

Understanding Prophecy, Part I

Lesson Four Lecture

Basic Distinctions

Well this week we continue striving to understand a few more distinctions that will continue to help us to come to a better understanding of things we need to have a grasp concerning Scriptures as a whole. Distinctions in the areas of:

- Heavenly and Earthly realms.
- Gentiles, Jews and Christians
- Time within respect to the ages, and
- Dispensations within the ages

I'd like to begin today reviewing the distinctions between the heavenly and earthly realms of the kingdom. This is something you may understand even without knowing that you understand it.

Hopefully, having done your homework, you have a better grasp of these two realms. So, for the lecture, I would just like to identify that two realms need to be recognized when dealing with the kingdom of this earth, both in the present time, as well as the future time.

Succinctly stated, we know that God is the Supreme Ruler over the whole of creation, the whole of the Universe. And this universe is far beyond what we can imagine! Powerful angelic beings ruling over various provinces of the universe. Glimpses of this can be seen in various part of the Book of Daniel

And though the earth and the heavens which surround this earth is a very minute speck in the overall universe, it is here that God has focused His attention. And the reason can be seen fairly easily:

The angelic rebellion that took place in the heavens in a past age, brought about the need for reconciliation of the heavenly places of rulership (*heavenly* thrones, dominions, powers, and authorities), and the restoration of the material creation over which this heavenly domain rule.

And while that restoration of the material creation took place nearly 6,000 years ago, with man being created to rule in the stead of angels, there was another ruin that took place, at the hands of the originally created ruler over this earthly domain. Satan brought about the fall of man. And in this fall, there came an additional need for the reconciliation of *earthly* thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities.

This fact can so easily escape our notice (if we are not careful and do not bring attention to this) that there are two realms of this particular kingdom in God's Universe. And God is dealing with both realms in the restoration and reconciliation. We need to know that there is an:

- Earthly realm (which is for the most part dealt with in the OT, and a
- Heavenly realm (which for the most part is dealt with in the NT).

We can see how God set it up...that God very distinctly says through the prophet Daniel that:

Daniel 4

26 b ...that the heavens do rule. (KJV)

In Daniel's day, King Nebuchadnezzar had refused to recognize this fact. And in doing so, God brought about a horrific state upon the king. He became as a wild animal, living outside and having lost his human mind, so to speak, and remained in that condition for 7 periods of time. Once the king recognized the fact that the Most High ruleth, and that rulership takes place from the heavens, he was restored. And he offered praises to the Living God.

This fact is true today — the heavens do rule! And the fact will be true in the Age to come. It is the heavens that rule. Even as rulership takes place on the earth over the earth, there is an unseen (to our human eyes) hierarchy of rulership that takes place from the heavens over the earth. And a good in depth study of the Book of Daniel would reveal that there is angelic activity that takes place in the heavens that surround our earth. The angelic activity is real and powerful! We need to grasp that.

Even as we have seen that Satan and his fallen angels rule over the earth from the heavens above even now (Eph. 6:12), it is from this domain that rulership will take place over the earth in the Coming Age, the Age of the ages. Jesus will rule from the heavenly City (that city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God)!

Look at this very clearly stated verse in Hebrews:

Hebrews 11

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign [land,] dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

Why did he do this? Why did Abraham live in tents? This passage reveals that it had something to do with the promises he had received. And that Isaac and Jacob, dwelled also in tents, because of these same promises!

But we do not have to guess why! The very next statement tells us why they lived in tents.

Hebrews 11

10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Imagine a city which God designed and built! That's what it says, right?

And so we ask the question — Is this a figure of speech, or is it dealing with something literal?

If a figure, then it must be pointing to something literal. We would not have a figure of speech in Scripture for nothing, without it pointing to something literal! Figures of speech point to something! Take the red dragon, for example. The figure is not literal, i.e., it is not a literal red dragon, but it is revealing something that is literal. And the text states as much

Revelation 12

3 And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. 4 And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth

(Notice the numbers 7, and 10!)

9 And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

So again, though the red dragon is a figure of speech, it points to something literal. Same is true for the *woman that sits on the scarlet beast* in Rev. 17; and the locusts prepared for battle in Rev. 9.

And so what about this “heavenly city”?

Jesus told His disciples that He was going away to prepare a place for them. This is a scene that took place on the night of Passover, the night before his death. He very kindly told His disciples:

John 14

1 "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

Is it figurative or literal?

And to see that it is literal, we only need to turn to its specific description:

Revelation 21

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. 12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.

Does this sound figurative or literal?

14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15 And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall. 16 And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal. 17 And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.

Does this sound figurative or literal?

18 And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19 The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; 20 the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprane; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. 21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Is this figurative or literal? And if figurative, what would it be pointing to?

Let's go back to Hebrews chapter eleven, and see what Abraham and Sarah thought of these things. Did they live in such a way that all of this was figurative, or literal? It seems pretty literal, and as a result, they were commended for their faith concerning these things.

We have read:

Hebrews 11

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign [land,] dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise;

10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised...

12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Why did they consider themselves strangers and exiles on the earth? The next verse answers the question:

14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own...

... 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

And remember this passage from last week:

Numbers 23

19 "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?"

There are many other places we could go to see the distinctions between heaven and earthly realms of the kingdom, but I will trust that you came to understand a lot of these things through your homework.

Not only in your workbooks, but also in these lectures, we have already seen the distinctions between ages and time, haven't we?

Now that we have a pretty good grasp on that, let's look at details concerning the present Age. In this time period, there are distinctions and divisions in this period that also is important to understand. Just as this period is divided into 3 two thousand-years periods,

The first 2,000 years were covered in Genesis 1-11a. (These chapter will be the focus of the final three lessons in this part one of the Prophecy series.)

The second 2,000 year period is covered in Scripture from Genesis 11b through the four Gospels.

The third 2,000 year-period is covered in Scripture from the Book of the Acts through the Epistle of Jude.

The last 1,000 year-period is culminated in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus the Christ.

And within these periods of time, we can see God working through specific house-hold servants. Let's look at a particular Greek word that means just that: *household servant*.

3622. oikonomia

administration (of a household or estate); --dispensation, stewardship.

From the word oikonomos: a house-distributor (i.e. manager), or overseer, governor, or steward.

Oikonomos, which is from a compound word:

oikos: household

nomos: a legal term, to parcel out

Sometimes this word is translated into the English as the word *dispensation*.

Sometimes it has been translated *manager*; sometimes *administration*. It all depends on what verse you are looking at, and/or what translation you are using.

But for our purposes today, I would like to use the word *dispensation* for a specific reason. There is something out there called "dispensationalism". And often it is not looked upon in a good light today. And anytime men mess with something, it often gets construed to mean something other than the way it is portrayed in Scripture.

At the present time, the word *dispensation* gets a bad rap! Seemingly, now more than ever before! With people saying that the doctrine of dispensationalism didn't even come into view until the 1800s, which is not true, as we will see that it is a Scriptural concept.

But we can see that Paul aught it, and if it has been skewed, it has been skewed by man's in man's ideologies.

Honestly, I do not know enough about the way the word is used today to speak to its correct and incorrect uses. It doesn't matter anyway, does it? The only thing that matters is the way Scripture deals with it. And we will strive today to see it in its correct light, not paying attention to the way it is viewed as an "ism" today. Does that sound good?

So we can see that the word dispensation is translated in the Bible from this Greek work oikonomia.

(Perhaps the reason for the bad rap is that a form of “dispensational doctrine” was formalized into some sort of man’s ideology in the 1800s, portions of which may or may not be correct according to Scripture. That is the bad thing about “isms”, isn’t it? Dispensationalism ... Man takes truths from the Bible and turns them into his ideology, adding beliefs to it that may or may not be correct, then passes it off as one of the options upon which to base your own theology! That craziness!

The safe thing is just to stick to what the Bible says, and you will be safe. So let’s work through one of the places in Scripture that deals with this word *oikonomia* (translated ‘dispensation’ in the KJV; and ‘stewardship’ and/or ‘administration’ in the NASB) and see what understanding we can come to. We will read through the whole text, then come back to parts of it and see what we can learn from it:

Ephesians 3

*1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship (**dispensation**) of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration (**dispensation**) of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal (Lit., the age-lasting [singular 'aion']) purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord...*

First, let’s understand the distinctions between the idea of age or ages, and dispensation or dispensations. An age has to do with *time*; a dispensation has nothing to do with time, but rather with the management of a household, or stewardship with respect to management. And in that respect, a dispensation fits into time. One or more dispensations can fit into an age. Let’s see how this works on the board”

We have one or more ages between “the beginning” and the “restoration of the earth”. Within this period, we know that Lucifer was the created being to manage the earth. And *in a sense* perhaps we could see this as a dispensation, though I don’t know of a place in Scripture where it is referred to as that!

Ezekiel 28

12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 "You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering...

... 14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created, Until unrighteousness was found in you.

Perhaps in this respect, we might see this as a dispensation, though it is a rulership that takes place from the heavenlies over the earth. And in the heavens, it is ongoing, even through today, with a view to this dispensation (and *that is what it is called* in Scripture) will be brought to an end in the heavens and a new ‘dispensation’ brought forward, the one having to do with the coming age, when Jesus and His bride will rule from the heavenlies in Satan’s stead.

But let’s see things from the perspective of God’s created purpose for man — man was created, God had created him to rule, initially from the earth, but in comparing Scripture with Scripture, it is easy to see that eventually man was to rule from the heavenlies, as well).

One place where we could see that is the understanding that God had given King David who, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, prophesied future things in his Psalms. Here is one such place:

Psalm 8

3 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; 4 What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? 5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! 6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;

The works of His hands is described as being the moon and the stars...but also the earth would still be in view. David continues in Psalm 8:

You have put all things under his feet, 7 All sheep and oxen, And also the beasts of the field, 8 The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea, Whatever passes through the paths of the seas. 9 O LORD, our Lord, How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

But remember that last week in Hebrews chapter two, we read that we do not yet see man ruling over the earth yet! (Heb. 2:8b.)

And though this has not come to pass, there is a sense that God uses human house-hold managers in the affairs of men, though Satan remains as the God-placed ruler over the earth, until a future time.

In that respect, we might see that there was a dispensation in the first 2,000 years, wherein God would manage His household through various individuals, rather than a group of individuals, which we see later.

Then with the call of Abraham, along with his progeny, we have another 2,000 year-period wherein we see God using the Jews as His household managers. So in that sense we could see this period as the Dispensation of the Jews.

Then at Pentecost after the crucifixion of Christ, we see new household servants coming into view — the Dispensation of the Church

We must pause for a moment here and mention something about this! Within the scope of God's history of mankind, we must see the distinctions between people groups, if you will.

Here in this first period of the history of mankind, we can know that while there were no distinctions among mankind per se (they were not even divided into nations until several generations after the Flood), we can know that *there were saved and unsaved individuals* during this period. (This is the period of time that we are going to go into details in the final three weeks of this study [Part I of the series on prophecy]).

And we can know that God certainly did work through certain individuals, who in a real sense were His household servants. We can think of Abel, Enoch and Noah, as three individuals who were singled out in Hebrews chapter eleven, representing this first 2,000 years of mankind's history. And in that sense, we will refer to this as the first dispensation in mankind's history.

Then, once God called Abraham, and gave him the promises, and Isaac, the son of promise, then Jacob, and his twelve sons, who became the TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL, we can see another dispensation come into view — Another group of household servants — the dispensation of the Jews.

And to keep things in proper order, we must see Jews and distinct and separate from all other people groups, i.e., the Gentiles. The nation of Israel was not to be counted among the Gentile nations. We cannot only see that this is true of the nations (governments) of the earth, but it is also true in the governments in the heavens. All angels which reside over the nations of the earth are found in Satan's domain. All but one — Israel! The prophet Daniel explicitly says that the angel Michael is Israel's prince.

So in the study of prophecy, one distinction which must always be in place is the distinction between Israel and the nations — past, present, and future.

Then, in understanding more about distinctions of people groups and dispensations — when the Church comes into view, we see another separated and distinct group of people and another separate and distinct dispensation (God dealing through another group of household servants) and within the Church there is neither Jew nor Gentile. This is the present dispensation (Dispensation of the Church)

So these three dispensations, with these distinct people groups must continue to be seen as separate and distinct, when dealing with Scripture, even prophecy.

To think that the Church is the “new Israel”, will totally mess up correct understanding of future things. God will yet establish Israel again as His wife, and will yet rule over the nations through Israel. And this must be kept in sight, because the promises and the callings of God are without a change of mind...for God is not like man that He can change His mind, not like the son of man that He could lie.

So it is here (in the present dispensation) that our understanding of dispensations comes into view. And this is where we can begin to come into a more complete understanding of the way ‘dispensations’ could be viewed.

Let’s go back through the passage in Ephesians and look at the various facets to this idea of “dispensation” in this passage:

Ephesians 3

*1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles-- 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship (**dispensation**) of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.*

“...by revelation...the mystery...”

A mystery had been made known to Paul...What is a mystery?

A mystery is something that has been laid out in the OT, in the way of types, or metaphors or pictures, and fully revealed (by divine revelation) in the NT. Nothing is in the NT, without first being laid out in the OT.

A mystery which has something to do with the present dispensation. What is the mystery?

Let’s compare Scripture with Scripture...a little from here and a little from there...

Romans 16

25 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, 26 but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets,

according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, [leading] to obedience of faith;

I Corinthians 2

7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden [wisdom,] which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 [the wisdom] which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory...

That is why this information had been held in mystery...because if it had been understood (prior to the crucifixion), the rulers of this age would not have crucified the Lord of glory! Isn't that what it says!

So now that the Lord of glory has been crucified, then the mystery can be made manifest. And this is the mystery, which he had already written to the church at Ephesus in brief. We can see it in chapter one:

Ephesians 1

9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He [God] purposed in Him [Christ] 10 with a view to an administration [dispensation] suitable to the fulness of the times,

i.e. the age of the ages!

[that is,] the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.

Remember those things God created in the heavens and on the earth— those *invisible* thrones, dominions, powers and authorities (heavenly); and *the visible*, thrones dominions powers and authorities (earthly). These things *will have been summed up in Christ* in that coming day, which is the Age of the ages. This is one facet *of the mystery*— the summing up of these things in a future dispensation (or administration).

But only one facet of the mystery? Yes, the other facet of the mystery has to do with us...Gentiles by birth. Here it is in the remaining verses of the passage in Ephesians chapter three that we have already read:

Ephesians 3

4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 [to be specific,] that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

There it is! The mystery which had been hidden from before the ages began. Paul even wrote about it to the Church at Corinth. We have already touched on this passage:

I Corinthians 2

4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. ...

Remember that statement that was our very first verse that began this entire series?

I Corinthians 2:

6 Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; 7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden [wisdom,] which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 [the wisdom] which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; 9 but just as it is written, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND [which] HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." 10 For to us God revealed [them] through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

This hidden wisdom, this mystery, which had been hidden and predestined before the ages, God has now made manifest by his Spirit in this time period, right here (the present dispensation).

And look what Paul says of this to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 3

*8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration (**dispensation**) of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;*

And look what Paul says of this, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 [This was] in accordance with the eternal (Lit., the age-lasting [singular 'aion']) purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord...

Paul deals with this same thing in his letter to the Church at Collosae:

Colossians 1

25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship [dispensation] from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you [Lit. preached among you— Gentiles], the hope of glory.

And so in summary — as we begin to broach the subject at hand next week as we jump with both feet into Genesis, the writings of Moses, we will remember that prophecy will deal with:

- Heavenly and Earthly realms.
- Gentiles, Jews and Christians
- Time and ages, and
- Dispensations within the ages

And with those distinctions in place, next week we will begin where we are supposed to begin...in Moses!

See you then!