

Dispensations

Preface: Everyone believes in dispensations; the difference is degree. It is quite obvious that at one time, that God functioned in a close relationship with Israel, which is no longer the case. However, it should be clear that God is not working through Israel today as He did in the Old Testament. Prior to 1440 B.C., there was no Israel. The Jews of the Old Testament worshiped by sacrificing animals, a tradition which goes all the way back to the garden (this is where the animal skins came from that God gave to Adam and Eve), We no longer offer up sacrificed animals to God. I am not aware of any major Christian group which has a disagreement with what I have just said; and what I have just described is dispensational doctrine.

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Introduction: A dispensation is a period of time in which God has a specific plan for spirituality, evangelization, judgment, and the writing, preservation and dissemination of His Word. The Greek noun which is occasionally translated *dispensation* does not mean this exactly; although it has come to mean *a specific period of time as defined by God*. The Greek noun is oikonomia (οἰκονομία) [pronounced *oy-koh-nohm-EE-uh*]; which specifically means *the administration or management of a household*. The idea is, those administering God's household here on earth change from time to time. Strong's #3622.

The Catholic definition of a dispensation (a dispensation is *an act whereby in a particular case a lawful superior grants relaxation from an existing law*) has absolutely nothing to do with our study.¹

There is a common misunderstanding with dispensations that, *everything* is different from dispensation to dispensation. This is patently untrue. Every person is delivered by believing in Jesus Christ (or Jehovah Elohim), regardless of the dispensation in which he finds himself. No one was every saved by keeping the Law at any time. In fact, only Jesus kept the Law perfectly.

It will be helpful to look at several of the words used in the New Testament, and see how they are related to the concept of dispensations.

¹ You will note that some cults and denominations confuse various theological issues by giving their own peculiar take on this or that word; so that it can mean something very different from what an outsider may think.

Vocabulary:

Greek Word	Definition	Theological Implications
<p>kairos (καιρός) [pronounced <i>kī-ROSS</i>]; Strong's #2540</p>	<p>masculine noun which means <i>time, as a chunk or definite period of time; an epoch</i>; Thayer: 1) <i>due measure</i>; 2) <i>a measure of time, a larger or smaller portion of time, hence: 2a) a fixed and definite time, the time when things are brought to crisis, the decisive epoch waited for; 2b) opportune or seasonable time; 2c) the right time; 2d) a limited period of time; 2e) to what time brings, the state of the times, the things and events of time</i></p>	<p>God organizes time, which is His invention, into epochs, each of which has its own distinguishing characteristics. The way we use the term <i>dispensation</i> today is actually more aligned with the idea of an epoch of time or a specific time period as defined by God.</p>
<p>mustêrion (μυστήριον) [pronounced <i>moos-TAY-ree-on</i>]; Strong's #3466</p>	<p>neuter noun which means: 1) <i>hidden thing, secret, mystery; 1a) generally mysteries, religious secrets, confided only to the initiated and not to ordinary mortals; 1b) a hidden or secret thing, not obvious to the understanding; 1c) a hidden purpose or counsel; 1c1) secret will; 1c1a) of men; 1c1b) of God: the secret counsels which govern God in dealing with the righteous, which are hidden from ungodly and wicked men but plain to the godly; 2) in rabbinic writings, it denotes the mystic or hidden sense; 2a) of an OT saying; 2b) of an image or form seen in a vision; 2c) of a dream</i></p>	<p>This is the mystery doctrine which belongs to a secret Greek society; and is not known to those outside of the Greek fraternity. This refers to the doctrine specifically of the Church Age, which was a mystery to the believers in the Old Testament. Dispensations would be an example of a <i>mystery</i> doctrine.</p>
<p>oikonomia (οικονομία) [pronounced <i>oy-koh-nohm-EE-uh</i>]; Strong's #3622.</p>	<p>feminine noun which means: 1) <i>the management of a household or of household affairs; 1a) specifically, the management, oversight, administration, of other's property; 1b) the office of a manager or overseer, stewardship; 1c) administration, dispensation</i></p>	<p>The reference here is to those who function in overseeing <i>God's household</i> here on earth. This word is often translated <i>stewardship, administration, dispensation</i>. The emphasis of this term is, <i>who's minding the store during this or that dispensation?</i></p>
<p>chronos (χρόνος) [pronounced <i>CHRON.-oss</i>]; Strong's #5550.</p>	<p>masculine noun which means: <i>time; time as a succession of events</i></p>	<p>God's plan proceeds as He has determined in eternity past with a specific succession of events. Even though the Church Age was never mentioned the Old Testament, God determined in eternity past that the church universal would be a part of his plan, to occur at a specific time, yet hidden from Israel and the prophets.</p>

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As with many things in the New Testament, you can read a verse here and there, see the words above, and not quite put it together. However, if you see all of the dispensational verses all together at one time, then the fact of dispensations becomes more apparent.

New Testament Passages

Verse	Passage	Explanation
Acts 1:6–8	So when the apostles came together, they asked Jesus, “Lord, is this the time when you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus told them, “You do not need to know about times [chronological events] or epochs that the Father has determined by His Own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes to you. Then you will be My witnesses to testify about Me in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”	At the time of their question, the Apostles were not ready to find out about the Church Age, which was about to begin. They were expecting the Millennium to begin some time in the near future (<i>restoring the kingdom of Israel</i>). Although their faith had increased since seeing the resurrected Christ, their knowledge had not. Most of the 11 Apostles apparently functioned as missionaries and evangelists. The 12 th Apostle, Paul, would teach the mystery doctrine, which includes the concept of dispensations.
Rom. 11:25–26 (Isa. 59:20)	For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery , brothers, so that you may not be wise within yourselves, that hardness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the [gentile] nations comes in; and so all Israel will be saved, even as it has been written, “The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”	The context for this verse is the wild branches of the church being grafted in. The word mustêrion (μυστήριον) is always tied to church age doctrine.
Rom. 16:25–26	Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclaiming of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.	The mystery doctrine of the Church Age was kept secret until Paul revealed it through his teaching of and epistles to the churches, which he and other Apostles had established.
1Cor. 2:7–8	But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery , having been hidden, which God predetermined before the ages for our glory, which none of the [religious and political] rulers of this age has known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;...	Church Age doctrine had been hidden to generations of the past, although God had predetermined the Church Age from eternity past (that is, God knew all about the Church Age, however, He did not reveal this until now).
1Cor. 9:16–17	For if I proclaim the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship [or administering the affairs of a household].	Paul had specific duties and requirements to fulfill as the teacher of mystery doctrine at the beginning of the Church Age.

New Testament Passages

Verse	Passage	Explanation
1Cor. 15:51–52	Behold! I tell you a mystery . We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.	Generally speaking <i>mystery</i> doctrine refers to Church Age doctrine which was not known to Old Testament saints. The doctrine here is that of the rapture, unknown to Old Testament believers.
Eph. 1:7–10	In Whom we have our redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him to an administration of the fullness of the times , to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, in Him;...	Mystery doctrine is tied here to the dispensation of the fulness of the times, which speaks of the completion of all things in Christ.
Eph. 3:1–10	For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the dispensation [or, administration] of God's grace that was given to me for you [i.e., <i>for their benefit</i>], how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of His power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ...	God the Holy Spirit revealed the mystery doctrine of the Church Age to the Apostles and other teachers of divine truth—doctrine which was not known to believers in previous epochs. Part of this mystery doctrine is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs of the Jews to the promise of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, in the Church Age, gentiles and Jews will make up one body, neither one being given preference (in the Jewish Age, the spiritual functions like evangelism and the writing and preservation of the Scriptures were carried out by the nation Israel).
Eph. 5:32	This is a great mystery , but I speak concerning Christ and the church.	The context here is the union of a husband and wife; which is related to the union of Christ and the church; something which did not exist in the Age of Israel.

New Testament Passages

Verse	Passage	Explanation
Eph. 6:19–20	<p>And pray for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; so that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.</p>	<p>Paul wrote Ephesians when in jail (in restraints, so to speak); and he prayed that he could speak the truth of the mystery doctrine, without these restraints. Paul did not realize that his epistles (letters) would have the greatest impact on world history, far more than his actual face to face teaching.</p>
Col. 1:23–29	<p>if indeed you continue in the faith grounded and settled and not being moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard proclaimed in all the creation under Heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister, who now rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf and fill up in my flesh the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His body, which is the assembly, of which I became a minister, according to the administration of God given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God, the mystery having been hidden from the epochs and from the generations, but now was revealed to His saints; to whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, who is Christ in you, the hope of glory; whom we announce, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man full-grown in Christ Jesus, for which also I labor, struggling according to the working of Him who works in me in power.</p>	<p>The mystery doctrine of the Church Age was hidden from previous dispensations (epochs) and entrusted to Paul, as one of the administrators of the household of God. Part of this mystery doctrine is <i>Christ in you</i>, which implication places all believers into full-time Christian service.</p>
Col. 2:1–4	<p>For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible [-sounding] arguments.</p>	<p>Despite the constant pressures, Paul endeavored to teach the full range of Church Age mystery doctrine.</p>
Col. 4:3	<p>At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison.</p>	<p>Paul had been put in prison due to his teaching of the mystery doctrine. Just as the pharisees, scribes, priests and Sadducees persecuted Jesus Christ, they continued to persecute the Apostles.</p>

New Testament Passages

Verse	Passage	Explanation
1Thess. 5:1–4	<p>Now concerning the times and the epochs, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.</p>	<p>In this epistle and in previous face to face meetings, Paul had taught eschatology doctrine to the Thessalonians (eschatology is the doctrine of future things). The Thessalonians should know all they need to about the Day of the Lord, which is the Tribulation to come, as Paul had previously taught them that doctrine in great detail.</p>
2Thess. 2:1–12	<p>Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him, we ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has [already] come. Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the departure comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God [this is the abomination of desolation]. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only He [= God the Holy Spirit] who now restrains it will do so until He is out of the way [when the church is removed from the earth]. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.</p>	<p>The Thessalonians thought that they might be in the tribulation (the day of the Lord), and Paul sets them straight here. First there would be the departure (or the rapture) and then the man of lawlessness is revealed, who would proclaim himself to be God and set up a seat in the Temple. Satan, who will indwell this man of lawlessness, is restrained now by God the Holy Spirit, Who will be removed with the rapture of the Church (there will be no believers left on earth).</p> <p>The coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by power and false signs and wonders, which are the strong delusion sent for those who have no love of the truth.</p> <p>Most English translations transliterate the word <i>apostasia</i> (ἀποστασία) [pronounced <i>ahp-os-tahs-EE-ah</i>], which means <i>a falling away, defection, departure, forsaking, abandonment</i>; and transliterated <i>apostasy</i>. Strong's #646. The transliteration of this word as <i>apostasy</i> is inaccurate (some translate this a <i>falling away</i>, which may not be accurate either). This word is found only twice in the New Testament (Acts 21:21 2Thess. 2:3) , and it is never used in this way.</p>

New Testament Passages

Verse	Passage	Explanation
1Tim. 3:9–16	<p style="color: red;">They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.</p>	<p>The administration of the Church Age household is in the hands of the church, which would write, preserve and disseminate the truth. Mystery doctrine is tied to the manifestation of Jesus Christ, and His being taken up in glory. It had previously been assumed that the Messiah would come just one time and restore the kingdom of Israel. However, Church Age doctrine tells us that we, as members of the church, will meet Christ in the air; and 7 years later, He would return to the earth to establish His kingdom (the Millennium).</p>

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Rationale: There are several rationales for the concept of dispensations:

1. Even the most precursory reading of portions of Scripture reveals that God has divided human history into specific epochs.
 - 1) At one time, there was no nation Israel. At the time of the exodus through the time of Joshua, God formed a nation Israel from a people whom He called who had the genes of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is clear for much of the Old Testament that the God of Israel was not the same as the gods of the surrounding heathen nations, and that God clearly worked through Israel (which did involve some discipline as well). Since the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the religious authorities of Israel crucified our Lord; and, consequently, Israel was destroyed as a nation. Almost 2000 years later, Israel returned as a nation; yet during this time frame, there seems to be no clear indication that God was working through Israel or through the Jews (although it is clear that He preserved the Jews).
 - 2) During the time of Adam and Eve's fall, an animal sacrifice was necessary (recall that they went from being clothed in leaves to being covered in animal skins). Cain and Abel offered up sacrifices to God; Abel's was acceptable, as it was the offering of an animal; Cain's sacrifice—the result of his hard work—was not acceptable. And from that time forward, until the incarnation, animal sacrifices were offered. After our Lord died for us on the cross, animal sacrifices all but disappeared from worship (those who continued to offer up animal sacrifices were **crucifying our Lord afresh, putting Him to an open shame**). Heb. 9:11–28
 - 3) Although there are specific men who were given the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament for specific purposes; there does not seem to ever be a universal giving of the Holy Spirit until the Day of Pentecost. The giving of the Holy Spirit began actually a progressive event that continued through a portion of the book of Acts as related to believers from the previous dispensation. However, for new converts, the giving of the Spirit became established as part and parcel of salvation (Rom. 5:5 8:9, 11, 16 1Cor. 2:11–14 3:16 6:17, 19 12:13 Gal. 3:26).
2. I think that virtually every denomination and cult would agree to the differences previously listed; this makes them, to some degree, *dispensationalists*; those who believe that God has set up specific programs

- for specific periods of time. Some try to only see the cross as a dividing line, that the church is spiritualized Israel, and that all real differences can be attributed to living before or after the death and resurrection of our Lord. However, even though the historical narrative prior to Abraham is brief, it is clear that there were distinct differences between the administration of God's household on earth before and after Abraham.
3. The 11 disciples were 11 of the lamest religious leaders in the history of man. They argued about who was the best; they never asked for the Holy Spirit, although Jesus told them to do so; they ran for their lives during the crucifixion, even though Jesus had been telling them over and over again that He would be crucified; and they elected a 12th Apostle, even though there was no reason to do so. Although God used them during our Lord's incarnation and after His death and resurrection; they simply are not the brightest bulbs in the lighting store. Now, they certainly did not understand dispensations, and they, for the most part, would become evangelists and not specifically teach the doctrine of the Church Age (the mystery doctrine). Obviously, they taught some; however, it was Paul who was entrusted primarily with the Church Age doctrine. Therefore, after our Lord had been resurrected, the 11 disciples asked him, **"Will you now restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He answered, "It is not for you to know the times (succession of events) or the epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority."** (Acts 1:6b–7a). Jesus goes on to tell them that, what they need to be concerned with is that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would be witnesses for Him throughout the earth. That is, the focus of their ministries would primarily be evangelism (and evangelism will include some doctrine). Paul seemed to have a myriad of spiritual gifts, which included Apostleship, evangelization, knowledge, prophecy and teaching. So, Paul taught the mystery doctrine of the Church Age; and it is clear, that he taught the **times (succession of events) and epochs** to the Thessalonians believers (1Thess. 5:1–4).
 4. Paul uses the term *mystery* nearly 20 times to refer to doctrines which had not been taught until he came along. The Greek word is *mustêrion* (μυστήριον) [pronounced *moos-TAY-ree-on*]; and it means: *mystery doctrine which belongs to a secret Greek society; and is not known to those outside of the Greek fraternity*. Paul's use of this term is for the doctrine specific to the Church Age, and which was a mystery to the believers in the Old Testament. Strong's #3466.
 5. The Doctrine of Intercalation, where the first and second comings of our Lord are not presented in the Old Testament as separate events; so that the prophetic events of the Old Testament continually skip over the Church Age, a period of time unknown to Israel (and hence, presented as *mystery doctrine* by Paul to Jewish and Gentile believers alike).

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R. B. Thieme Jr.'s Doctrine of Intercalation is presented below.

R. B. Thieme Jr.'s Doctrine of Intercalation

1. Intercalation means "insertion." The Jewish Dispensation was interrupted by the strategical victory of Christ in death, burial resurrection, ascension and session.
2. A new Dispensation was inserted, the Church Age.
3. Intercalation is the intensified stage of the angelic conflict.
4. Doctrines pertaining to the Church Age are not found in the Old Testament; therefore, called a "mystery" (Rom. 16:25–26 Eph. 3:1–6 Col. 1:25–26).
5. Where Church Age information would have occurred in the Old Testament, there is a parenthesis.
6. Doctrine pertinent to the Church Age is intercalated (inserted) by the New Testament epistles (particularly, Paul's).
7. The Old Testament reveals doctrine up through the session of Christ, then skips the Church Age and reveals the Tribulation, Second Advent and/or Millennium.
8. Intercalation, or the "Great Parenthesis," occurred between the following passages: Psalm 22:22, 23; Isa. 61:1–2a, 2b–4; Daniel 2:40, 41; 7:23, 24; 8:22, 23; 11:35, 36; Hosea 3:4, 5; 5:15, 6:1
 - a. Isa. 61:1–4: [First advent:] **The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is on Me; because Jehovah has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to**

R. B. Thieme Jr.'s Doctrine of Intercalation

preach the acceptable year of Jehovah [second advent:] and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the mantle of praise for the spirit of heaviness; so that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that He might be glorified. And they will build the old wastes, they will raise up the ruins of former times. And they will repair the waste cities, the ruins of many generations.

- b. Hosea 3:4–5: [After Judah was returned to the land after they had been dispersed:] For the sons of Israel shall live many days with no king, and no ruler, and with no sacrifice, and no pillars, and no ephod, or teraphim. [Tribulation and Millennium:] Afterward the sons of Israel shall return and seek Jehovah their God and David their king. And they shall fear Jehovah and His goodness in the ends of the days.
 - c. Hosea 5:15–6:1: [Resurrection and ascension:] I will go; I will return to My place until they confess their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will seek Me diligently. [The Jews return to Jehovah in their hearts:] “Come and let us return to Jehovah. For He has torn, and He will heal us; He has stricken, and He will bind us up.”
 - d. As you can easily observe, there is nothing in between these verses about the Church Age, even though the Church Age clearly occurs between these sets of passages.
9. There are actually 21 passages where the Church Age is left out of the prophecy of the 1st and 2nd advents of Jesus Christ. These passages, as well as this doctrine being examined in greater detail in can be found here: <http://kukis.org/Doctrines/Intercalation.htm>

Taken from R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Dispensations*; ©1974 by R. B. Thieme, Jr.; p. 30. I only did some very slight editing of this doctrine.

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The Common Elements:

The 3 members of the Godhead: God the Father (Who planned human history and set the divine decrees); God the Son (the revealed member of the Trinity); and God the Holy Spirit (the empowering member of the Trinity)

Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ (Jehovah Elohim of the Old Testament)

There is an unseen conflict (the Angelic Conflict) of which we are a part.

Man is a sinner by birth, by choice and by imputation. Adam and Eve are exceptions to this; they were sinners by choice, which apparently affected the cell structure of their bodies.

The Dispensations:

1. **The Age of the Gentiles** (Gen. 1–11 Job)
 - a. Innocence
 - b. Pre-Deluvian
 - c. Post-Deluvian
2. **The Jewish Age** (Gen. 12–most of the Old Testament)
 - a. The Patriarchs/the Jewish Race
 - b. The Nation Israel
 - c. The Tribulation
3. **The Dispensation of the Hypostatic Union** (the gospels)
4. **The Church Age (the Intercalated Age)** (Acts and the Epistles; Rev. 1–3)
 - a. Pre-Canon
 - b. Post-Canon
5. **The End Times/Restoration of the Kingdom** (Rev. 4–22)

- a. Millennium
- b. The Eternal State

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The Age of the Gentiles:

- General characteristics:²
 - One language (Gen. 11:6)
 - One race
 - No canon of Scripture, although it is possible that the Book of Job was in existence at some time during the Age of the Gentiles. God communicated to man in dreams, visions and by direct contact. What was known about God going back to the garden was passed along verbally (although it is possible that this was written down).
 - Evangelism: word of mouth (human history); animal sacrifices (Gen. 3:21 4:3–4)
 - Salvation: belief/trust in Jesus Christ (Jehovah Elohim of the garden)
 - Spirituality: confession of sin when out of fellowship (Job 7:20)
 - Time span: from Adam to the destruction of Babel (or to the conversion of Abraham)
 - All four divine institutions along with attacks upon them.
 - Volition: Attacked in the garden (Gen. 3)
 - Marriage: Attacked with polygamy (Gen. 4:19)
 - Family: Attacked with polygamy (Gen. 4:20–22)
 - All three are attacked by angelic infiltration of the human race (the angels **which kept not their first estate**) (Gen. 6:1–7)
 - Nation: the tower of Babel (Gen. 11).

Innocence: From creation (or restoration) to the fall (Gen. 1:1–2:25). The lives of Adam and Eve are potentially perpetuated forever in innocence by the Tree of Life. They have direct fellowship with Jesus Christ in the Garden of Eden. This establishes the first two divine institutions: volition and marriage.

Pre-Diluvian (Antediluvian): From the fall to the flood (Gen. 3:1–7:24). True humanity is corrupted, something which is not allowed after the flood. During this time period, we established the 3rd divine institution, which is family.

Post-Diluvian: From the flood to Abraham (Gen. 8:1–11:32). During this time, we have the 4th divine institution, which is nation.

Transitional Period: Babel to Abraham.

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The Jewish Age:

- General characteristics:³
 - Many languages (Gen. 11:9)

² These are taken from R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Dispensations*; ©1974 by R. B. Thieme, Jr.; pp. 9–10. There is some editing and at least one addition made.

³ These are taken from R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Dispensations*; ©1974 by R. B. Thieme, Jr.; pp. 12–13. There is some editing and at least one addition made.

- Many races of people.
- A specific missionary agency. The word *Hebrew* means *one who crosses over the river*. Abraham crossed over the Euphrates to evangelize those who spoke a different language, becoming, therefore, the first missionary.
- Evangelism: word of mouth (human history); animal sacrifices, which were eventually codified by the Mosaic Law. The Mosaic Law also included Feast Days, which did, among other things, evangelize.
- Salvation: belief in Jesus Christ, Jehovah Elohim, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Gen. 15:6 Rom. 4:3 Gal. 2:16)
- Spirituality: remaining in fellowship with God and the faith-rest technique. Although confession of sin to God would get one back into fellowship, the importance of confession of sin (Num. 21:7 Judges 10:10 Psalm 41:4 51:4 Jer. 14:20 Dan. 9:8) was codified by a sacrifice in Lev. 5:14–19. The faith-rest life is given in Rom. 4:17–22 Heb. 11.
- Four unconditional covenants: God promises to the line of Abraham and to Israel were made in the Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic and New Covenants to Israel. Each covenant contained an eternal life clause.
- Judgement: God chastened Israel for disobedience and for failure to function as a missionary agency. These judgments are called 5 cycles of discipline, aptly named by R. B. Thieme Jr. and found in Lev. 26.
- Time span: from Abraham to the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. The Jewish Age is interrupted by the insertion of the Church Age, and resumed when the Church is taken out of the way.

The Patriarchs/the Jewish Race: From Abraham to the Land of Promise (Gen. 12:1–Deut. 34:12). God works through the patriarchs and communicates with the patriarchs. There are great signs and wonders to mark the separation of the Jews from the Egyptians.

The Nation Israel: From entry into the land to the first advent (Joshua–Malachi; the gospels). God works through the nation Israel; however, Israel becomes very degenerate from time to time. Northern Israel is occupied and sent out of the land. Southern Israel (Judah) is occupied and sent out of the land. Judah does return. However, apostasy and degeneracy continues, even to the point of the religious hierarchy demanding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

The Jewish Age is suddenly interrupted, with the public ministry of Jesus Christ and then with the giving of the Holy Spirit to the believers at Pentecost; and the Church Age begins. There are 7 more years remaining in the Jewish Age.

Transitional Period (from the interruption of the Jewish Age to the Church Age): the resurrection of our Lord, His session, during which we have the appearances to the Apostles and the 500, and the waiting for the Holy Spirit to be given. Although, generally speaking, there is little information on the Church Age to be found during the Age of Israel; our Lord did reveal a great many Church Age truths during the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17). Some might see the public ministry of Jesus Christ and the period of time He was on the earth after His resurrection as a transitional period. I've listed it as a separate dispensation, taking my cue from R. B. Thieme III.

The Tribulation: Between the removal of the church and the Judgment Seat of Christ, we complete the Jewish age with a shortened 7 years (probably 7 years of 360 days). The nation Israel is again in the forefront, and God works through nation Israel, and through Jews who are scattered throughout the world (the 144,000 Jewish evangelists). Although several prophets in the Age of Israel spoke of the Tribulation, it is primarily revealed throughout most of the book of Revelation. Now, I believe that spiritually during this period of time will be similar to the Church Age, insofar as believers being indwelt and filled with God the Holy Spirit. Somehow, given the short period of time that we are dealing with, spiritual growth may be accelerated. That could be a result of believers realizing that they are in the Tribulation and that time is limited.

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The Dispensation of the Hypostatic Union:

- General characteristics:⁴
 - Jesus functions as under the Law of Moses. He keeps the Law perfectly.
 - Jesus is empowered not by His Own Deity, but by the power of God the Holy Spirit, exactly as Church Age believers are.
 - So, on the one hand, Jesus fulfills the Law, but He also executes the Christian way of life.
 - The Jews are still God's people, and Jesus and His disciples go first to the Jews, but salvation is not withheld from non-Jews (which is true throughout the Age of Israel). Matt. 10:6–7 15:22–28 Luke 7:6–10
 - Jesus makes the Holy Spirit available to His disciples, but His disciples never take Him up on this offer. Luke 11:13
 - What Jesus does *not* do is offer up any animal sacrifices, because He is the Lamb of God to be sacrificed. His appearance ends the need for the animal sacrifices (much like the appearance of David overshadowed the function of the 2 High Priests in the Old Testament).
 - The priests and the scribes are no longer men who proclaim the Word of God; they have become legalistic religious types, opposing Jesus at every turn. Matt. 9:34 12:14–23 16:1 19:3 22:15 26:3–4
 - Believers at that time were under the Law,; however, Jesus' disciples could have been strengthened in the Holy Spirit (however, it was probably not the indwelling of the Spirit as we have, but an anointing or an empowering of the Spirit, something which could be lost). This is somewhat of a moot point, as it is unclear whether the disciples had much spiritual impact when Jesus was here on earth (there were exceptions to this; e.g. Peter identifying Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God—Matt. 16:16).

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The Church Age:

- General characteristics:⁵
 - Positional truth: every believer, at the moment of salvation, is placed into union with Christ, via the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. This was first done in stages in the early church, when it was made clear by signs and wonders that Jews, Old Testament Saints, half-Jews and Gentiles were all brought into the body of Christ.
 - Universal indwelling of Jesus Christ: every believer is indwelt by Jesus Christ, as prophesied in John 14:20.
 - Universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit: in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was given to specific individuals for specific purposes (Ex. 35:30–34) and the Holy Spirit could be withdrawn (Psalm 51:11). However, all believers in the Church Age are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.
 - The universal priesthood of the believer. All believers are priests, which means all believers may represent themselves directly to God, without an intermediary (intermediaries in the Old Testament were all shadows of Jesus Christ to come). Since Christ has come and died for our sins, no one stands between God and us. The life of any believer and every believer has meaning and definition.

⁴ The first time I heard this taught as a separate dispensation, was by Bobby Thieme (R. R. Thieme III), and after giving it a great deal of thought, I had to admit that Bobby was onto something. After all, Jesus, on the one hand, fulfills the Law and the Prophets (the Age of Israel) but then He also *test drives* the spiritual life for us in the Church Age. One might see this as a hinge between the Age of Israel and the Church Age.

⁵ These are taken from R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Dispensations*; ©1974 by R. B. Thieme, Jr.; pp. 16–19. There is some editing.

- The completed Canon of Scripture: after the 1st century A.D., all direct communication from God to man was contained in written form. Dreams, visions, trances and voices are no longer bona fide revelations in this age. At best, these are delusions and/or hallucinations; at worst, these are demon influences or possession.
- A supernatural way of life: Our function on this earth supersedes the Mosaic Law; it is the filling of the Holy Spirit, which we lose by sin and regain by confession of sin. All believers, at any stage of growth, can be filled with God the Holy Spirit.
- Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ.
- Spirituality is the filling of the Holy Spirit, augmented by spiritual growth.
- Personal impact and the distribution of spiritual gifts: all believers have one or more spiritual gifts; all believers have equal privilege and equal opportunity; all believers can have impact for Jesus Christ.
- The Church Age is marked more by wisdom than by signs; and historical trends more than prophetic teaching (although there is definitely prophetic teaching given in the Church Age about the remaining portion of the Jewish Age still to be concluded).
- It is the characteristics above, as well as the function of the church and as well as Gentiles taking part in the administration of God's household, that form the mystery doctrine, taught primarily by Paul.

The Pre-Canon Period: Signs and wonders which indicate that the Apostles have the authority. The Baptism of the Spirit is an experience as well as a position (being placed into Christ) as it is done to Jewish believers, Old Testament believers, Samaritan believers, and finally to Gentile believers.

The Post-Canon Period: The flashy gifts fade, healings decrease dramatically during the pre-canon era, after the authority of the Apostles has been established and once epistles begin to be written and distributed. The baptism of the Spirit becomes a position only, and true of all believers at the moment of salvation.

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The End Times/Restoration of the Kingdom/Millennium/New Universe:

- General characteristics:⁶
 - Perfect environment (Isa. 11:1–9).
 - No religion; the father of all religion will be imprisoned for 1000 years (John 8:44 Rev. 20:1–3).
 - Great spirituality: there will be a maximum number of believers filled with God the Holy Spirit and ecstasies will be bona fide during this period of time (Joel 2:28–29)
 - Israel will be restore. God will regather all Israel and give to them all of the land which He promised them, which is far more than they ever possessed (Isa. 35:3–10 Ezek. 20:34).
 - Although Jesus Christ will rule over the entire earth, there will still be nations. However, the government by Jesus Christ will be perfect (Psalm 72 Isa. 11:1–5 Zech. 14:9).
 - Universal peace: for the first time since the fall of man, the world will be free of conflict (Psalm 46:9 Hosea 2:18 Micah 4:3).
 - Universal prosperity: free enterprise will reach an all-time high during the Millennium (Psalm 72:7, 16).
 - Universal knowledge of God (Isa. 11:9)
 - Radical changes in nature: man will be loosened from the bondage of sin (Rom. 8:19–22); animals will lose their ferocity (Isa. 11:6–8); plant life will abound throughout all the earth (Isa. 35:1–2, 7).
 - The Millennium, like the two civilizations before it (the creation of man; survivors of the flood), will begin with believers only; the unbelievers having been removed by the baptism of fire (Mal. 3:2–5 4:1–2 Ezek. 20:37–38 Matt. 25:31–46).
 - Extended life span (Isa. 65:20)

⁶ These are taken from R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Dispensations*; ©1974 by R. B. Thieme, Jr.; pp. 20–22. There is some editing.

- Immediate justice (Psalm 72:2–9 Isa. 11:3–5).
- Salvation is by faith in Christ. Old Testament sacrifices will be reinstated as a memorial to His death on the cross.
- Although there is certainly a difference between the Millennium and the eternal state (they are different dispensations), I have chosen not to explore that difference any further.

Second Advent of Jesus Christ: Our Lord returns to the earth and ends the Great Tribulation.

The Baptism of Fire: Jesus Christ separates the sheep from the goats (believers from unbelievers) and casts the unbelievers off the earth. Believers from the tribulation go into the Millennium. Matt. 3:11 24:36–41 25:31–46 (the passage where *one shall be taken from the field and one shall be left* refers to the baptism of fire and not to the rapture of the church).

The Millennium: Jesus Christ will be the administrator of the earth for a 1000 years. There will be perfect environment and men will still reject Jesus Christ as Savior. Satan will be released for a little while and he will lead the Gog Magog revolution against Jesus Christ and perfect environment. There will be a final judgment of all unbelievers, living and dead, after Satan is released at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11–15).

The Eternal State: The universe will be destroyed (2Peter 3:7–13) and God will create a new heavens and a new earth, which will begin the eternal state (Isa. 65:17 66:22 2Peter 3:13). This might be seen as a separate dispensation or as a part of *Eternity Future*.

What follows is a simple chart of these dispensations, where the Dispensation of the Hypostatic Union is both the center of human history and a hinge, so to speak, between the Church Age and the Age of Israel.

	Adam to Abraham	Abraham to the birth of Jesus Christ	The Life of Jesus	Pentecost to Rapture	Rapture to 2 nd Advent	Satan Bound to Satan Loosed and the Great White Throne
Eternity Past Creation of the Earth (Gen. 1:1) Restoration of the Earth (Gen. 1:2ff)	God communicates by dreams, visions and directly	God communicates by dreams, visions, directly; and to Israel through prophets, priests and kings (Heb. 1:1)	God communicates to us through Jesus Christ, His Son (Heb. 1:2)	God communicates by Apostles at first, and then through His Word	God communicates through His Word; possibly through the 144,000	Divine knowledge and viewpoint is available to all
	Individual Evangelism	Israel is a Nation of Divine Truth (uncertain of nations far outside Israel)	The world was evangelized by Jesus and His disciples	Missionary Activity by Client Nations to God	Evangelism by the 144,000 Jews	The Knowledge of God is Universal
	Family Priesthood (Gen. 13:3–4 Job 1:5)	Aaronic Priesthood (Leviticus Heb. 7:5)	The High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:26 8:1 9:11)	Universal Priesthood (1Peter 2:5, 9)	Universal Priesthood?	Universal Priesthood ?
	Age of the Gentiles	The Jewish Age	The Hypostatic Union	(The Church Age) <small>(the Intercalated Age)</small>	The Great Tribulation <small>(conclusion of the Jewish Age)</small>	The Millennium
	Volition, Marriage (Fall of Adam) Family (Corruption of the Human Race) Nation (Tower of Babel)	From Abraham to Egypt From Moses to Christ	The Life of Jesus on this earth	Pentecost and 11 Apostles The Apostle Paul to the Present	1 st Half 2 nd Half	Satan is bound; Jesus directly rules over the earth; perfect environment
						Eternity Future Omega (Rev. 1:8 22:13)

	Innocence	Pre-deluvian	Post-deluvian	Patriarchs	Nation Israel	Only one era	Pre-Canon	Post-Canon	The setting up of the abomination of desolation demarcates midst of Tribulation	When Satan is loosed, he will lead part of the world in rebellion against God
	Gen. 1:26-3:6	Gen. 3:7-6:22	Gen. 7:1-11:32	Gen. 12-50	Exodus. to Malachi	The Gospels	Acts 1-12	Acts 13-Rev. 4 Epistles	1Thess. 4:13-18 Dan. 12:1 Jer. 30:4-7 Rev. 6-18	Matt. 24-25 1Thess. 3:13 2Thess. 7-2:12 Rev. 19-20
	Possibly 2000-3000 years			From return from Captivity to our Lord: 490-7 = 483 years (perhaps 1500 years before that?)		30-35 years	Parenthetical time period, not found in prophecy, introduced when our Lord was rejected at the cross		7 abbreviated years (possibly 360 day years)	A literal 1000 years

Miracles and Dispensations: One of the great dividing lines in Christianity is miracles. There are naturalists (if I may so use this term) who see the miracles of the Bible as all natural phenomena or as metaphors for the power and character of God. There are some, like myself, who believe that there are some miracles in Scripture (John 2:1–11); there are some incredible events which probably have very natural explanations (many of the plagues of Egypt, Jesus rubbing mud in the eyes of a blind man so that he sees) and there is at least one incredible event which is in dispute (Joshua's long day). There are some who think God is doing miracles constantly, and that every Sunday in church is going to be filled with powerful miracles to bolster up the faith of those weak in faith, and to convict the unbelievers who have wandered in off the street. Of course, people are going to hold to positions everywhere between. I recall talking to one charismatic who told me that her God is a *Big God* (something which she had obviously culled from one of the sermons she heard), the implication being, her God was able to do great miracles and did so often; and that my God was not quite as good at such things, probably because I am small in faith. We need to take a balanced approach to this—examine the Scriptures—to see that the God of the Bible is not a God whose miracles are the result of over-enthusiastic authors, eager to convince their readers of the power of Jehovah God; nor are we dealing with a God who is in the business of constantly creating miracles, thousands, if not millions a day, primarily during the Sunday services in the many charismatic churches which dot the countryside. In examining these miracles, keep the concept of dispensations in the back of your mind; they are related (however, do not suppose that there is a dispensation of miracles and a dispensation of the laws of physics).

Introductory Points:

1. Even if we want to take the position that miracles can all be explained via natural phenomena, one cannot read the Bible without recognizing that in certain periods of time, there are a great many events which need a lot of explaining.
2. Even if we take the position that our God is a Big God of many miracles, one cannot but note the paltry number of miracles over the 500 year period of time during which Jews were in Egypt and then taken out of the land of Egypt. Now, certainly, there seemed to be great acts of God before Pharaoh (11 or 12, including the parting of the Sea of Reeds, over the period of a few weeks); and there were a dozen or so great acts of God over the period of a few years, as Moses led the Jews in the desert toward the Land of Promise.
3. Elijah did a few things which were pretty amazing; primarily, when he showed the power of Jehovah God as versus the power of the heathen god (1Kings 18:20–46); however, even with his great prophesies, these seem small compared to the events during the life of Moses (which are relatively few, if one looks at them in the context of the previous 400 years of slavery).
4. When we seem to read about great miracles again, is when our Lord walks on this earth, beginning with the most misunderstood miracle of all time, the water being turned into wine at Canaan. I'm not sure if even a handful of theologians have ever explained this, except that, it was time for Jesus to do something miraculous, he just happened to be at a wedding, they were out of wine, so He thinks, "Hell, I'll just change water into wine and start My ministry." I don't mean to be irreverent, for, for all intents and purposes, that is how most theologians view this miracle, which was the first great miracle of His ministry (John 2:11). By the way, this is one reason for a pastor teacher; what immature believer opens his Bible and begins reading the book of John (which is an excellent place to start) and has any clue as to the meaning of this miracle?
5. In the book of Acts, beginning with the Day of Pentecost, and proceeding most of the way through the book of Acts, we also observe a great many miracles, although nothing like we observed in the 3–4 year earthly ministry of our Lord (even though Jesus said, "**And even greater things will you do**" speaking to His disciples).
6. My point is, you cannot simply ignore the miracles in Scripture nor can you naturalize them all; whereas, I personally believe that you can naturalize much of what happened at the hands of Moses; and a few things which Jesus did; still there were just too many incredible acts with no implied natural explanation of them which Jesus did. Furthermore, the speaking of foreign languages by the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost just has no reasonable natural explanation either. So, if you are going to accept the Bible as the Word of God, then you must acknowledge that there are a number of incredible acts of power, some of which appear to be clearly miraculous (i.e., they fall outside the laws of science).

What is the problem with the Charismatic View?

7. “Our God is Big God, and He creates miracles constantly. This is done to show the power of the gospel, the power of the person at whose hand God does miracles, and the power of God. These miracles also bolster the faith of the faith of those weak in faith. The Bible is filled with miracles—from cover to cover. Furthermore, I have experienced such miracles and have seen these miracles of tongues and healings with my own eyes.” I trust that this summarizes the position of the charismatic (if you are a charismatic and you think I got this wrong, please enlighten me).
8. Let’s deal with these points that a charismatic would hold to. First of all, the Bible is a book of miracles from cover to cover. Not true. One could reasonably say that the Bible is a book of prophecy, because there are a great many things presented prophetically in Scripture. This is not miraculous, but simply demonstrates the foreknowledge/omniscience of God. We have some grasp of this in our everyday life. I was a teacher for nearly 30 years, and I would learn the behavior of certain students, and I knew when I did this or that, I would elicit specific behavior from specific students. I knew this in advance; some things (e.g., some jokes) I knew that I could not do, as some groups of students would be unable to handle a joke and then get back on task soon thereafter. In some classes, I could pepper my lecture with humor, and never miss a beat. They would stay with me the entire time, and the class would not degenerate into adolescent chaos. Was this a miracle that I could predict their behavior? Not really; I simply knew them well enough to figure out what they would do. If you have a 3 or 4 year old son, you can put that little boy into certain circumstances, and you know what he is going to do. Little Bobby might see a puppy and go over and love on that puppy and want to bring it home. Little Jason might see the same puppy, and go over, and start to love this puppy; and then start trying to pull its ears off to see what will happen. Knowing your son or daughter well enough as they move toward their teen years gives you an idea as to how much freedom you can give them and when you need to tighten the reins. But I digress—but back to the topic of miracles; the Bible is not a book of cover-to-cover miracles:
 - 1) There is no indication whatsoever that the 400 years of slavery endured by the Jews was peppered with miracles.
 - 2) There is no indication that the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments is filled with miracles.
 - 3) Over the period of a few weeks, about a dozen miracles, or great acts, were done before Pharaoh; and in the following 1.5 years, another dozen were done before the children of Israel; which miracles seemed to come to a screeching halt for about 38.5 years, where the Jews may little or no progress in moving toward the Land of Promise.
 - 4) Although some great acts occurred during the time of Joshua and the Judges; we might be able to gather up maybe a dozen great acts during this time period (400 years) which could qualify as great acts of God. However, mostly what we have in these two books is a lot of war, and God often intervening to deliver Israel in battle. In all of these two books, only one real miracle stands out, and that is the miracle of Joshua’s long day. After carefully exegeting that passage myself, I cannot honestly confirm or deny that there was the incredible miracle of physics which took place. I am not saying that it cannot be done; I am not saying that God cannot suspend the laws of physics in a way that would simply blow away the scientists of this age; I am just saying, based upon the Hebrew, it is unclear as to what really happened.
 - 5) Now, what I cannot dispute in any way, are the great miracles and great acts of power of Jesus. John told us that the world itself could not hold all of the books necessary to record the details of what Jesus did (John 21:25—this is, by the way, known as hyperbole). Furthermore, Jesus told His disciples that they would do even greater works than they have observed Him do (John 12:14).
 - 6) Interestingly enough, even though there are some miraculous occurrences in the book of Acts, there are nowhere near as many to be found there than in the gospels. What about John 12:14?
 - 7) Interestingly enough, where we find even fewer miracles mentioned is in the epistles.
 - 8) Now, compare this to the typical charismatic service (and, these run the gamut here) where there are enough observable miracles to convince the unbelievers there and to bolster up the confidence of the believers who are there. On a typical Sunday morning service, in any given major city, we expect that there will be enough miracles performed by God in the various charismatic churches

to far outnumber all of the miracles recorded in Scripture (even if there is just an average of 3 or 4 miracles per church).

- 9) Also, bear in mind, there are unbelievers out there who offer money to anyone who can demonstrate a completely verifiable healing through a miracle.
 - 10) Contrast this to, the lack of literature from the 1st century which dispute the miracles of Jesus or His disciples.
 - 11) If you are going to be objective here, you must admit that there is a problem with the view that, God is performing an incredible number of miracles each and every day.
9. There is the charismatic concept that the miracles observable in their churches convict the unbelievers who attend; and that this fulfills Jesus telling His disciples that even greater works would they perform.
- 1) Here is the basic problem: Jesus wandered throughout all Israel (a fairly small geographical area, to be sure) and performed a large number of miracles before large audiences. Some of these miracles did alleviate suffering; but several of them seemed to have a different purpose (such as the two miracles of the loaves and the fishes; the miracle of turning water into wine).
 - 2) We find no such similar ministry today. We do not have a famous charismatic walking through a hospital, curing person after person, and then leading the patient and all of his friends and relatives to Jesus Christ.
 - 3) The “cures” which are allowed some medical scrutiny seem to come up wanting; without a medical consensus that any sort of a miracle took place.
 - 4) Even though there are many who claim to be *healers* (Christian and non-Christian alike), they tend to heal in a very controlled environment. That is, it is on their turf, in their church or in their city or on their stage; and very often, there is money which changes hands in one way or another (whether it is through gifts from the sick or an offering taken from those who are there). What is rare is, any healer who is willing to allow himself to be objectively observed or for his patients to be examined before and after they are healed by licensed physicians. What greater testimony to God’s great power than to allow this to occur? What greater testimony than for these healings to be done where no money changes hands? Even if only 1 out of 10 healings can be certified as a true miracle, would not that be a great testimony to the power and grace of God?
 - 5) The obvious problem is, the miracles of healing performed by healers of any group are tied to monetary support, unverifiable, and very unconvincing to the skeptical unbeliever.
10. The healings and miracles that can be observed at any charismatic church bolsters the faith of those weak in faith.
- 1) I’ve known a lot of charismatic in my life, some of whom I respect and love dearly; and many of whom strike me as being singularly arrogant. For instance, when it comes to stacking up their experiences against what the Bible says, they are going to believe their experiences, and make the Bible conform to their experiences.
 - 2) As a result, we have dozens (if not hundreds) of charismatic leaders who visit heaven periodically. We have some who have splash fights with Jesus in the River Jordan in heaven; we have Jesus hunkering down next to some, to watch a few episodes of “Lavern and Shirley.” You might think I am making this crap up, but I’m not. It would be difficult to come up with all fo the weirdness which pervades the charismatic movement. There are some charismatics and churches which are reserved and reasonable; but there is a powerful fringe element whose experiences are the stuff of comic books.
 - 3) What I do not find among these charismatics which I know is a faith which is stronger than the faith of Noncharismatics which I know. In fact, there are many that I know, who have never experienced any sort of a miracle, who have an extremely solid foundation in the faith.
 - 4) What does the Bible say about those whose faith is made strong by the observation of signs and wonders? Let’s look at the exodus generation 1; they observed God’s great signs to Pharaoh firsthand. When being led through the desert, they observed another set of great signs. We could reasonably say that they saw more great feats of power than any generation of men before or since (at least, until the time of Jesus Christ). What was the result? They were so faithless that God killed off this entire generation before entering into the Land of Promise.
 - 5) How about the Apostles of Jesus? They observed firsthand sign after sign; wonder after wonder; and what was their response when Jesus went to the cross? One never believed in Him. 9

immediately scattered when Jesus was apprehending; Peter eventually scattered after denying Jesus; and only John, of the 12 Apostles, had any clue that Jesus being taken was a part of His plan, even though He told them again and again that it would happen.

11. What about the idea that signs and wonders continue unabated from the time of the Apostles until now?
- 1) James, who wrote one of the earliest epistles, explained what to do when some member of a congregation was found to be sick. “Bring in the men who are perform signs and miracles from you congregation—those who can heal—and bring the sick up in front of the church, and let them be healed.” Well, James actually does not say that. He writes: **Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.** (James 5:14–15). Notice that those who are leaders in the church pray over him. The sort of healing which we observed during the ministry of our Lord does not appear to be in play in the churches.
 - 2) Maybe James was writing to churches bereft of healing gifts? How about Paul? Paul was able to heal, right? But we read in 2Tim. 4:20: **Erastus has remained at Corinth; Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.** This was late in Paul’s ministry, and Paul did not heal Trophimus.
 - 3) Speaking of Timothy, overseeing a church had become a difficult thing for Timothy and it had upset his stomach and apparently affected his digestion. So, Paul went out and healed him. No, he did not. Paul did, of course, tell Timothy to bring the healer or healers in his church to his church office and heal him there. No, he did not. Paul recommended that Timothy **drink a little wine for his stomach’s sake** (1Tim. 5:23). I have heard the standard arguments why God does not heal everyone, even though God is still in the business of healing through men with that sign gift. Think about those arguments, and then realize, Paul is giving Timothy some medical advice here, with the expected end result to be that Timothy’s stomach pain is quelled. Why is God willing to work through a medicinal approach (wine), yet unwilling to work a miracle on Timothy, which would increase the faith of all those in the church? If healing gifts are the order of the day, why is Paul’s faith in a medicinal approach here, as opposed to great work of God approach?
 - 4) And just so that we do not miss it, God the Holy Spirit once more includes a sick person in the epistles of Paul, so that we know that the great Apostle Paul was unable to heal this person: **But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus—my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need—since he has been longing for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another** (Philip. 2:25–27). Not a word is said about anyone with the gift of healing being involved here. If Paul is going to mention miscellaneous sick people, why does he not also mentioned those in the church who heal? Aren’t there sick people in the congregations that Paul writes to? Doesn’t he want people to know that they can have their pain and illnesses taken away?
 - 5) Even during the time when tongues was still a legitimate gift, the gift of healing seems to have been phrased out: **This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep** (1Cor. 11:30).
12. The chronological progression of Scripture:
- 1) Although we find a few instances of healings in the Old Testament, it is a rare thing. I can only recall two instances off the top of my head: the widow’s boy who Elijah brought back from the dead; and Hezekiah, whom God healed and allowed to live for another dozen or so years.
 - 2) What we find is, in the gospels, there are dozens of passages where illnesses are mentioned and men and women are healed, without any instances of Jesus saying, “Sorry, dude; you just don’t have enough faith.” If you are thinking of Matt. 17:21, think again; it is unlikely that this verse belongs in the Scriptures. However, that general passage is an instance where the disciples were unable to heal someone. That appears to be a failing of their faith, rather than of the person who required the healing.
 - 3) In the book of Acts, we have a grand total of two instances where the sick are healed (Acts 5:15–16 19:12) and one instance where they were not (Acts 9:37). If physical healings were to be an important part of the early church, it is amazing how few times this is mentioned (Luke mentions healing the sick 5 times in his gospel, which covers a time period of approximately 3–4 years; and

mentions 2 healings in the book of Acts, which covers a time period which is more than 30 years). In other words, if miraculous healings are supposed to be an important part of the ministry of the church, why didn't God the Holy Spirit make this clear to Luke the physician?

- 4) Finally, in the letters to the churches, the only time illness is mentioned, it is an illness which was not cured or an illness where the church is urged to pray for the sick person.
 - 5) We are told to **rightly divide the truth**; so, if it is clear that signs and wonders and healings are abundant during the ministry of Jesus Christ, and that such things occurred, but with much less frequency in the early church, and that such things are not even mentioned in the epistles, then maybe God phased healings out? Maybe God phased the sign gifts out? Maybe God stopped doing an abundance of wonders and miracles? When you take this in conjunction with everything which we have studied so far, does it not make a great deal of sense?
13. The purpose of signs, wonders and healings:
- 1) Healings are not done solely for the purpose of alleviating suffering. Jesus could have waved His hands (or, even less), and He could have healed the world of all diseases and of all demon possessions for as long as He chose to. I believe that many of the healings which Jesus did were miraculous healings. For instance, when you have a lame man who not only gets up and walks, but jumps around, that is a miracle, simply because he would have suffered atrophied muscles in his legs over this debilitating illness. There are other instances where there may have actually been some medicine involved (Jesus rubbing salve into the eyes of a blind man). But Jesus did not heal every single person in the world; but He did seem to heal every single person who came to Him. Those who were sick, diseased, and especially those infirm from birth could come to Him and be made whole. Do you see what we are being told here? We go to Jesus, even though we are sinners at birth and by birth, and He will make us whole.
 - 2) Healings are done to establish our Lord's authority and person. Even John the baptizer and his disciples were a little confused by what Jesus did and did not do (remember the **Doctrine of Intercalation**? Those who knew Scripture expected that Messiah would return and deliver the nation Israel). How did Jesus respond to John's disciples? Did He berate them? No, He said this, **"Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind see, the lame walk, those with skin diseases are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are told the good news. And if anyone is not offended because of Me, he is blessed."** (Matt. 11:4b–13). His signs were proof of who He was.
 - 3) When the Holy Spirit was sent, and the Church Age began, the sign of the disciples speaking in foreign languages which they had not learned made a great impact on those who had gathered on the Day of Pentecost.
 - 4) And the great Apostle, Paul himself, was a persecutor of the church of God; therefore, part of what established his authority were the signs and wonders which he could perform in his early and middle ministry (Acts 19:12), but apparently not in his later ministry (Philip. 2:25–27 1Tim. 5:23 2Tim. 4:20).
14. Signs, wonders and miracles as related to dispensational theology:
- 1) The general idea is this: signs, wonders and miracles establish the authority of an individual or group; and/or signal that a great change is about to take place. There are three examples of this:
 - 2) The great flood, whether natural or supernatural, was a great sign which ended the pre-deluvian civilization and began the post-deluvian civilization. As is the case with the beginning of any civilization, the earth begins with believers only (the angels in eternity past; Adam and the Woman; Noah and his family; the beginning of the Millennium). One of the great changes is, it appears as though the angels could cohabit with mankind prior to the flood; and that no longer occurred after the flood (although demon possession and demon influence appear to be allowed after the flood).
 - 3) The next great sign was, God promised Abram that he would sire a son through Sarai; and this marked the beginning of the Jewish race. **Abraham believed God and this was considered righteousness to him** (Gen. 15:6 Gal. 3:6).
 - 4) Then we have a whole group of signs—Moses demands that the Pharaoh let God's people go, and God does sign after sign at the hand of Moses. Whether these great works had a naturalistic explanation or not could be debated; but that these were great works of God cannot be debated. God was taking a nation of slaves out of Egypt and was going to plant them in the Land of Promise,

a land He would give to them. What happened here was known throughout the ancient world, and was legend for hundreds of years. What God did in Egypt on behalf of Israel was a testimony to the power of God, and to the fact that He is the God of the universe, and not simply some local deity.

- 5) The great signs done at the hand of Elijah were nothing compared to the exodus; however, he is the first of a long line of prophets through whom God spoke. Now, God had spoken through some prophets previously (Samuel, Nathan, etc.), but their authority had been recognized by those to whom they ministered (Israel, David). However, with Elijah, there will be a host of prophets to follow who will write prophecy which will become a part of the Word of God. About a third of the Word of God was written by prophets who followed in the tradition of Elijah.
- 6) The next period of time of great signs and wonders was the incarnation of our Lord. When He entered into His public ministry, we read of hundreds of signs, healings, great works and wonders. This confirmed that Jesus was who He claimed to be. "Today you see this Scripture [which testified as to the coming of the Messiah] fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21). If there ever was to be a time when there would be great signs and wonders, this would be it.
- 7) The final great wave of signs and wonders occurred at the beginning of the Church Age, when God no longer worked through the nation Israel, but through a new body of believers, unknown to people in the past. It is also clear that Paul was capable of some signs and miracles, particularly at the beginning of his ministry.
- 8) You will note that, often, when there is a wave of signs and wonders, there is a passing of the torch and/or the beginning of a new age (or the beginning of a significant segment of a new age).

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