

Summer 2017 Newsletter
Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia
P.O. Box 51, Southfield, MI 48037-0051
biblenewsletter.org



GOD AND REASON

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith Jehovah...”

Isaiah 1:18

It has been said that the Bible is a fiddle on which any tune can be played. Over the centuries, the Scriptures have been used to support widely divergent ideas. But is the Bible a cafeteria from which one can pick scriptures to suit his ideas, or is it a banquet with one consistent message for man?

If the Bible is the word of God, it should be like its author, reasonable and harmonious throughout. “For God is not a God of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33). The God who set in place the laws that govern the universe would surely be as clear and precise in his own revealed Word, therefore he invites his people to “reason together” with him.

Some have said that the teachings of the Bible are “mysteries.” This is said when an effort is being made to advance ideas that cannot stand in the light of reason. The Apostle Paul tells us, “I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, **but now has been revealed** to His saints” (Colossians 1:15,16, *New King James Version*). God’s workings are hidden only until they are due to be known. Then they are opened up, but only to the faithful who are seeking to know (Daniel 12:4; Mathew 13:15, 16; 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10; Ephesians 3:9-11). God’s plan is clear

and rational, but like finding gems in a mine, it takes a diligent search to uncover it.

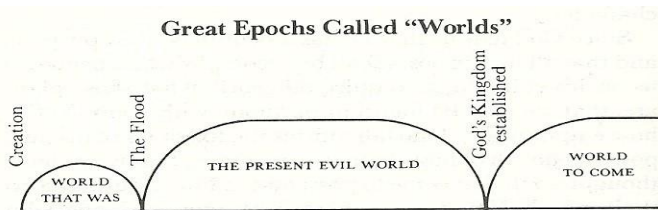
How does one go about finding a unified testimony in a book written by at least 40 persons over a period of 4,000 years? The Apostle Paul told Timothy, his dear “son” in the Lord, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, *New American Standard Bible*). The prophet Isaiah asked, “Whom will he [God] teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand the message? ...For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little” (Isaiah 28:9,10).

God’s truths are scattered throughout the Bible, so simply reading through the Scriptures, while uplifting, will not prove adequate to understand the “eternal purpose” of God (Ephesians 3:11). Therefore, in this and subsequent newsletters we will present the approaches to Bible study that have proven valuable and productive to other of the Lord’s people over the past two centuries. One very great benefit today comes from the discovery of third century manuscripts which have led to improved translations of the Bible. The publication of concordances, lexicons, Bible dictionaries and

commentaries have also greatly aided the truth seeker in “accurately handling the word of truth.”

In this newsletter, we will examine the three major time divisions into which the Bible is organized. These eras of time are referred to as “worlds” in the Scriptures. The first is designated “the world that was” by the Apostle Peter (2 Peter 3:6). The second “world” Peter called, “the heaven and earth which are now” (2 Peter 3:7). The third “world” is simply called “the world to come” by Paul in Hebrews 2:5, and “a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” by Peter (2 Peter 3:13).

The first “world “ began with the creation of Adam and ended with the Flood. The second “world” stretches from the end of the flood to the Second Advent of Christ. The third “world” begins with Christ’s return and is the time for which Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). This world has no designated end.



The Bible begins with a brief account of the preparations of the Earth for man. Some mistake this account to include the whole universe. This is a misconception. Genesis 1:1 simply says, “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” that is, before the events that follow. In verse 2, we see that the earth already existed “without form and void,” when God began the work of preparing it for man. These creative epochs are not part of the “world that was” spoken of by Peter.

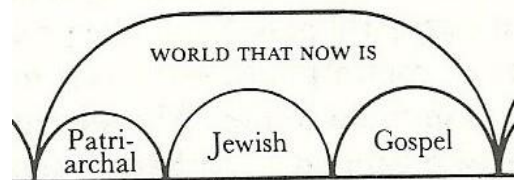
The first world opened with Adam, created perfect, pronounced “very good” by God. He was placed in Eden where he had all his needs provided for so long as he followed one imperative rule: “you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for...you will surely die” (Genesis 2:7, *New International Version*). We all know the story. Eve, was enticed into eating the fruit by Satan, the serpent (Revelation 20:2), who told her that she would not die. Adam, knowing that Eve would die, also ate the forbidden fruit. They were sent out of the Garden into the uncultivated earth where they would begin to die. Genesis 5 lists the generations and lifetimes of the family of Adam until the time of Noah. By adding these up, we learn how long the first world lasted.

Genesis 6:1-5 tells us why God sent the flood upon the earth. Verse 2 says that the “sons of God” saw that the daughters of men were beautiful and came down to earth to

take wives of them. From 2 Peter 2:4,5, and Jude 6, we learn that the “sons of God” were the angels. Leaving their own estate to mingle with mankind was rebellion against God (Hebrews 2:5). They polluted the human race by producing hybrid children who were men of violence. That is why Noah is described as “a just man and perfect in his generations” (Genesis 6:9). That is, purely human. Therefore, God sent the flood to wipe out this unauthorized society. Thus ended the first world.

The second world began after the flood. Unlike the first world, the second is subdivided into three “ages” which reflect the way in which God dealt with man. The first of these is the Patriarchal Age in which God dealt with certain faithful individuals, followed by the Jewish Age in which he worked exclusively with the nation of Israel. The last is the Gospel Age in which God is dealing with Christians from all races of man.

Noah was the first of the Patriarchs, but Abraham is the one cited



by the New Testament writers as the epitome of faith. James says of him, “he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:23). Paul also said that the “Gospel” was preached first to Abraham (Galatians 3:8). Also belonging to this age are Isaac and Jacob, Abraham’s progeny, and Job, who is thought to have been contemporary with Shem, Noah’s son. The history of the Patriarchs is in the book of Genesis beginning with chapter 10.

After the death of Jacob, God dealt with the twelve sons of Jacob as the nation of Israel. From Exodus through the remaining books of the Old Testament we find the history of Israel. God gave his Law to Israel to keep them free of the defilements of the pagan nations around them. God also gave them the land that he had promised to Abraham many years before (Genesis 13:14-17). He blessed them and gave them protection from and victory over their enemies as long as they were faithful. God also gave them his Tabernacle where he maintained a presence with them (Exodus 25:8,9). God told them, “...the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth...because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Genesis 22:16-18; Amos 3:2).

The Jewish Age lasted until the first advent of Jesus. The four Gospels are the record of the life of Jesus. Jesus came

to Israel to offer them the first opportunity to become his disciples (Matthew 15:24). The time of Jesus' presence was a "harvest" of the Jewish age in which those whose hearts were ready to receive the truth were gathered into the Gospel fold. The Law was intended to prepare the people to receive their Messiah (Galatians 3:23,24), but the teachers of the Law had become self-righteous and conspired together about how they might put Jesus to death (John 11:50).

God had sent Jesus into the world to die as a ransom for Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:17,18; 1 Timothy 2:5,6)—to pay the price which would wipe away the curse which lay upon the whole family of Adam. For their failure to accept Jesus as their Messiah, and their part in his death, Israel was cast off for a time—until the full number of the Gentiles would be found (Matthew 23:38; Romans 11:25,26).

God has permitted Satan to rule this second world as part of his plan for man's education in sin. The Apostle Paul, therefore, calls it, "this present evil world" (Galatians 1:4). Jesus referred to Satan as the "prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul speaks of him as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience," and "the god of this world" (Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan was the deceiver in Eden, and has been hard at work to thwart God's plan and destroy "Abrahams' seed" (Galatians 3:8,16,29) through whatever means he can.

The third age, the Gospel Age, began with the death of Jesus. Cornelius was the first Gentile convert (Acts 10). The book of Acts recounts the experiences of the Apostles in setting up the first Christian churches. The epistles of Paul, James, John, and Peter are addressed to these. The salutations of these letters are to the faithful believers, all of whom were called "saints" (Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; etc.).

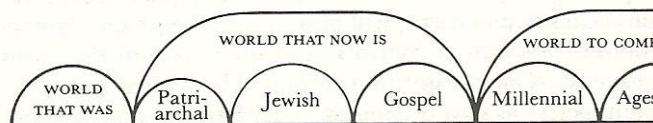
The last of the Apostles to die was the Apostle John. He was in exile on the Isle of Patmos when he had the vision we know as Revelation. Jesus gave John a preview of the events coming upon the Gospel church; however, the events depicted were cloaked in symbolic representations (Revelation 1:1). For this reason, Revelation has been the object of very imaginative interpretations. However, Revelation is not a prophecy unrelated to the rest of the Bible.

Revelation follows the history of the Gospel church from its beginning at Pentecost, to the second Advent of our Lord. The visions of beasts, bowls of wrath, trumpets, seals, and horses are all symbols which represent experiences of the

Church through 2,000 years of struggle and persecution, first from pagan Rome, and then from apostate church systems. Many of the images of Revelation are also found in prophecies of the Old Testament so Scripture can be compared with Scripture to find meaning. From chapter 16 to the end, Revelation overlaps into the third world showing the judgement and destruction of the enemies of God and of righteousness by the "King of Kings." The restoration of earth and mankind to Edenic perfection ends the Revelation.

Christians from the 4th century onward identified the papal system as the Man of Sin, which Paul said was already beginning to develop in his day (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8). All the Protestant Reformers applied the terms "Anti-Christ," "Mystery of Iniquity," "Synagogue of Satan," to the papacy. As the term "reformer" implies, the very excesses and worldliness which had taken over the church of the middle ages were the driving factors of the various Protestant movements. In an effort to deflect attention from Rome, a Jesuit priest named Ribera (1537), reinterpreted Revelation to apply to the rise of a superman called Antichrist in the end time. Protestantism did not adopt this "futurist" interpretation until the late 1800's..

The last of the three "worlds" is called "the world to come." It opens with the Millennial Age in which Christ and his Church reign over the earth. During this age the dead will be



raised back to life and taught righteousness and truth (1 Timothy 2:4; Isaiah 26:9; 1 Corinthians 15:21-28; Matthew 6:10; Revelation 11:15-19). Satan will be bound (Revelation 20:1,2) so he will no longer be able to deceive. Man will be able to make an intelligent choice between good and evil, knowing clearly the results of sin. Following this first age there are untold "ages to come" (Ephesians 2:7) unmarred by sin, with perfected mankind free from sickness and death. No crime. No wars. Nothing to make man afraid. Even the wild beasts will be tame (Isaiah 11:6-9). With this framework in mind your study should be more fruitful.

***"As for God, his way is perfect."
Psalm 18:30***

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