amplified in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 with great detail with a special closeness and fellowship unique to the Church. This unique relationship of the Church to Christ will be culminated in the eschaton by her becoming the bride and wife of Christ. John wrote in Revelation 19:5-9 of the future Marriage Supper of the Lamb, where "his wife has made herself ready" (verse 7), in reference to the Church. She will have a special part, as Christ's Bride, in the New Jerusalem of eternity, as it comes down from the heavens. John recorded how one of the seven angels in Revelation 21:9 spoke to him, saying, "Come, I will show to you the wife, the bride of the Lamb." With the special relationship which the Church has in the work of the Holy Spirit, the reference to "the bride" in Revelation 22:17 would also be the Church.

Other hallmarks of The Church Age can be noted in the book of Acts and the New Testament Epistles. The Lord revealed to Peter in a vision of clean and unclean animals in Acts 10:9-16 a transition in His dietary laws, as a picture of holiness in the Old Testament, from clean and unclean categories to all being clean, as a picture of His acceptance of all nations into the Church. However, two specifications of dietary uncleanness were noted and held to in Acts 15:29 regarding the eating of meat offered in idol worship and blood, such as from a strangled animal not properly drained of its blood, when cooked and eaten.

Paul saw the issue of circumcision, as a part of this transition. In Acts 16:1-3, he felt compelled to have Timothy, apparently as an adult, be circumcised being of mixed Jewish parentage; however, at about this same time he resisted having Titus, a Greek, circumcised according to Galatians 2:3. About a decade later Paul would write to the Colossian Christians of the practice of circumcision giving way to Church's counterpart of baptism in Colossians 2:11-12.

A notable hallmark of the Church Age is the change in focus from the Sabbath to Sunday, the first day of the week. The transition from the Age of Israel to the Church Age can be traced through the chapters of Acts 2 to 15. Paul's practice in Acts 16 and 17 was still focusing on the Jewish synagogue and the Sabbath. However, in Acts 18:4 is found the last reference made to the Sabbath in Acts and the rest of the New Testament (except for Col.2:16 in a reference to the Law and our Christian liberty and a form of the word in Hebrews 4:9 with reference to a "Sabbath rest" for Israel, as an OT image and concept, but not our Sunday.) Jesus' resurrection had been on the first day of the week during the Feast of First Fruits. His recorded appearances after His resurrection had initially been on the first Sunday (John 20:19) and the second Sunday (John 20:26) of His resurrection, so with such a remembrance and emphasis on Jesus' resurrection even to the point of belief in it is essential for salvation (see Rom. 10:9-10), Sunday would from then on become a memorial of His resurrection celebrated some fifty-two times a year.

In Acts 18-20 there appears to be a dispensational shift from The Age of Israel's Sabbath to The Age of the Church's Sunday. In Acts 18:6 Paul expressed a turning point in this transition from a Jewish Church to a Gentile-Jewish Church; and in Acts 20:7 his pattern of emphasizing

“the first day of the week” is seen, when the disciples were accustomed to coming together to break bread in the observance of The Lord’s Supper. He also note in 1 Corinthians 16:2 how the Corinthian church had their church collection on the first day of the week, as it would have been a part of their weekly gathering together. The first day of the week, of course, began at sundown on Saturday and continued to sundown Sunday. Paul continued to preach and teach on into the evening of the next day and left the following morning.

John’s reference to “the Lord’s Day” in Rev.1:10 can well be interpreted as a traditional reference to Sunday, or as Modern Greeks refer to this first day of the week, as Kyriake. In Rev.1:10 John was in the Spirit on “the Kyriake Day,” i.e. literally “the Lordian/Lordly Day.” A major characteristic of God’s shift from The Age of Israel to The Age of the Church (in Acts) is our observance of Sunday, not as a covenant sign, as was the Sabbath, but as a day of rest and worship, thus not so legalistic. Such an emphasis on the first day of the week would be quite natural for the Church, as it focuses on the cornerstone of its faith, a resurrected Savior.

A notable difference in the specification and explanation of the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20 and relisted in Deuteronomy 5 is found in Deut. 5:15, “And commemorate that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and Yahweh, your God, brought you out from there by a strong hand and by an extended arm; therefore Yahweh, your God, commanded you to keep the Sabbath.” When one contrasts this with Ex. 20:11 and God’s emphasis on the seventh day of creation being a rest, such an emphasis is replaced by Moses in Deut. 5 with the emphasis of the Exodus-redemption which can be readily compared with the redemption of Jesus Christ occurring on Good Friday. However, the following first day of the week, Sunday, was a celebration of Firstfruits, thus Jesus’ resurrection occurred on the Feast of Firstfruits described in Lev. 23:9-14. After the crucifixion, the following day was a Sabbath and was a time of despair and disappointment. Jesus was dead and buried. But with all of the glories of His Resurrection Jesus marked the next day. The impact was great. The Jewish Messiah was alive again and forevermore. The Church was founded upon this resurrection of Jesus Christ. Hence, Sunday would be the focus in this commemorating of the resurrection of Jesus Christ,⁶ as in contrast to Israel’s Sabbath commemorating “Exodus-experience.”

As to the actual length of time⁷ for the Church Age, it is unrevealed and unknown, so that the future translation of The Church has been and will continue to be *imminent*, that is, it can occur at any time. However, after it does occur, God will return to using Israel again for seven more years during the Tribulation.

The Harpage

An issue often debated is whether there will be any set time period between Christ’s translation of His Church and the establishment of His earthly, millennial kingdom. The

⁶ Among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, *The Epistle of Barnabas* 15:8-9 explains this transition to “the eighth day” - Finally He saith to them; Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot away with. Ye see what is His meaning ; it is not your present Sabbaths that are acceptable [unto Me], but the Sabbath which I have made, in the which, when I have set all things at rest, I will make the beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world. Wherefore also we keep the eighth day for rejoicing, in the which also Jesus rose from the dead, and having been manifested ascended into the heavens.

⁷A novel teaching is found in *The Epistle of Barnabas* 15:1-5 of 6,000 years of human history, after which “the Lord will bring everything to an end” and commence a 7th 1,000 years. So with a chronology of Adam’s fall being about 4000 BC, such a 6,000-year period would be completed somewhere around 2000 AD.

question is, “Are the two events described in 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 and Revelation 19:11-16 (along with Matthew 24:30) to happen at the same time?” Some sincerely believe that these two events will be simultaneous in a hermeneutical framework popularly called “Historic Premillennialism.” Others sincerely believe that these two event will be separated by a 7-year period called the Jewish Tribulation, in a hermeneutically framework popularly called “Dispensational Premillennialism.”

Christ’s return for His Church at the end of this present age is described well in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17,

¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive and remaining until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who are asleep.

¹⁶Because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with a trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will be resurrected first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remaining shall be caught up together with them in the clouds for a meeting of the Lord in the air, and thus shall we always be with the Lord.

Those that are “in Christ,” that is, the Church, will “caught up” to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air. This event has been popularly called the Rapture. This word comes from the Latin term, *rapere*, which is used in the Latin translation of this passage to translate the Greek word, *harpazō*, translated above as “caught up.” Perhaps a better technical term for this event, that would be closer to the original language of the New Testament, would be the noun form of this Greek verb, *Harpagē*, which would be transliterated, *The Harpage* (pronounced – “har-pah-gee”). This term could be used for the event described in verse 17, after which 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 describes subsequent events leading to Christ’s Parousia or Apocalypsis some seven years later. The details of this event are given quite well in Revelation 19:11-16,

¹¹And I saw the heaven open up, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and carries on war.

¹²And his eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head were many royal crowns that had names written and a name written, which no one except him knew.

¹³And he was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his name was called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies in heaven followed after him, on white horses, clothed in fine, white, clean linen. ¹⁵And out of his mouth goes forth a sharp, double-edged sword, so that with it he might strike the nations. And he himself will shepherd them with a rod of iron, and he himself treads on the winepress of the rage of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶And he has on his robe and on his thigh a name written: Kings of Kings and Lord of Lords.

This appears distinct from that which is prophesied in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and is the culmination of hundreds of minutely described prophetic events recorded in Revelation 6 through 18. The decision to be made is, whether or not to take these various prophecies through the Book of Revelation as ones to be literally and chronologically fulfilled, or only figuratively, especially its references to specific lengths of various times periods. If it is to be taken literally, then the next question would be, have these prophecies in Revelation 6 through 18 been fulfilled historically already at some time in the past but subsequent to John’s receiving and recording of

them around 90 AD, or are they still yet future? With John's portrayal of them as prophecy, it would be inconsistent to find them fulfilled during the fall of Jerusalem around 70 AD. It also appears that no events since the first century has fully and completely fulfilled the details described in Revelation 6 through 18. If a literal fulfillment would be sought, it would have to be yet future.

On the other hand, this teaching of Christ's imminent return is found both within and even beyond the New Testament, such as in an ancient letter of the Romans to the Corinthians, commonly called First Clement in 23:5, "Upon a truth, quickly and suddenly will his purpose be accomplished, even from the co-testimony of the scripture, 'Quickly will he come and not delay, and suddenly will the Lord come into his temple, even the Holy One whom you expect.'" (Lightfoot, 1992:56) It is interesting to note the closing chapter of The Didache, chapter 16, in its apocalyptic teaching:

¹"Watch" over your life: "do not have your lamp be extinguished, and do not have your waist[-belt] become slack, but be prepared; for you do not know the hour in which our Lord is coming. ²But frequently gather together, seeking the things that are proper for your souls; for all the time of your faith will be of no benefit to you, if you are not found complete in the last time. ³For in the last days the false prophets and the corrupters will be multiplied, and the sheep will be changed into wolves, and love will be changed into hate. ⁴For with the increase of lawlessness, they will hate and persecute and deliver over one another. And then the cosmic imposter will appear, as a son of God, and will do signs and wonders, and the earth will be delivered over into his hands, and he will do lawless acts which have never happened from eternity of old. ⁵Then will come the judgment of men in the fiery process of testing, and many will be scandalized and perish; but the ones enduring in their faith will be saved by him, the accused one [on the cross]. ⁶And then will appear the signs of the truth: first a sign of an opening in heaven, then a sign of a voice of a trumpet, and third the resurrection of the dead— ⁷but not of all [the dead]; but, as it has been said, 'The Lord will come, and all the saints with him. Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.'⁸ (Lightfoot, 1992:266-268)

There is both a teaching of the immanency of Christ return *for* his saints; and then, after the coming of specific events and personages similar to those in Revelation 9-18, Christ is to come *with* his saints. The Lord's "coming" of verse 1 can be contrasted to his "coming" in verse 7 with many events needing to transpire between these two comings.

In Revelation, a three and a half year period is specifically mentioned in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 (of 42 months) and Revelation 11:3 and 12:6 (of 1260 days, where the Jewish prophetic year contains 360 days) and in Revelation 12:14 (with the poetic "a *time* [one year] and *times* [plural — two years] and *half a time* [half a year]"). This last expression is also found in Daniel 7:25 and 12:7. The various events described as occurring during these three and a half year periods can well be taken as contemporaneous, except for the one in Revelation 11:3 concerning the ministry of the Two Witnesses:

⁸ J V Lightfoot and J R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers Greek Texts and English Translation of Their Writings*, Second Edition, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, (1992), pp. 266-268.

¹And there was given to me a reed like a measuring rod, with one saying, Arise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those worshiping at it, ²and leave out the outer court of the temple, and do not measure, because it has been given to the Gentiles, and they will tread the holy city [Jerusalem] forty-two months, ³and I will give [authority] to my witnesses, and they will prophesy 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. (Rev. 11:1-3)

The three and a half year period described in verse 3 would fit well, as preceding that of verse 2, since verses 7-13 of this chapter describes events concerning these two witnesses, that are after their three and a half year ministry. These later events apparently transpire during the second three-and-a-half year period which is described in verse 2 and also described in the other three places in which it is mentioned in Revelation. Thus by putting these two periods together consecutively, one could parallel this seven-year period with that prophesied in Daniel 9:27, as mentioned above. Only a Pre-Tribulation Harpage can explain how this total of seven years in Revelation 11:2-3 can be taken literally. Either Jesus Christ will not come back for at least three and a half or seven years from the present, since the events of Revelation 11 have not literally transpired yet; *or* one cannot know, when the three-and-a-half year period begins, in order for the Harpage of Christ to be imminent. It cannot be both. However, with all the details given in Revelation 11, the latter could not be the case, and the former would mean that the soon return of Christ is *not* imminent. Hence, this two-fold scenario of Christ's second coming, as The Harpage and then seven years later the Second Advent, would fit more into this Scriptural prophecy.

The Application to the Local Church

As noted in the Scriptures above, God has put The Church in a very strategic place in His overall Plan of the Ages with a very strategic purpose: "That there might be made known now to the rulers and to the authorities in the upper heavenlies THROUGH THE CHURCH the multicolored wisdom of God, according to a plan of the ages, which he made in Christ Jesus, our Lord." (Ephesians 3:10-11). Paul described this through the eighth chapter of Romans. Believers during the Church Age, according to Paul, will find that

¹There is therefore now condemnation for the ones in Christ Jesus, the ones not walking according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ²For the law [or principle] of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus liberated me from the law [or principle] of sin and of death. ³For the thing [was] impossible for the [Mosaic] law in which one is weak through the flesh, God [by] sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh even concerning sin condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, the ones not walking according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

With God's special working of His Holy Spirit in the Church, there is a supernatural dimension of power that God had not worked forth in previous ages and generations. Through the Church He seeks to reveal features of his "multicolored wisdom", even to those angelic beings with Paul's reference "to the rulers and to the authorities in the upper heavenlies." Paul hinted in 1 Corinthians 11:10 at something within the special relationship of a wife to her husband, which

parallels that of the Church to Christ, as something of focus for the angels apparently to observe. Even Peter in 1 Peter 1:12 explained how the Old Testament saints prepared the way for the gospel to have its special working in the Church, as angels intently look on. This appears to be a part of a resultant intensification of an angelic conflict that has been continuing from the time before man. Jesus spoke of this intensification that began in the early days of his ministry in Matthew 11:12, “but from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of the heavens is violently treated, and violent ones seize it.” With the ministry of John and then Jesus, Satan and his demonic host found God preparing a special, supernatural work that eventuated in the Church, the Body and Bride of Christ, with the unique characteristics listed above. Each local church and each believer within a local church “in Christ” is a integral part of this fantastic channel through which God’s multi-variated wisdom is being revealed to everyone in the world, both seen and unseen.

Messianic Congregations

Some Messianic congregations/congregants form a strategic Bible-believing remnant within the Church. The influence of this believing Jewish remnant⁹ on other Jews, after the Harpage, apparently will form a basis for God to return to his previous administration of His Jewish mission of evangelism in a worldwide Jewish “revival” among Jews and Gentiles described in Revelation 7. It is of interest to note the exponential growth in numbers of Messianic congregations during just the past few decades and to consider their present ministry and influence on Jewish unbelievers who in the future may have a new understanding of their Messiah and be used in a very special evangelistic ministry in Israel.¹⁰ This is an exciting dimension of the latter days of this present Church Age with this preparation even by the Church, as a whole, for this apparently prophesied post-Harpage Messianic revival among Jews, which will be high profiled by the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and the two “witnesses” in Revelation 11. This “Jewish Tribulation” is not Jewish, because the Jews will be the victim (although there will be much persecution of them) but because the Jews will be the avenue of God’s salvation amid his wrath.

⁹According to some calculations, there are approximately 5000 Messianic Jews in Israel today, and in America there are about 25,000, distributed in more than 200 Messianic congregations. The number of Gentile Messianic believers in both countries ranges between 80,000 to 120,000.

¹⁰To be sure, the Messianic movement presently is NOT recognized as a valid Jewish expression by all branches of Judaism. According to Jewish (rabbinic) law, in the Mishneh Torah, “Laws of Idolatry”, chapter 9, rule 4, those who profess faith in Jesus Christ are idol-worshippers. This includes Messianic Jews and gentile Christians. Also in the same code of law written by Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), in “Laws of Kings and their battles”, chapter 11, rule 4, Jesus is declared to be a “false Messiah;” thus anyone who follows him, “follows a false Messiah.” In “Laws of Idolatry” again, we see (chapter 10, rule 1 that it is a “mitzvah” [religious obligation] for a Jew to seek by any means the destruction of the faith of Jewish “apostates,” that is, Messianic Jews. So, if one wants to take the literal reading of this specific rule, Jewish believers in Jesus should be killed by zealots among those in Israel today tremendous persecution against Messianic believers does exist, such as the case of Beer Sheva in 1999, where more than 1000 Hassidic Jews intended to eliminate a small group of Jewish believers in Jesus on a Sabbath!! The reason for this (according to them) was that the believers had plans to “baptize” Jewish children and “to convert” them to Christianity. Incidents like this are repeated over and over and few people protest.

Judaism and The Messianic Church in the present Church Age

During the present time of The Church Age, many Jewish unbelievers in their rejection of Jesus as Messiah will continue, as an ethnic entity, in unbelief according to Matthew 24:34; Acts 15:14-16; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 2 Corinthians 3:16-17. Thus a form of Judaism will continue through The Church Age.

Even though among the prophets of the Old Testament nothing about The Church Age was revealed to them, the Book of Esther portrays a interesting picture of Judaism, as it is found in this present Church Age. In a sense, the Judaism found in Esther displays a foreshadow of present-day Judaism. The book describes God's providence for His nation, Israel. "God" and prayer are never mentioned in the canonical Hebrew text.¹¹ The description of the Jews appears to foreshadow what Paul described in 2 Cor. 3:14-15: "But until this day, when (any of the books of) Moses is read, a veil is laid on their hearts; but, whenever one might turn to Christ, the veil is taken away." Interestingly, the Hebrew verb-form for "Judaism" is even used in Esther 8:17. These Jews were out of God's will and had chosen the luxury of Persia over the hardship of a return to "the land" under Ezra and Nehemiah.¹² The Book of Esther describes God's providential care for the Jewish people in this odd dilemma.

God the Father found and chose Israel to be His bride and wife by covenant, although she became a faithless wife in time, though never forsaken and ultimately to be restored (Rom.11; Ezek.16:60). However, in the meantime her son, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of her (Rev.12:1-6) has Himself found and chosen a bride, the Church, made-up of believers from Acts 2 on the Day Pentecost to the Harpage.

Presently, the Church is in a betrothal stage awaiting the Marriage Feast of the Lamb after the Harpage. In Judaism presently Israel, as the wife of Yahweh, has become estranged in harlotry but in a "veiled" blindness from unbelief (2 Cor. 3:13-16).

Future Evangelism within the Tribulation of the Age of Israel and within the Millennial Kingdom

That which is yet future is the seven-year Jewish Tribulation and Millennial reign of Christ, all of which is often summed up in the Biblical expression, "The Day of the Lord." It will focus on God's long-awaited judgment on mankind and the fulfillment of His glorious purpose of His Kingdom coming to earth.

The Future Seven-year Jewish Tribulation

This will be a continuation of The Age of Israel described earlier, thus it will be very Jewish in its character. However, a unique part of this period of the Age of Israel will be that it will occur with Christ's work of atonement and resurrection being historical rather than prophetic (as they were in the first part of the Age of Israel.) Substantially, Revelation 6 through

¹¹That is, according to the Masoretic Text. This is not the case with the text of Esther in the Septuagint and even, perhaps, its Hebrew *Vorlage*.

¹²Even Ezra and Nehemiah have some interesting foreshadowing of The Tribulation after The Church Age.

18 gives the most details of this period, which will be a time of relative calm and peace for its first three and a half years and then a time of “great tribulation” during its second three and a half years. It can also be noted that there is a conspicuous absence of the Church in these chapters of Revelation, after much is described about it in Revelation 2-3.

At this point of history the nation of Israel will be back in their promised land. A Revived Roman Empire will come into being, headed by The Beast of Revelation 13, also referred to as The Antichrist in 1 John 2:18 and “the man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 6-9, who will make a seven-year covenant with Israel and break it after three and a half years according to Daniel 9:27.

Also, the third Jewish temple is to be built apparently either shortly before or after the Harpage. Such a temple is mentioned in Revelation 11:1, as well as in Matthew 24:15 and Daniel 9:27, even though the second Jewish temple was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans in accordance with Jesus prophecy in Matthew 24:2. So it would seem that its construction could be accomplished just prior to the Harpage, but with present technology it could be rapidly constructed within the first few weeks or months of the Tribulation.

A key to understanding this future seven-year period is that, God will have some special plan for using ethnic Israel’s believing remnant as His agency of evangelism that they might be “for a light to the nations.” In fact, Revelation 7:1-8 and 14:1-5 described a specific group that God will use: 144,000 single Jewish evangelists sealed for a worldwide ministry of evangelism to Jews and Gentiles. They will be divinely protected by God during the Tribulation and commissioned with “the gospel of the kingdom” which is mentioned in Matthew 24:14. During the first half of this seven-year period, Israel will live in a relative peace, as the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are also used in this evangelistic plan. Verse 3 specified this time period’s length. During the second half of this seven-year period, Israel will be in hiding according to Revelation 12:6, during what Jesus called “great tribulation” in Matthew 24:21. Their evangelistic ministry will prepare for what God has further planned in the Millennial Kingdom Age.

Concerning those “in Christ”, that is, those in the Church, during this 7-year period The Judgment Seat of Christ and The Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9) will be taking place for these resurrected and with the Lord, as The Church.

The Future Millennial Kingdom of Christ

The fourth age of God’s plan will begin at the close of the Tribulation, after The Battle of Armageddon, with the Second Coming of Christ, as described in Revelation 19:11-21 and Matthew 24:29-31, 36-44. In Revelation 20:1-10, John briefly described this as a 1,000 years from which comes its name, as “The Millennium.” It will be a golden age of righteousness, as described in Daniel 9:24, when Christ will reign on earth, after its “Regeneration” as mentioned in Matthew 19:18.

The results of this regeneration is described in many places throughout the Bible, such as in Daniel 9:24; Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-16; 35:1-10; 65:20-25. There will be radical changes in nature according to Joel 2:24-26; Amos 9:13; Isaiah 60:19-20; Romans 8:18-23. There will be universal peace, prosperity, and knowledge of God with a perfect one-world government headed by Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace, according to Isaiah 9:6-7. The Tribulation Temple of Israel will be renovated into The Millennial Temple that is described in Ezekiel 40-46.

Further, there will be some of the fourteen categories of intelligent beings living in the Millennial Kingdom-Age:

God the Father in the Third Heaven – see 2 Cor. 12:2.
God the Holy Spirit poured out on the earth – see Joel 2:28.
God the Son ruling from Jerusalem, as King of Kings and Lord of Lords – see Rev. 20:4c.
Michael the archangel – see Jude 9.
Holy, Elect Angels – the two-thirds of the angels that did not sin – see Rev. 12:4.
The Church resurrected and ruling, as Jesus’ “queen-bride” at His side – see 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 5:10.
The Friends of the Bridegroom resurrected and ruling over various cities – see Rev. 20:4, 6.
Mortal believers coming out of the Tribulation into the Millennium and bearing children – see Isa. 11:6, 11-16; 65:21-23; Matthew 24:29, 39-41; 25:31
Mortal believers born during the Millennium – see Isa. 11:8; 65:20-23.
Mortal unbelievers born during the Millennium and recruited by Satan at the end – see Rev. 20:7-10.
Unbelievers through the ages still in Hades, who will be resurrected at the end of the Millennium – see Rev. 20:5.
Satan in the Abyss – released for a while at the end of the Millennium – see Rev. 20:7.
The fallen angels of Satan in the Abyss, called demons and unclean spirits.
Specially cursed fallen angels who sinned in Gen. 6:2 and were confined forever in Tartarus – see 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 7.

All will go well, until near the end, when Satan will pursue one last effort against God, that is prophetically described in Revelation 20:7-10 with Gog and Magog. Then he will be cast into the Lake of Fire, which is also called “eternal fire” in Matthew 25:41. After this Millennial Age of Christ will be The Great White Throne Judgment which will be by Jesus Christ for unbelievers from throughout the ages.

Applications for The Church Today

Through all of human history God has had an evangelistic purpose for believers here on earth. As His stewards or agencies of evangelism, He has used Gentiles, Israel, and The Church; and in the future He will return back to utilizing Israel and then Christ Himself. These stewards were not to be and will not be used concurrently but successively, as four special but separate administrations or economies of evangelism.

At this present time in history, God’s purpose is that His multifaceted wisdom might be made known through the Church. In this overall plan, God in the Bible described a special place for His Church with unique and supernatural resources by which she can fulfill her ministry. This notable pattern also offers an approach to a consistent way of interpreting the Bible and a nice solution to many enigmatic Biblical passages.