

Editor's Introduction

It has been a real pleasure for me to read and edit the articles that I am bringing to you in this issue. You will notice that we have a final article on 'Dispensations'. This brings us to the end of this series but more than that, it reminds us once again of the plan that God has in place. In a world of craziness, rest assured that God has everything under control. I'll resist giving you a preview of each article, but they are varied, interesting and challenging.

By the time you read this we will be staring winter in the face. I don't know about you, but I quite like winter. Cosy nights, the roaring fire, a nicely lit room and something good to read. Well, we can dream! Maybe after lockdown it doesn't seem as attractive to settle down in your home, but whatever you will be doing, my prayer is that you will hear the Lord's voice through these articles and be drawn closer to Him.

Yours through grace,
Stephen Baker

Edited by
STEPHEN BAKER

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Dispensations – Final

BY TM SE ASIA

In studying the dispensations of innocence, conscience, government, promise, law, grace, and kingdom, we have seen, at times, a degree of overlap between the various administrative systems through which God has regulated His dealings with mankind.

The Acts period stands out especially, containing elements of law, grace, and kingdom.

A second historical period which does not fit neatly into a dispensational pigeonhole is the coming 'tribulation'. This brief season of future history fits chronologically between grace and kingdom, although spiritually its characteristics are more akin to law and kingdom. Though short in duration,

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

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the tribulation is the subject of much prophecy in both the Old and New Testaments.

In Daniel chapter 9 verses 20 to 27 an angel revealed to the prophet when the present age would end, and God's kingdom be established on earth. Specifically, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, Neh. 2. 5-8, to the end of the age, there would be seventy 'weeks' of seven years. The prophecy divides these 490 years into three sections, the last section being just seven years long. After the 483rd year 'the Messiah shall be cut off' – a prophecy of the death of Christ. Various Bible scholars¹ have shown that this section of the prophecy was fulfilled with remarkable accuracy.

We might expect, then, that the kingdom would be established seven years after the death and resurrection of Christ, but, of course, it wasn't. Because of Israel's rejection of Messiah, and God's desire to make the gospel known to the Gentiles, He stopped the prophetic clock, as it were, with seven years yet to run. We live in a span of history not prophesied about in the Old Testament, between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth 'weeks'. We sometimes call this 'the day of grace' – and, indeed, God is being very gracious to mankind, extending the gospel of grace to all who will believe and delaying the onset of Daniel's seventieth week, which will be a time of terrible judgement on the earth.

The event which stopped the prophetic clock was the death of Christ. The event which will start it ticking again will be the rapture of the church. Once the church has been caught up to be with the Lord, God will resume His prophetic programme for the earth.

The term 'tribulation' comes from the Lord Jesus' own description of this period in Matthew chapter 24. The tribulation marks the first phase in what Old Testament prophecy refers to as 'the Day of the Lord'. There will be judgement of the world generally, for its wickedness, and of Israel particularly, for the nation's rejection of Christ. Revelation chapters 6 to 18 predict in detail events which will happen during this time.

What will God require of mankind during the tribulation? He will raise up 144,000 Jewish

witnesses, Rev. 7. 4-8, who will preach 'the gospel of the kingdom', Matt. 24. 14 – substantially the same message the Lord and His disciples preached in the Gospels, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'.

Those who repent, whether Jews or Gentiles, will be saved, though many of these tribulation believers will be martyred, Rev. 6. 9. Meanwhile, God's judgements will increase in severity, and over half the world's population will die, Rev. 6. 8; 9. 15.

The tribulation will be concluded when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in glory to establish His kingdom, Rev. 19. 11-21.

While much Old Testament prophecy concerns the **judgements** of the tribulation, there is also a significant emphasis on what God requires of 'the remnant' – that is, the small number of Jews and others who will respond to the preaching of the 144,000 and be preparing themselves for the Messiah's coming. Many of the Psalms have this remnant in view, and it may well be that the Lord Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, as well as the Epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude, will take on extra-special significance during this time.

The church, the body of Christ, will be caught up to heaven before the tribulation, so scriptures referring to this period do not have **direct** application to us,² though we can still learn valuable principles from them. For example, tribulation believers will preach the gospel of the kingdom, 'Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand';³ but we proclaim the gospel of God's grace, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved'.⁴ Tribulation believers will be watching for the prophesied signs of the King returning in glory; we are waiting for our heavenly Bridegroom to come and take us to His Father's house – but there are no signs given to watch for. He could return for us at any moment! Maranatha! 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus!'

¹ SIR ROBERT ANDERSON, *The Coming Prince*, Kregel, 1969. More in-depth articles on this subject can be found at pre-trib.org.

² See 1 Thess. 4. 17; 5. 9.

³ See Matt. 4. 17.

⁴ See Acts 16. 31 NKJV.

Paul's I am Series

BY ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

I am . . . content, Phil. 4

'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content', Phil. 4. 11.

The Epistle to the Philippians is marked by joy and rejoicing, as Paul displayed much affection for the Philippian believers. Paul wrote from prison, Phil. 1. 7, likely at Rome, to thank the believers for a gift that they had sent to him by Epaphroditus.

It seems to be this gift that caused Paul to rejoice 'in the Lord greatly' that their 'care . . . hath flourished again', v. 10. The believers had not been able to communicate with Paul, but the opportunity arose for them to be able to show their care, v. 10. 'Care' is a translation of the word *phroneo*, which includes in its meaning 'being thoughtful or mindful' of him. 'Flourished' has the idea of 'growing or blooming again' like a plant; this was how Paul considered the believers' care for him.

There is a great need for Christians to be thoughtful and caring towards one another. Life is often so busy that there is simply not enough time to be thoughtful, and therefore care is not always shown; the sad consequence is that some believers feel neglected at times. May we look to the Lord to help us have a flourishing care for each other, following the example of the Philippian believers.

Verse 11 comes to the matter of Paul's contentment, but, first, he qualifies his rejoicing, 'not that I speak in respect of want'. HENDRIKSEN explains that 'the satisfaction of a material need must not be construed as being either the real reason for or the measure of . . . joy'.¹ This was because Paul was content; we will look at what we can learn from his contentment in verses 11 to 13.

TRUE Contentment

The development of contentment, v. 11

VINE defines contentment as being 'self-sufficient, adequate, needing no assistance'.² STRONG adds 'independent of circumstances'.³ Paul was writing from prison, with no one near to help or assist, yet he felt adequate; he did not desire a change or a release from his difficulty. He says, 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content', v. 11. Whatever the circumstance, Paul would be happy in it, and fully reliant on God to meet his needs.

Interestingly, Paul indicates that he 'learned . . . to be content', v. 11. This is not something that comes to us naturally; we must learn it. It was developed through Paul's experience of trials and of seeking the will of God, accepting it, and resting in it. I take it that it is possible to 'learn' the opposite, i.e., to be discontent, to be questioning and challenging of circumstances and trials, even unappreciative of blessing. May we, like Paul, learn contentment.

The basis of contentment, v. 12

Paul understood the ups and downs of Christian life and service through personal experience. He maintains, 'I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound', v. 12. 'Abased' means to 'be brought low' ESV; he had experienced both extremes.

The phrase 'I am instructed' seems to provide the basis for this contentment, it comes from one Greek word *mueo*, which STRONG defines as 'to initiate into the mysteries, to teach fully, instruct'.⁴ HENDRIKSEN comments helpfully, 'Paul has learned the secret . . . He has been thoroughly initiated into it by the experiences of life applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit. To those who fear him God reveals this mystery'.⁵ The fact that a believer in the Lord Jesus has the Holy Spirit of God dwelling within is something that those who do not believe cannot

understand. But we who are saved can live out this contentment, in times of both plenty and hunger, and times of 'abundance and need' ESV. The great practical challenge from this, a challenge that comes up so often in the New Testament, is how much we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us.

A further application is relevant here, relating to living a Spirit-filled life. I remember hearing Jim Baker ask the very simple, yet challenging, question many times, concerning whether the flesh or the Spirit dominates a believer's life. 'What do you feed the most, the things of the flesh, or the things which are spiritual?'

The outcome of contentment, v. 13

There is a conclusion reached in verse 13 which demonstrates Paul's confidence. Not confidence in himself, but in his Lord, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me', v. 13. Some

translators indicate 'in Christ' as being a better translation. By allowing the Spirit of God to have full control of his life, Paul is enabled to face suffering, hardship, trial, and persecution, as well as times of relative comfort and plenty, and faithfully serve the Lord. Whatever the circumstances, he could do all things in Christ. But more than this, it was the Lord that gave him the strength to do whatever the Lord had for him to do.

1. WILLIAM HENDRIKSEN, *Philippians New Testament Commentary*, Banner of Truth, pg. 204.
2. W. E. VINE, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Nelson, pg. 125.
3. J. STRONG, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Riverside.
4. *Ibid.*
5. WILLIAM HENDRIKSEN, *op. cit.*, pg. 205.

expression of grace in their poverty and was more than simply financial. Are you willing to give for God? While it is therefore not confined to financial giving, it certainly includes sacrifices of a financial nature. Just begin by thinking about the fact that heating and lighting in the building the assembly meets in needs to be paid for. Then there are matters such as insurance, tracts, prizes for children's work, and so on. Are you practically interested in supporting the work of the Lord? That is before you turn to the support of those who have put their life on the line for the work of the Lord.

The Responsibility to Give

In 1 Corinthians chapter 9 the Apostle Paul teaches about our responsibility. He could have taken gifts from the assembly at Corinth but, perhaps because of their immaturity, he chose not to be a burden. In fact, he went back to work as a tentmaker, as well as preaching, to support himself, Acts 18. There is no shame in 'the Lord's servants' supporting themselves, but the need to do so may be a shame to the saints! He teaches clearly that those engaged sacrificially in the spiritual work for God deserve to be supported in the material area of life. That principle might involve sacrificial giving to more than evangelists or teachers commended to the grace of God. It will include widows, 1 Tim. 5, and poor saints, 1 Cor. 16, who are still with us. This will certainly include supporting such who are living by faith in a special way and are dependent on the Lord exercising the hearts of the saints to support them.

God does not expect you to give what you do not have. Rather, God is interested in sacrifice and motive. Ten pounds from you might not be a large amount but could be assessed as worth more in heaven than £1,000 from someone else. That is borne out by the Lord's assessment of the widow with two mites, Luke 21. 1-4.

Giving regularly and consistently is another habit we need to get into, as individuals and through the assembly. There might be needs you are aware of that no one else is aware of. Young believers should make it an early priority in relationships and marriages to prioritize giving. We live in a day when it has never been easier to transfer funds. Service organizations such as Lord's Work Trust can arrange

transfers to servants or works for the Lord very swiftly.

The Priority to Give

We learn in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 that giving was a regular activity of the local assembly each Lord's Day. An individual saint's offering was based upon what God had given him. It might only be a few pounds. Are you guilty of going out for food on a Saturday night and having nothing for the Lord on a Lord's Day morning? The idea is that the assembly is prepared as need arises; interestingly the modern examples in Christendom of fundraising or making requests for financial assistance find no basis in scripture.

Practical Lessons

Do I give regularly and consistently to the Lord's work and workers? Am I exercised and concerned about the work? Do I contribute to the assembly as the Lord has blessed me? Have I devoted myself to the Lord and His work?

May we be helped to give to God!

Principles for Progress

BY ERIC M. BAIJAL, WICK, SCOTLAND

Giving

The Context

The Apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that the Lord Jesus had taught that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive', Acts 20. 35. The Lord Jesus gave Himself. What do we know about giving? It is sad to observe that, while there are exceptions, the saints are generally better off in the western world than ever before, yet perhaps sometimes give less than previous generations!

In an Old Testament environment tithing was expected. In the New Testament, however, everything the believer has belongs to God. The question is

perhaps better expressed, what can we legitimately hold for ourselves?

We learn several principles from the scriptures about giving. God was unhappy with His people when giving was not sacrificial, Mal. 1. 7, 8. Unlike for the heathen round about, giving did not of itself equate to spirituality but it ought to have been an expression of it.

Giving will include the sacrifice and application of time and talents. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 we read of the Macedonian believers who were supporting the poor saints in Jerusalem. They 'first gave their own selves to the Lord', v. 5; their giving was an



A to Z of Priests – Prophetic Priests: Jeremiah and Ezekiel

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

Children often follow the career paths of their parents. For instance, how many doctors do you know whose parents were doctors? There is a similar pattern for teachers. In Old Testament times, the office of priest was hereditary – son followed father into sacred service, as ordained by Jehovah, 1 Chr. 23. 13. That is why the priests were generally referred to as the ‘sons of Aaron’.

In this article, we focus on two individuals who were born priests but are better known as prophets – Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Both came from priestly families, Jer. 1. 1; Ezek. 1. 3, but for different reasons neither man was permitted to serve in the temple at Jerusalem. Because of his preaching, Jeremiah endured occasional banishment, Jer. 36. 5, and because he had been captured by the Babylonians, Ezekiel lived in permanent exile, Ezek. 40. 1.

Although their opportunities for service had been curtailed, God in His sovereignty had purposes for both men, Jer. 1. 5; Ezek. 2. 4. God’s unstoppable programme emerges as a key theme throughout Old Testament prophecy. Jeremiah neatly summarizes the truth that God’s intentions will be fulfilled in our lives; some of His most-quoted words are, ‘I know the plans I have for you’, Jer. 29. 11 ESV.

In divine providence, Jeremiah and Ezekiel were each in the right place at the right time. Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem for the last few years before its destruction, while Ezekiel was in Babylon during the same period. We will briefly consider three aspects of these prophets’ consistent message to God’s people.

1) Exposing Ritualism

Frequently, when the Lord’s people grow complacent in their devotion, ritual replaces reality. Outward business cloaks inward barrenness. Can we diagnose this tragic spiritual condition in Jeremiah’s day? Consider how the people took refuge in repeatedly chanting about ‘the temple of the Lord,’ Jer. 7. 4, while they persisted in fraud, abuse, and idolatry. Idol worship even occurred in the temple itself – Ezekiel had a sneak peek at the wicked behaviour of the Jewish leaders in God’s house, Ezek. 8. 5-12. We must be on constant guard against the same danger. How easy it is to go through the motion of devotion while our hearts are far from the Lord!

2) Forecasting Ruin

Both prophets predicted the same outcome, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army. How it must have hurt their national pride and their priestly instincts for Jeremiah and Ezekiel to announce that their city would be ransacked, and their temple demolished! However, since this message had been committed to them, they were obliged to tell it, Ezek. 3. 17; 33. 7. Similarly, in our society we cannot veer away from communicating uncomfortable Bible truths.

We notice that both prophets were affected personally by their tragic forecast of ruin. Because the city was ripe for destruction, Jeremiah was forbidden to marry, Jer. 16. 2. Ezekiel, on the other hand, was already married but his wife died, Ezek. 24. 18, as a sign to the people that Jerusalem would fall. The intimate burden of prophecy marked these men’s lives with sorrow.

3) Anticipating Recovery

The Old Testament prophetic message is essentially optimistic – there is a glad future for God’s people. Recovery will come out of ruin. This was true in the short term, since the Babylonian captivity would be completed in seventy years, Jer. 25. 11; 29. 10, and the people would return in a second exodus to the promised land.

Ultimately, there is a future day of deliverance and blessing for the nation of Israel, Rom. 11. 26. This restoration involves a new covenant, Jer. 31. 31-34, and a new temple, Ezek. 40-43. Although the people in Jeremiah’s day had forsaken the Lord, Jer. 2. 13, He lovingly promised to ‘be their God and they shall be my people’, 31. 33. Although Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord depart from the temple, Ezek. 10. 18, the prophet-priest was privileged to preview a full return of that glory, 43. 5. We can be glad that human weakness and failure cannot frustrate the purpose of God for His people.

I write this article during the C-19 pandemic, when there are severe restrictions on gathering with fellow believers or publicly preaching the gospel. We draw encouragement from the experiences of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, men who lived through equally difficult days. Despite their straightened circumstances they served God faithfully. Jeremiah exclaimed, ‘Great is thy faithfulness’, Lam. 3. 23. In our present difficulties, let us enjoy God’s faithfulness while loyally seeking to serve Him.



The young believer and career choices - banking

BY AB, SCOTLAND



I have spent the last thirteen years in the banking industry and many changes have taken place over those years. Like writers before me, I have been thankful to the Lord for His help and guidance during that period. I can look back over it and know that I have been guided through thus far.

When I joined the bank, it was seen as being a relatively safe industry for believers to go into. Indeed, it has only been recently that potential Sunday opening, and that only in big cities, has been spoken about. Working in this industry, the number of meetings that I have missed as a result of work has been relatively few.

When I commenced the job, I had a customer-facing role as I was working on the bank counter. In those days, I was expected to sit and serve the customers, and my colleagues would want to know about me and what I did in my spare time. This gave opportunity to speak about my faith and, from time to time, opportunities arose to explain the gospel. I have never been prevented from doing this. If someone asks me, then I am free to tell them what I believe.

In time, I progressed from serving in the main banking hall to serving customers in an office where I would speak to them about their banking needs. It was here that challenges arose. The world around us is changing and as tolerance for issues that are anti-scripture became greater, I was faced with more difficult situations. Opening accounts for couples who are not married or couples who are in same-sex relationships are cases in point. As I look back on those times, I am grateful for the advice of godly men who I felt able to speak to about these things. As a young believer, it is vital to have those to whom you can speak and from whom you can seek advice. They spoke about the fact that I was not supporting the choices of individual customers; I was fulfilling my role in the bank. Over time, these issues will grow greater in their impact. Organizations and businesses are linking themselves with so many schemes that are anti-scriptural. It will become more and more difficult for younger believers who will need to handle these issues, and find those to

whom they can turn to help them as they seek to live for the Lord.

As I have progressed in the organization, issues that I have faced have become more varied and challenging. I moved to a new area, one that I felt the Lord called me to. My present job was a big step from the role that I had previously been involved in. I applied for the job and was granted an interview. I knew the Lord's help leading up to it, but I left the interview thinking that I would not be in the running. In my Bible readings over those weeks, I had felt that the Lord was leading me to this new area to work. Conversations with different saints confirmed this and, thus, when I was offered the role, I accepted.

I am grateful to the Lord for the support that I have known as, in the current role, there is a greater demand on my time. A leadership position in any organization means that you can be called at any hour by staff members who need support or guidance. I have had to work closely with those whose lifestyles are against everything in the scriptures, and against the principles that I stand for. However, it has given me opportunity to speak a word to them. I have been asked about my faith, as I know that others have too, and it is vital to 'nail your colours to the mast'. Through doing this, yes, there are challenges, but it gives opportunities for you to speak. I have been asked many different questions about my faith and the biblical view on various issues. I am grateful for saints whom I have met and spoken with, and for times of fellowship that I have been able to share and the opportunities to learn from them.

Work/life balance is more difficult now that my role has become more intense. Time in Bible study cannot be neglected, and I have known support from godly men to try and get this right. God is faithful and will give help and guidance to all who need it. As many have said before in these articles, there is a great need to stay close to the Lord and keep short accounts with Him.

My advice for those considering a role in banking is to pray about it, and always seek the Lord's help in the career choice you are making.