

*Charts: The Church Age, The Dispensations, The Generative Cycles*

## PREFACE

Because God's word, in its entirety, is an intricately interwoven tapestry with Christ Jesus as its central figure, it can be difficult to know where to break into the narrative to begin a study of the Last Things. But since I have argued for the inaugural event of the *eschaton* being Christ's *first* advent—that is, Bethlehem—we will begin there. [\[You will want to refer to the accompanying chart: "The Church Age."\]](#)

**Note:** Please note one feature of the charts. Instead of including Scripture references in-place in the body of the timeline—which I find clutters it unnecessarily—I have treated the references as “footnotes,” adding them in a separate area at the bottom of the page. Typically there is not just a number or title (as in Chart 2), but a corresponding *color* to match it to the item above. Not all charts include these footnotes, but most do.

Approximately thirty-three years after his incarnation in Bethlehem, Christ is crucified, and a few days after that He is resurrected from the dead. Then for about a month and a half Jesus appears to and speaks with different individuals and groups before ascending to the Father.

Jesus was arrested on the first night of the Passover. Fifty days later Jews celebrated the Day of Pentecost/Day of First Fruits/Feast of Weeks, as dictated by the Law.

**Read Deuteronomy 16:9-10.**

Later in the first century, the day was celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. So it is with poetic irony that God chose to send the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the church era on the very day Jews celebrated the giving of the Mosaic Law.

**Read Acts 2:1-4.**

**Note:** This is theology on which individuals may disagree. That the “church” began in Acts 2, with the giving of the Holy Spirit, is a *dispensational* position, for, different from some, we see Israel as separate and distinct from the Christian church. To put it succinctly for the moment, during the Last Things, Israel and Christians play different roles, and are treated by God in different ways. As stated in our church’s Articles of Faith, regarding the Millennial period,

This 1,000 year period has its foundation in the great unconditional covenants of the Old Testament – **Abrahamic** (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17, 15:9-18, 17:1-9), **the Palestinian** (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), **the Davidic** (2 Samuel 7:10-16; Psalm 89), **and the new covenant** (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Christ will be the king of this millennial or Davidic Kingdom with the nation Israel occupying an exalted position within the kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-10). [\[more on this when we study the Millennium\]](#)

Of course, we believe “the church,” the redeemed in Christ, will have been removed from earth at the Rapture, returning then with Christ when He comes in judgment. Thus, the NT church is not to be lumped together with the OT Jewish believers by faith (e.g., Abraham), nor do we say that the church represents the “new Israel.” The two are, and remain, separate.

### THE DISPENSATIONAL POSITION

Before we get too far along in this study of the Last Things, it is time to include a bit more about *dispensationalism*—a term I have mentioned more than a few times already. [\[Please refer to the accompanying chart: “The Dispensations.”\]](#) I will make every effort to limit the discussion to only those aspects pertinent to our study. Even so, for many of you this may be relatively new and rather detailed information. But we must include it because it plays an important role in not just what happens in the Eschaton, but why, and to whom—especially regarding Israel.

We get a general definition of dispensational theology from an essay written by Michael J. Vlach, professor of theology at The Master’s Seminary, and an expert on “the nation of Israel and issues related to refuting the doctrine of Replacement Theology”—that is, the (errant) doctrine that the church has replaced Israel as God’s chosen people.

*Vlach*: Dispensationalism is an evangelical theological system that addresses issues concerning the biblical covenants, Israel, the church, and end times. It also argues for a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies involving ethnic/national Israel, and the idea that the church is a New Testament entity that is distinct from Israel.

In *Webster's Second College Edition* (1980) definition number seven for the word "dispensation" is "the ordering of events under divine authority." At its root, dispensationalism says that God has worked in different ways in a number of distinct time periods or epochs (dispensations) in human history. For one obvious example that we can easily understand, there was the "Legal Dispensation" (Law: Moses to Christ) during which God said that to be righteous (right with God) one must follow the precepts handed down in the Mosaic Law. After this, however, there was the Dispensation of Grace, or the Church Age (in which we are presently), during which righteousness is determined by faith in Christ Jesus.

**Note:** *God* does not change, and dispensationalism affirms that *salvation* has *always* been by grace through faith alone (Genesis 15:6, "Then [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness"). But throughout the history of man God has initiated different covenants, or agreements, for different people at different times. All is part of His plan, and it is my personal view that God Himself does not reckon in epochs or dispensations, but just sees His economy working its way seamlessly, an unbroken thread through man's history. His purpose, His goal has never changed; from the beginning it has always pointed to Christ's kingdom.

The classic *number* of dispensations has been seven:

1. innocence, or Edenic dispensation (Adam before the Fall);
2. conscience, or antediluvian (before the flood) dispensation (Adam to Noah);
3. human government, or post-diluvian (after the flood) dispensation (Noah to Abraham);
4. promise, or patriarchal dispensation (Abraham to Moses);
5. law, or legal dispensation (Moses to Christ);
6. grace, or ecclesiastical dispensation (Pentecost to the rapture); and
7. kingdom, or Messianic dispensation (Millennium).

But not all dispensationalists agree on the number—and all *need not* agree. In my chart of The Dispensations I have listed eight; in my Generative Cycles chart I have added "Creation" as a subdivision to the first Innocence dispensation.

*Dispensationalism* is not synonymous with *pretribulationism* and/or *premillennialism*, but the three are often associated with each other. That is, if one subscribes to the first, one typically subscribes to the other two. Most—but not all—dispensationalists believe in a pretribulation rapture. We believe the rapture of the church is described, for example, by the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians ([1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, which we will look at in our next session](#)).

There are two key passages in God’s word that pretribulationists reference for their position:

### **Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.**

The word translated “wrath” is *orge* (or-gay’), meaning anger, indignation, vengeance, punishment. Our position is that those in Christ—redeemed, sanctified, justified saints—will not and *cannot* suffer that.

### **Read Revelation 3:10.**

(By the way, [anticipating a question about] Revelation 2:10, “...you **will have** tribulation,” that speaks of a briefer time of persecution and imprisonment for members of the church in Smyrna, not *the* Tribulation.)

Let me touch on just a few points as we wrap this up.

### *Israel*

Regarding the issue of Israel, as mentioned earlier there are some who claim that the Christian church *replaces* Israel as God’s chosen people. Many non-dispensationalists “hold that the OT as a whole is comprised of types and shadows of greater NT realities. In line with this idea, some assert that national Israel in the OT functioned as a type of the NT church” (Vlach).

Dispensationalists believe that God’s word clearly differentiates between the two, and that God’s promises made to Israel will be fulfilled *to Israel* during the Last Things. I love how Michael J. Vlach puts this succinctly: “God keeps His promises to those whom the promises were made.”

We will look at this in greater depth when we get to the Millennium—and, by extension, the Tribulation—for Israel will play a vital role during those periods.

### *The Dispensations Chart*

During the sessions of this class I do not intend to walk you through every minute detail of each chart. In most instances, as today, I will offer an overview during the session, but leave the rest of the discovery to you. That is not laziness on my part; it is my view that it will be to your benefit to work through these details and references for yourself—in that personal discovery and realization will be found much of the fascination and joy of this topic that I have already been blessed to experience.

The body of this chart is self-explanatory. There is really no point in assigning dates or, in most cases, even a precise length to the individual dispensations. The true wonder and depth of the dispensations is found in the references, below, that accompany each epoch, for almost every dispensation is inaugurated, or at least associated with a declaration or agreement—a covenant—established by God Himself, with either an individual or a people. Spend some time on your own reading through these passages to obtain a picture of how the Lord God has generously—yet righteously—moved His will and purpose through the generations from Adam to those who will dwell with Him in the new Jerusalem of the “new heaven and new earth.”

### *The Generative Cycles Chart*

For me, the value of the Generative Cycles chart is in how it visualizes the eternal structure and order of God’s economy for man in Christ—and how, even if one breaks it down, as I have in the three aspects: Generational, Dispensational, and Believers, there is continuity.

We won’t take the time here to digest every component of the chart, but it would be well worth your time to sit down with it on your own, examining each column downward, and each row from left to right. It all speaks to the genius of the Godhead in how this world, and its destiny under God and in Christ, were created in a poetic symmetry.

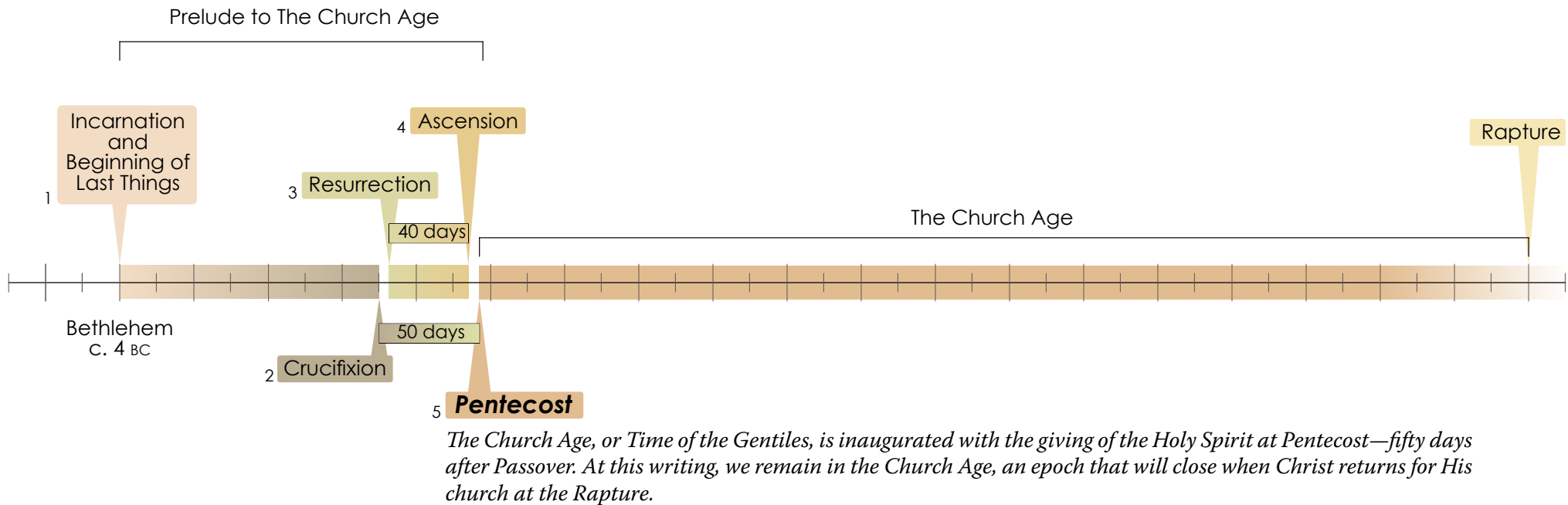
### THE END

Let’s close by reading the history of the beginning of the church.

### **Read Acts 2:41-47.**

We hold that the end of the dispensation of Grace—the closing of the church age—will come when Christ Jesus returns for His church at the Rapture, just before The Tribulation. **And the Rapture will be the topic of our next three sessions.**

# THE CHURCH AGE or THE TIME OF THE GENTILES



## Footnotes

1  
Genesis 3:15  
Luke 2:5-7, 11-12  
Galatians 4:4-5  
John 1:1-5, 14  
Hebrews 1:1-2

2  
Matthew 20:18-19  
John 19:16-20  
Acts 2:36

3  
Psalm 16:10-11  
Matthew 28:6-7  
Acts 13:30-37  
Romans 4:25  
Revelation 1:15, 18

4  
Luke 24:50-51  
John 16:28  
Acts 1:9-11  
Matthew 26:64  
Hebrews 1:3

5  
Numbers 28:26-31  
Acts 2:1-4



# THE DISPENSATIONS

Innocence	Conscience	Human Government	Promise	Law	Grace	Kingdom	Eternity
or Creation/Eden	or Antediluvian (before the flood)	or Post-diluvian (after the flood)	or Patriarchal	or Legal (under the Mosaic Law)	or Ecclesiastical (the present church age)	or Messianic (the Millennium)	or Perfect
Adam before the Fall	Adam to Noah	Noah to Abraham	Abraham to Moses	Moses to Christ	Pentecost to the Rapture	Christ's 1,000-year reign on earth	

## Footnotes

Innocence	Conscience	Human Gov	Promise	Law	Grace	Kingdom	Eternity
Gen 1:28-30 Gen 2:16-17	Gen 3:8-24	Gen 6:6-8, 11-22 Gen 8:20-9:17	Gen 12:1-3, 7 Gen 15:1-21 Gen 17:1-21 Gen 22:15-18 Gen 28:10-17 Gen 35:9-15 Gen 46:1-4	Exo 3:1-4:17 Exo 6:1-13 Exo 12:1-20 Exo 13:1-16 Exo 19:3-6 Exo 20:1-26 Exo 33:1-5, 12-23 Exo 34:5-27 Lev 26:1-45 Deu 6:1-25 Deu 7:6-8:20 Deu 11:1-32 Deu 27:1-28:68 Deu 29:1-30:20	Luke 21:24 Acts 1:4-11 Acts 2:1-4, 29-36 Acts 13:16-41 Rom 3:21-31 Rom 5:1-2 Rom 9:30-33 Rom 11:1-32	Psa 22:28 Psa 145:11-13 Isaiah 32 Dan 2:44 Luke 1:30-33 Rom 11:26-31 Rev 11:15 Rev 20:1-6	1 Cor 15:24-28 Rev 21-22



# THE GENERATIVE CYCLES

Generational Cycle	Dispensational Cycle	Believers Cycle
<p><b>Generation</b> The creation of the heavens and earth, Eden, and the first man and woman</p>	<p><b>Creation</b> } <b>Edenic (before the Fall)</b> } (Innocence)</p>	<p><b>Generation</b> We are born.</p>
<p><b>Degeneration</b> From the Fall of man, through all of recorded history, to the end of the Great Tribulation and the Return of Christ in judgment and triumph</p>	<p><b>Antediluvian (before the Flood)</b> <b>Post-diluvian (after the flood)</b> <b>Patriarchal</b> <b>Legal</b> (Mosaic Law to Christ) <b>Ecclesiastical</b> (The Church Age: Grace)</p>	<p><b>Degeneration</b> We are born in sin, and live, for a time depraved, separated from God.</p>
<p><b>Regeneration</b> Through the Millennium into a New Heaven and New Earth (re-made) and the perfect bliss of eternity with God</p>	<p><b>Messianic</b> (Millennium) <b>Eternity</b> (New Heaven and New Earth)</p>	<p><b>Regeneration</b> At the point of conversion the believer is re-generated, "born again."</p>

