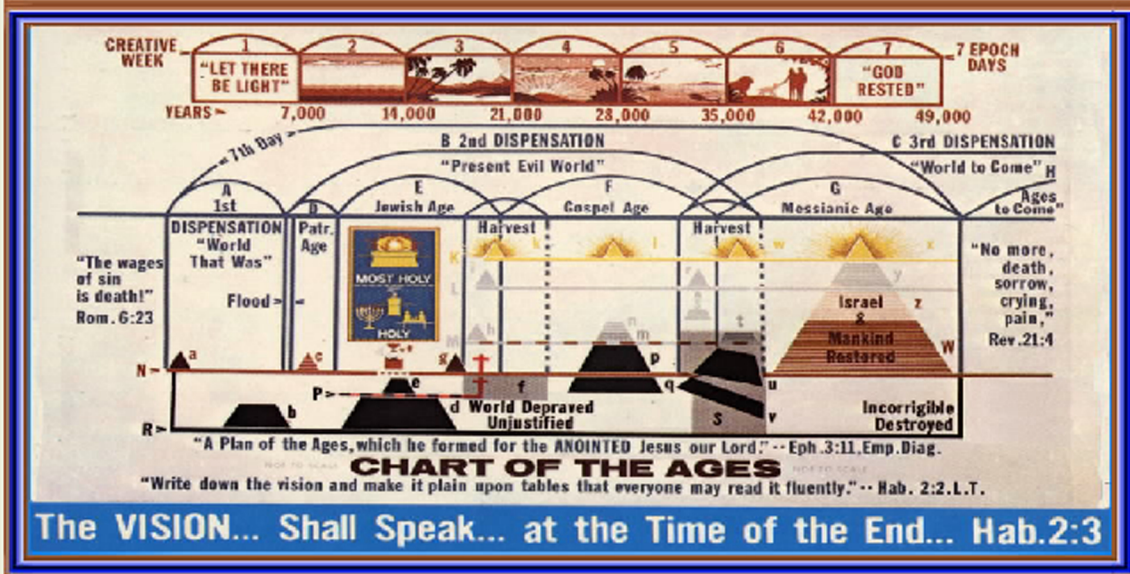


The Three Worlds

Chart of the Ages



“And the LORD answered me, and said,
Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon
tables, that he may run that readeth it.”
(Habakkuk 2:2)

THE THREE WORLDS

As some ignorantly misjudge the skill and the wisdom of a great architect and builder by his unfinished work, so also many now, in their ignorance, misjudge God by His *unfinished* works. But by and by, when the rough scaffolding of evil, which has been permitted for man's discipline, is finally overruled for his good—when the scaffolding has been removed and the rubbish cleared away—God's *finished* work will universally declare His infinite wisdom and power, and His plans will then be seen to be in harmony with His flawless character.

The Bible tells us that God has a definite, fixed plan and that all of His purposes shall be accomplished. Therefore, it behooves us, as His children, to inquire diligently what these purposes are so that we will be in harmony with them. Notice in the following Scriptures how emphatically God affirms the fixity of His divine purposes. "The LORD [Jehovah] of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" (Isa. 14:24). "The LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?" (Isa. 14:27). "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, ... My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: ... yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also

do it” (Isa. 46:9-11). However haphazard or mysterious God’s dealings with men may appear, those who believe this testimony of His Word trust that His original and unalterable plan has been, and still is, progressing systematically to a completion.

While the mass of mankind are groping in darkness and ignorance and must await the actual development of God’s plan before they can realize the glorious character of the Divine Architect, it is the privilege of the children of God to see by faith and by the light of the lamp, the Bible, the foretold glories of the future—and thereby to appreciate the otherwise mysterious dealings of the past and of the present (Psa. 119:105). If, as sons of God and heirs of a promised inheritance, they prayerfully apply themselves to search the Scriptures, they will be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to understand God’s plan and specifications. That plan, with reference to man, spans three great periods of time, beginning with the creation of Adam and reaching to the illimitable future.

The apostles Peter and Paul designate these periods as three “worlds,” namely, the world that was, the present evil world, and the world to come (2 Pet. 3:6; Gal. 1:4; Heb. 2:5). These periods of time can be conveniently and graphically seen by drawing three arcs. The first semicircle, the world that was, represents the time span from Adam to the Flood. The second semicircle, the present

evil world, extends from the Flood to the establishment of God's Kingdom here on earth. The third semicircle, representing the next age, the world to come, begins with the inauguration of the Kingdom.

These three great epochs represent three distinct manifestations of Divine Providence. The first was under the ministration of the angels (Heb. 2:5). The second has been called the "present *evil* world" because it is under the limited control of Satan, the "*prince [or god]* of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31). The third epoch is to be a "world without end," the Kingdom of God, under divine administration (Eph. 3:21; Isa. 45:17).

And the Scriptures reveal still more information about the three great worlds. The first world, under the ministration of angels, was a failure. The second, under Satan the usurper, has indeed been an evil world. But the third will be an unending era of righteousness and blessing to all the families of the earth (Gen. 22:16-18).

Of the three worlds, the last two are more particularly mentioned in the Bible. The statements about the second and third worlds are in strong contrast. For example, the present (or second) period is called the "present evil world" not because there is no good in it but because evil has been permitted to predominate, even as the Prophet Malachi tells us, "Now we call

the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered” (Mal. 3:15). The third world or epoch is mentioned as the world to come “wherein dwelleth righteousness” not because there will be no evil in it—at least in its forepart—but because evil will not predominate (2 Pet. 3:13). The blotting out of evil will be *gradual*, requiring the first thousand years. During that time, evil will not rule or prosper. The wicked will no longer flourish but the righteous (Psa. 72:7). “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God” (Psa. 92:12,13). The “willing and obedient ... shall eat the good [the fruit] of the land” (Isa. 1:19). “Evildoers shall be cut off” (Psa. 37:9).

The next dispensation will be the very reverse of the present one in almost every particular. The reason for the difference in the two dispensations is that Jesus will be the Prince or Ruler of the world to come, and in *his* righteousness, the truth will prosper. With Satan as the current ruler, evil prospers and the wicked flourish “like a green bay tree” (Psa. 37:35). Jesus declared, “The prince of this world ... hath nothing in me,” and consequently, Satan has no interest in Jesus’ followers except to oppose, tempt, annoy, and buffet them (John 14:30). In the present epoch, all who “live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of *this* world,” and until that world or era does come, Christ’s Kingdom will not control the earth (John 18:36). For this Kingdom, we are taught to hope and pray: “*Thy* kingdom come. *Thy* will be done in earth” (Matt. 6:10). Satan is the ruler of the darkness of this world, and therefore, darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people (Isa. 60:2). He now rules and works in the hearts of the children of disobedience (Eph. 2:2).

Reason tells us that a very important part of the Great Architect’s plan for man’s salvation is not yet fully developed, or else the new Prince and the new dispensation would have been introduced long ago. Of course a logical question is, Why the postponement? The next question is, What will be the manner of the change from the present dominion of evil under Satan to that of righteousness under Christ? At the proper time, the kingdoms of this world, which are subject to Satan, will become the Kingdom of God and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). The context of this verse in the Book of Revelation shows that the transfer will be accomplished by a general Time of Trouble.

Jesus made an enlightening statement that helps us to understand the change of power in the near future: “No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house”

(Mark 3:27). In other words, Satan must *first be bound* with figurative chains and deposed before the reign of righteousness and peace can be established in the earth. The binding of Satan will be the first work of the new dispensation (Rev. 20:2).

It should be remembered that planet Earth is the basis of all these “worlds” or dispensations. Ages pass and dispensations change, but still the earth continues—it “abideth for ever” (Eccl. 1:4). Carrying out this same figure, the Apostle Peter calls each of the three worlds or great time periods a separate “heavens and earth.” The word “heavens” represents a higher or spiritual controlling power, while “earth” symbolizes the human government and social arrangement below. Having served their purpose, the first heavens and earth, that is, the order or arrangement of things that existed from Adam’s creation until Noah’s day, terminated in the Flood, but the physical heavens (the sky and atmosphere) and the physical earth remained and did not pass away. The present world, the present heavens and earth, will also pass away in trouble, described as “a great noise,” fire, and melting—terms that figuratively express confusion, trouble, and dissolution (2 Pet. 3:7,10).

When being bound, the “strong man,” Satan, will struggle to retain his power. The present order of government and society will soon pass away, and the present heavens or powers of

spiritual control will give place to the “new heavens,” that is, to *Christ’s* spiritual control (Rev. 21:1). The present earth, human society as now organized under the control of Satan, must symbolically “melt with fervent heat” and be dissolved in the beginning of the Day of the Lord, which “shall burn as an oven” (2 Pet. 3:10; Mal. 4:1). It will be succeeded by a “new earth,” that is, by a society reorganized to be in harmony with earth’s new Prince, Christ, so that righteousness, peace, and love will rule among men. The basis of this Kingdom will be the strictest justice.

The Apostle Paul was given a glimpse of the next dispensation, the world to come, when he was caught away, physically or mentally or both (2 Cor. 12:1-4). In other words, the *vision* was so real to him that the experience seemed literal. In the vision, he was brought down the stream of time to the new condition of things, that is, to the *third heavens*. He thus saw things as they *will be* under the spiritual control of Christ, things that he was forbidden to disclose at that time. Doubtless, these were the same things that the Apostle John afterward saw in visions and revelations on the Isle of Patmos and was permitted to express to the Church in *symbols*, which can be understood only as they become due (Rev. 1:1,9). Our Lord carried John, in vision, down through the present Christian Age and its changing scenes of Church and State to the end of the present evil world, and there the apostle prophetically saw Satan bound, Christ reigning, and the new heavens and the

new earth established, the former heavens and the former earth having passed away (Rev. 1:10,12; 21:1,2).

Two of the long epochs, the second and the third, can be subdivided into ages. In the first world, the world that was, God's dealings with men were the same throughout, from beginning to end, under the ministration of the holy angels. God gave man His law—wrote it in his very nature—but after man sinned, he was left immeasurably to his own course, which was downward and “only evil continually,” so that he might realize his folly and so that the wisdom of God in commanding absolute obedience might be made manifest (Gen. 6:5; Rom. 1:28-32). That first dispensation ended with the Flood, which took away all but faithful Noah and his family. Thus the first dispensation not only manifested the disastrous effects of sin but also showed that the tendency of sin is downward to greater and greater degradation and misery. The first dispensation also proved the necessity for Jehovah's interposition if the recovery of that which was lost—man's first estate—is ever to be accomplished.

The second epoch, the world that now is, includes three ages, with each succeeding age being a higher step in the plan of God for the overthrow of evil. In other words, each successive age carries the divine plan forward and, therefore, nearer to a completion.

The third great epoch, the world to come, comprises the Kingdom Age or times of restitution and afterwards the ages to come, the particulars of which are not revealed in God's Word (Acts 3:20,21; Eph. 2:7). Present revelations treat *man's* recovery from sin and not the eternity of glory afterwards.

The first age in the world that now is, the present evil world, is called the Patriarchal Age. During that age, God's dealings and favor were with only a few individuals, and the remainder of mankind was almost ignored. The favored individuals were the patriarchs: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Each of these, in turn, seems to have been God's favored personality.

At the death of Jacob, however, that age or order of dealing changed. Jacob's descendants were first called the twelve tribes of Israel and were *together* recognized of God as His "peculiar people" (Deut. 14:2). And through animal sacrifices ordained of God, the Israelites were typically a holy nation, separated from other nations for a particular purpose and, therefore, for the enjoyment of certain special favor. As shown in the divine plan, the time allotted to this second age of the world that now is, beginning with the death of Jacob and ending with the death of Christ, is designated the Jewish Age or the Law Dispensation. During that age, God especially blessed the nation of Israel. He gave them His Law, He made a special covenant with them, He

gave them the Tabernacle under Moses with its *shekinah* glory in the Most Holy representing His presence with them as their Leader and King, and He sent them prophets and finally His Son. Jesus performed miracles and taught in their midst, neither going himself nor permitting his disciples to go to surrounding nations. He sent the twelve apostles forth, saying, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5,6). He also said, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24).

At Jesus’ death, the Christian or Gospel Age began. That the national favor of Israel ended with the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus is shown by the Master’s words when, shortly before his crucifixion, he declared: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matt. 23:38). There, at Jesus’ death, a new age began, the Christian Age, wherein have been heralded forth the good tidings of justification not only to the Jew but also to all nations, for Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for *every* man (Heb. 2:9).

During the Gospel Age also, a class is called to special favor. To this class, who, by faith, accept Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord, following in his footsteps, special promises are made (1 Pet. 2:21; 2 Pet. 1:4; Gal. 3:29). The gospel proclamation has gone

hither and thither through the earth for nearly two thousand years, so that it can now be said the gospel has been preached, more or less, to every nation (Matt. 24:14). The gospel message has not converted nations—in fact, it was not designed to convert nations during the Gospel Age—but it has been effective in the selection, here and there, of some who are styled a “little flock,” as foretold by Jesus. “Fear not, *little flock*; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom [in the next age, that is, in the age to follow the Gospel Age]” (Luke 12:32).

The present evil world will terminate with the end of the Gospel Age. While God has been permitting the predominance and reign of evil to the seeming detriment of His cause, His deep designs have actually been steadily progressing according to a fixed and definite plan—and in the exact order of the seasons He previously appointed. In the end of the Gospel Age and in the dawn of its successor, the Millennial Age, Satan is to be bound and his power overthrown preparatory to the establishment of Christ’s Kingdom and the beginning of the world to come, wherein dwelleth righteousness. The Millennium, which is the thousand-year period mentioned in Revelation 20:4, is the time of Christ’s Second Presence as well as the first age of the world to come. During the Millennial Age, there is to be a restitution of all things lost by the fall of Adam, and before the close of that age, all tears will have been wiped away (Isa. 25:8). All will be brought

forth from the grave and *given the opportunity, by corrective and retributive judgments*, to come into harmony with God's ways and thus gain everlasting life (John 5:28,29; Isa. 26:9; 1 Tim. 2:3-6). Those who refuse after hearing the truth about God's character, His plan, and His Son will not get life (Acts 3:22,23). Beyond the boundaries of the Millennium—that is, beyond the thousand-year forepart period of the third dispensation, the world to come—in the ages of blessedness to follow, "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain" because the former things will have passed away (Rev. 21:4).

Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, of degradation and sorrow, that yet prevail because of sin. Picture instead, before your mental vision, the glory of a perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society—not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word. Love welling up in every heart meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There is no more sickness, not an ache or pain or any evidence of decay, not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of the human form and features you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. Inward purity and mental and moral perfections will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's

society be. All tears will be wiped away when thus earth's inhabitants realize their resurrection work complete.

In summation, we have shown that God's plan is definite and systematic, that it embraces three great epochs of history, and that each epoch has distinctive features. Ages and dispensations change, but planet Earth abides forever. The hope of mankind lies in the world to come, in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. With zeal and enthusiasm, we say, "Thy Kingdom come!"

The Keys of Revelation



**ND TIME
PROPHECIES
REVEALED**

The curious symbols and visions of the Book of Revelation mystify scholar and layman alike. *The Keys of Revelation* unlocks the secret code

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