

Introduction To A Series Of Adult Sunday School Lessons On End Times Prophecy

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Israel

The key geographical location on planet Earth which is of such vital importance to the study and understanding of Bible prophecy, both fulfilled and unfulfilled, is the small area of the world which today is called Israel (Palestine).

Palestine is the ultimate piece of real estate that God has promised to the Jews (See Gen. 15:18, the Abrahamic Covenant). This land extends from the Great River in Egypt to the Euphrates River. Since 70 A.D., the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the legions of Titus, the Jews have been scattered all over the earth (the diaspora) and will continue to be dispersed until the Second Advent where the Lord Jesus Christ Himself reunites them nationally as believers in the Land. The present dispersion is the result of their persistent negative volition to Bible Doctrine and their failure to disseminate or spread the Gospel.

Today, the Jewish people throughout the world are conscious of their national home in Palestine. However, as a whole, they are now entering the land as unbelievers and, therefore, modern Israel does not constitute the prophesied nation under God.

Israel was declared a nation on May 14, 1948 after nearly 1900 years without a homeland. In fact, as you are all probably aware of, this current month (May 14, 2008)* marks the 60th anniversary.

For centuries armies of all nations have pushed across this strategically vital territory. The Arab states are constantly engaged in a bid for power and political solidarity. In order to keep face in the Near East, they are always seeking to abscond this strip of land from the Jews. The attached map shows the linking geographical area between the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa. The Bosporus is basically the 20 mile straight between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara. This area actually includes the entire body of water from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and forms part of the boundary between Europe and Asia. Also note the near geographic locality of both Israel and the Suez Canal.

*On this date this paper was presented to a Sunday school class at Sunrise Community Church (Temple City, CA).

Many experts have said that the nation which controls the Bosphorus and the Suez canal commands three continents – Europe, Asia and Africa. As a result, it thus becomes more and more apparent with the advance of time that Palestine, located between the Bosphorus and Suez canal, is a focal point for military and economic strategy throughout the world. The hand of God can surely be seen here in that He provided this geocentric location for Israel.

For hundreds of years, a multitude of divergent views concerning Israel's future (e.g. Book of Revelation) have been put forth. These attempts to correlate Bible passages to contemporary events lead to much confusion when the dispensational aspect of God's plan is ignored. As 1 Cor. 14:33 states: "God is not the author of confusion". God has given us a time table which the Bible calls Dispensations. However, as we shall point out later, this term is more than just a time table. It is the key to understanding prophecy. Let us take a look at Ephesians 1: 8-10:

"Wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence. Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to his good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself. That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him".

The two key words here in these passages are mystery and dispensation. Let us discuss these in more detail.

Mystery

According to J. Vernon McGee, a mystery, when referred to in Scripture, means that God is revealing something that, up to that time, He had not revealed before. A New Testament mystery has two characteristics:

1. It cannot be discerned by human devices because it is a revelation from God.
2. It is revealed at the proper time and not concealed. Enough is revealed without necessarily all the details being disclosed.

The Scofield reference Bible lists eleven (11) mysteries. Some New Testament examples would be:

1. the mystery of the kingdom of heaven – Mt. 13:3-50.
2. the mystery of the NT church as one body composed of Jews and Gentiles - Eph. 3:1-12, Rom. 16:25, Eph. 6:19, Col. 4:3.

3. the mystery of the seven (7) stars and golden lamp stands – Rev. 1:20.

4. the mystery of Babylon – Rev. 17:5-7.

A mystery is then something God hasn't previously revealed but now reveals to us. In Eph. 1: 8, 9 the mystery of His will is something which is revealed according to wisdom and prudence. In other words this is deep stuff that we cannot discern by our own mental power. No human can reveal them to us.

Dispensations

R. B. Thieme Jr. (Pastor of Berachah Church, Houston, TX) defines a dispensation as a period of time expressing the divine viewpoint of human history or the divine interpretation of history. He refers to it as a time table which is the key to understanding prophecy in that it establishes chronologically certain events pertinent to Israel.

J. Vernon McGee states that the term dispensation does not just refer to a period of time and basically differs from the term "age" – like the Age of Grace or the Church which is a specific period of time. It can refer to a stewardship, an order or an administration or an economy. "It is an order or a system that is put into effect; it is a way of doing things".

A given dispensation may fit into a certain period of time or age, but it really refers to the way God runs something at a particular time.

Lewis Sperry Chafer states that a dispensation can be defined as "a stage" in the progressive revelation of God comprised of a distinctive stewardship or rule of life. As a general rule, each dispensation appears to begin with man being divinely placed in a new position of privilege and responsibility, and each closes with the failure of man resulting in righteous judgments from God.

Here is a brief summary of the seven (7) dispensations:

<u>Description</u>	<u>Verse(s)</u>
A. Innocence – Liberty	Gen. 1: 26-27 to Gen. 3:6
B. Conscience – Human Determination	Gen. 3:7 to Gen. 8:19
C. Human Government – Cov. with Noah	Gen. 8:20 to Gen. 11:9
D. Promise – Cov. with Abraham	Gen. 11:10 to Exodus 19:2

E. The Law	Exodus 19:3 to Acts 2 (Pentecost)
F. Grace	Acts 2 to Rapture
G. The Kingdom	Mt. 24, Rev. 19 beginning with 2 nd coming of Christ

I believe that each of these dispensations can be shown to fit in nicely with the various ages of the attached time-line chart. In summary,

<u>Dispensation</u>	<u>Age</u>
A, B, C	Age of Gentiles
D, E	Age of Jews
F	Age of Church
G	Age of Christ to Eternity

Dispensations F and G correspond directly (in elapsed time) with the ages they are associated with.

Time-Line Chart

This chart begins with eternity and ends with eternity. In summary we have the following chronological sequence of these ages:

Eternity Past ---- Age of Gentiles ---- Age of Jews ---- Age of Church ---- Age of
Jews Cont. (Tribulation) ---- Age of Christ (Millenium) ---- Eternity Future

It should be noted here on this chart that the Age of the Jews is interrupted by the Age of the Church (the Great Parentheses). It is not until the personal reign of Christ in the Millenium (the last 1000 years of history) that Israel will once again be a theocracy. But during the seven years prior to that period (the completion of the Jewish Age), God will unleash upon the world a series of judgments unequalled in history (e.g. the seven bowls of wrath of Rev. 16). We will return to the time-line chart once again when we discuss the 70 Weeks of Daniel.

The Tribulation I

In His Olivet Discourse Jesus prophesied concerning the Tribulation. This is recorded in Mt. 24:21-22:

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened”

As most every believer knows, the Old Testament contains many references to the Tribulation: Jer. 30:4-7 speaks of the “time of Jacob’s trouble” and compares it to the “birth pangs” of a woman. Ez. 20:34-38 refers to a time when Israel shall “pass under the rod” and also in Ez. 22:19-22 where Israel will be refined as gold and the impurities removed. This time of trouble is known as the “indignation” in Dan. 8:19, Is. 10:5, 13:5 and 26:20.

It is quite apparent in Scripture that from the beginning Satan has attempted to thwart God’s plan for man. The result of Satan’s cunning was the infamous deception of Adam and Eve in which they inherited both physical and spiritual death, and, as we all know, this inheritance was passed on to their progeny.

Gen. 3:15: “And I will put enmity between thee (Satan) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel”

Here, not only was a personal Redeemer, who would overcome Satan promised, but also mention of the perpetual warfare between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil.

As we all know, this Redeemer came out of Israel and Satan, for obvious reasons, has sponsored antagonism toward the Jews through history. During the Tribulation, Satan will promote a period of unparalleled anti-Semitism and launch a concentrated attack against Israel aimed at the destruction of all Jews. If no Jews survive, Christ would then not be able to fulfill His promises to them – literally!

Two primary factors will facilitate the acceleration of Satan’s activities in the Tribulation:

1. Removal of all believers from the earth at the rapture, 1 Thess. 4:13-18.
2. The removal of the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit, 2 Thess. 2:6-7.

Then “RELIGION”, Satan’s ace in the hole, will be free as never before to deceive and destroy.

The Tribulation itself will be divided into two periods of about 3 ½ years each. The latter 3 ½ years is generally referred to as “the Great Tribulation” – Mt. 24:21-22. Without getting into great detail here, we can say that the Tribulation will be further characterized by:

1. Power politics by four major spheres of influence struggling for world dominance.
2. Intensified lawlessness and anti-Semitism.
3. Terminating or culminating in Satan’s final attempt to annihilate the Jews by the gathering of the armies of the world against Palestine – in short, the famous Battle of Armageddon.

Two key role figures will be:

1. The Dictator of the Revised Roman Empire or the Antichrist.
2. False Prophet of Israel.

These two personages along with Satan (the Dragon) constitute what could be described as an “Anti-trinity” or an “Evil-trinity”.

70 Weeks of Daniel

Let us now devote our final discussion here to the 70 weeks of Daniel described in Dan. 9:20-27. In his vision, the prophet Daniel was told (by the Angel Gabriel) of a 70-week period that God would give the Jews:

“to make reconciliation for iniquity and to bring in everlasting righteousness; to seal up the vision and prophecy; and to anoint the most Holy” Dan. 9:24

These are prophetic weeks in which each week stood for seven (7) literal years (360 days or a Jewish year). This 490 year period was “started” as “going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem” – the decree of Artaxerxes I (better known as Artaxerxes Longimanus) of Persia in 445 B.C. (See Neh. 2:1-8). It was 483 years (69 weeks) from that time that Jesus rode into Jerusalem at the Triumphal Entry (Palm Sunday).

The crucifixion of Jesus was the start of the interruption of this prophecy and left one remaining week (7 years) to be fulfilled. Spliced between the 69th and 70th week of Daniel is the present Church Age which we are living in today. This intermediate period of time is also referred to as “The Great Parenthesis”.

During this time, Israel has been set aside as a missionary agency for spreading the Gospel. The end of Dan 9:26 demonstrates the silence of the Old Testament prophets with regard to the “doctrine of the mystery” (Eph. 3:3) or the Church Age. Verse 27 of Daniel, Chapter 9, jumps right into the Tribulation period or the final week (7 years). When prophecy deals with events chronologically, the Church Age is omitted, and it goes straight to information concerning the Tribulation, Millenium, and Eternal Future, all following sequentially. Daniel only understood that the Tribulation was a time of great trouble for his people. What were unknown and unrelated facts to Daniel were clearly revealed later by John on the Island of Patmos, where he was commanded to record all of the details in the Book of Revelation.

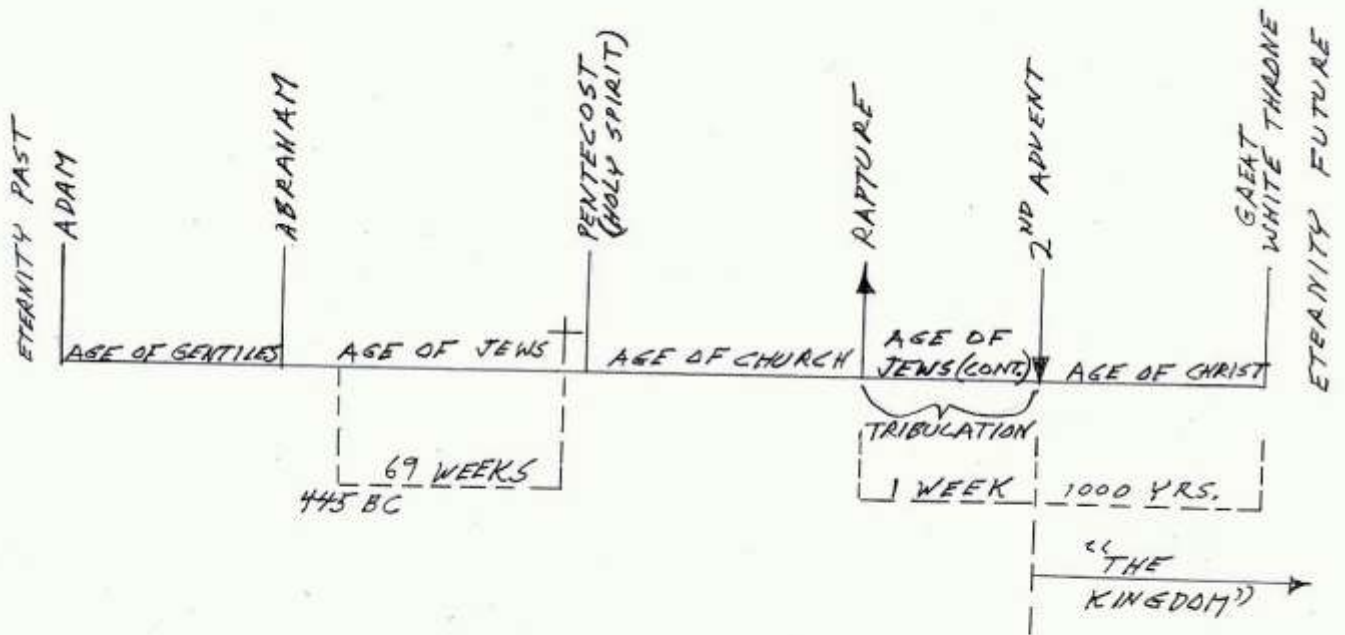
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3. J. Vernon McGee, "Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee", Vol. V, I Cor. To Rev., Thru the Bible Radio, Pasadena, CA, Copyright 1983
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Map showing the linking geographical area connecting Europe, Africa and Asia.

TIME LINE CHART



1 WEEK = 7 YEARS

69 WEEKS = 483 YEARS

1 JEWISH YR. = 360 DAYS