



## Scripture Study Course 2014 - Part 6

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### Daily Study – Readings and Meditations

#### Week 6

## The Seven Ages of God's Plan

- Morning Meditations (20-30 minutes daily): prepared by Don Schwager
  - The Seven Ages of God's Covenant Plan (pages 2-6)
    - 1<sup>st</sup> age: God's Covenant with Adam (Genesis 2), 2<sup>nd</sup> age: Noah (Genesis 6), and 3<sup>rd</sup> age: Abraham (Genesis 17) [page 2]
    - 4<sup>th</sup> age: God's Covenant with Moses (Deuteronomy 5), and 5<sup>th</sup> age: King David (Psalm 89) [pages 2-3]
    - 6<sup>th</sup> age: Jesus establishes the New Covenant (Luke 22:20), and 7<sup>th</sup> age: Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19-21) [pages 3-4]
    - Ruler of All Ages - God's Anointed Son: Psalm 2, Hebrews 1:13,10, and Revelations 21:5-6 [page 5]
    - Signs of God's Covenant – God weds himself to his people: Hosea 2:16-23 [page 6]
    - Jesus' First Sign – Miracle at the Wedding Feast at Cana: John 2:1-22 [page 7]
- Readings for study (30-40 minutes daily):
  - The Six Ages of the World (the 7<sup>th</sup> Age – world to come without end), by Augustine of Hippo [pages 8-9]
  - The Stages of God's Plan, by Steve Clark (pages 10-16)
  - Introduction to the History of Salvation in the Old Testament, by Peter Kreeft (page 17)
  - Christ in Resurrection Power in the Book of Acts, by Alice M Hodgkin (pages 18-19)
  - Christ in Future Glory in the Book of Revelation, by Alice M Hodgkin (pages 19-20)

## The Seven Ages of God's Covenant Plan

1<sup>st</sup> age: God's Covenant with Adam, the first head of the human race

**Genesis 2:7** The LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being...<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Reflection: In the first age God created the universe and time itself, and he established Adam as the first head of the human race – a people made in the image and likeness of God. With the fall of Adam's disobedience, the human race is subject to sin and death, but God promises to reconcile and restore his people.

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2<sup>nd</sup> age: God's Covenant with Noah and his descendants

**Genesis 6:5** The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth. <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD... <sup>9</sup> Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God... [God said to Noah] <sup>17</sup> "For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. <sup>18</sup> But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. <sup>19</sup> And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you."

Reflection: God renews his covenant with Noah and his descendants and promises to save them from the destruction of the flood.

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3<sup>rd</sup> age: God's Covenant of friendship with the Abraham, first patriarch of God's people

**Genesis 17:3** And God said to him, <sup>4</sup> "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. <sup>8</sup> And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

Reflection: God makes a covenant with Abraham, the father of faith, and promises to establish an everlasting covenant with his chosen people.

4<sup>th</sup> age: God's covenant with Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai

**Deuteronomy 5:1** And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them. <sup>2</sup> **The LORD our God made a covenant with us** in Horeb [Mount Sinai]. <sup>3</sup> Not with our fathers did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. <sup>4</sup> The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, <sup>5</sup> while I stood between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD.

Reflection: God delivers his chosen people from slavery in Egypt and makes a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. Through Moses' servant Joshua, God leads his people into the Promised Land.

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5<sup>th</sup> age: God's covenant with David and the kingdom he would establish

**Psalms 89:3** "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: <sup>4</sup> 'I will establish your offspring forever, and **build your throne for all generations.**'"

Reflection: God gave the twelve tribes of Israel an anointed King to unite them as a nation and he promises to establish an unending kingdom of peace and righteousness through David's heir, the Anointed One (Messiah) whom God will send to save his people and to establish the everlasting kingdom of God.

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6<sup>th</sup> age: Jesus Christ establishes the *New Covenant* and reign of God through his saving death, resurrection, and ascension to the throne of God in heaven

**Luke 22:17** And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; <sup>18</sup> for I tell you that from now **on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.**" <sup>19</sup> And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "**This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.**"

Reflection: God sent his only begotten Son to establish a new covenant sealed in the blood of the spotless Lamb of God who offered his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. Through Jesus' saving death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the gift of the Spirit of God is now poured out on all Christ's followers who are sealed through baptism in the new covenant which Christ has established.

**Ephesians 1:20-21**

*20 Which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this **age** but also in that **which is to come.***

Reflection: This present age will end and it will be followed by another age, which is yet to come. This present age will end at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

**Matthew 24:3**

*Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when these things will be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the **end of the age?**"*

Reflection: The disciples were asking Jesus Christ about the **end of the age**. They understood that the Second Coming of Jesus would mark the end of this present age and the beginning of the next age.

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7<sup>th</sup> age: The second coming of the Lord Jesus will complete the work he began in his first coming and will culminate in the creation of a new heaven and new earth which lasts forever.

**1 Corinthians 15:21** For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also **in Christ shall all be made alive.** <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> **Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.** <sup>25</sup>

## Ruler of all Ages – God’s Anointed Son and King

### The Alpha and Omega – the Beginning and the End

**Psalm 2** (RSV translation)

#### God’s Promise to his Anointed Son

**Psalm 2:1** Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?<sup>2</sup> **The kings of the earth set themselves,** and the rulers take counsel together, **against the LORD and his anointed,** saying,<sup>3</sup> “Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.”

<sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs; the LORD has them in derision.<sup>5</sup> Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,<sup>6</sup> **“I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.”**<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, **“You are my son, today I have begotten you.”**<sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.<sup>9</sup> You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.<sup>11</sup> Serve the LORD with fear, with trembling <sup>12</sup> kiss his feet, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way; for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

**Hebrews 1:1-3,10-11** (RSV translation)

#### The Eternal Son and heir of all things

**Hebrews 1:1** In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; <sup>2</sup> but **in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the ages.**<sup>3</sup> He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

**Hebrews 1:10-11** You, Lord, founded the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands;<sup>11</sup> they will perish, but you remain; they will all grow old like a garment,<sup>12</sup> like a mantle you will roll them up, and they will be changed. But **you are the same, and your years will never end.**”

**Revelations 21:5-6** (RSV translation)

**Revelation 19:11** Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war... <sup>15</sup> **From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron;** he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, **King of kings and Lord of lords.**

**Revelation 21:5** And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” <sup>6</sup> And he said to me, “It is done! **I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.**”

#### Some questions for reflection

1. How does God direct the course of history and rule over his creation throughout the ages?
2. How does God defeat his enemies and establish his everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace?

# Signs of God's Covenant: God Weds Himself to his People

Hosea 2:16–23 (ESV translation)

<sup>16</sup> “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ <sup>17</sup> For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. <sup>18</sup> And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. <sup>19</sup> And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

<sup>21</sup> “And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, <sup>22</sup> and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, <sup>23</sup> and I will sow her for myself in the land.

And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’ ”

## Points for reflection

1. The people of Israel have repeatedly been unfaithful to the covenant which God made with them. God, nonetheless, promises through the prophet Hosea, that he will forgive his people and reconcile them with himself. He promises to make a marriage covenant with them – God being the bridegroom and his people corporately as the bride. The key biblical word for love in Hebrew (*hesed*) literally means *covenant love*. What better image of covenant love is there than the marriage covenant between the groom and his beloved bride? Why does God keep renewing his covenant love when his people keep falling away like a bride who forsakes her husband to go after other lovers?
2. Hosea wrote his prophecy after a period when the King of Israel (Ahaz) married a foreign bride, named Jezebeel who brought 400 priests to the false god Baal with her to the land of Israel. Jezebeel promoted the worship of Baal and her priests erected altars to the worship of Baal. God sent the prophet Ezekiel to cleanse the land from the priests of Baal and to destroy their altars. After a period of repentance and purification, God is ready once again to renew his covenant with his people. Can you see a parallel today when God is again calling his people to turn away from serving idols to worship him in faithfulness and obedience?
3. Jesus repeated the image of the marriage covenant in a number of his parables and in his first miraculous sign which he performed for his disciples. Read the first public sign which Jesus performed at a wedding feast at Cana recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 2 (see next page).

## Jesus' First Sign – Water turned to wine at Cana wedding feast

John 2:1-22 (ESV translation)

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. <sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup> Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

<sup>11</sup> This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

### Points for reflection

1. Wedding customs in biblical times required that the bride and groom celebrate their wedding covenant with friends and family for a period of seven days. Often the whole village was involved in the festivities. Jesus grew up in the town of Nazareth which was close to the town of Cana. It is very likely that Jesus and Mary, his mother, knew the bride and groom intimately. Jesus brings his new disciples with him to the wedding feast at Cana. They very likely showed up on the last day of the celebration, the 7<sup>th</sup> day. Mary notices that the wine is about to run out. The wine is not only an important part of the wedding celebration, is also an important symbol of the joy which God shares with his people. To run out of wine is to run out of joy! Something that should not happen at the happiest occasion when a bride and groom are celebrating their wedding covenant. Why do you think that Jesus used this occasion to perform a miracle that would give a *sign* that the *kingdom of God* was about to imminently break forth?
2. Jesus turned 6 huge jars of water which were stored for purification rituals in the Jewish home. The Jewish people were required to ritually cleanse themselves each day. Why does Jesus use water reserved for ritual purification for his first public sign and miracle?
3. Jesus produced more than 800 bottles of the best wine! The steward, not knowing that this wine was miraculously produced by Jesus, exclaimed, "Why has the best wine been saved for the last day of the wedding feast! Normally the best wine is served first – on the first day! What does this sign point to or foretell about what Jesus will do in the age to come for all who believe in him?"
4. How might the wine of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20) point to and prefigure the marriage feast of the Lamb and his bride in the last book and last chapter of Revelation (22:17)?

**Revelation 22:17** The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let him who hears say, "Come."

# The Six Ages of God's Plan in the World

By Augustine of Hippo (345-430 AD)

Augustine of Hippo explains the six ages of God's plan in the world revealed in the Scriptures. The seventh stage, which is the age to come, will result in the creation of a new world – new heavens and a new earth joined in the New Jerusalem which lasts forever (Revelations 21-22).

## Excerpt from Augustine's treatise, *On the Trinity*:

Sacred Scripture commends the perfection of the number six to us especially in this, that God completed his works in six days and made man in the image of God on the sixth day. And the Son of God came in the sixth age of the human race and was made the Son of man, in order to reform us in the image of God. This is the age in which we are at present, whether a thousand years are assigned to each age or whether we settle upon memorable and notable personages as turning points of time.

Thus the first age is found from Adam to Noah, the second from that time to Abraham, and after that ... from Abraham to David, from David to the carrying away to Babylon, and from then to the birth of the Virgin. These three ages added to those make five. Hence the birth of the Lord inaugurated the sixth age, which is now in progress up to the hidden end of time.

ON THE TRINITY 4.4.7.

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## Excerpt from Augustine's treatise: *Catechising of the Uninstructed, [or, for Instructing the Unlearned, De Catechizandis Rudibus]*

“Five ages of the world, accordingly, having been now completed (there has entered the sixth). Of these ages the first is from the beginning of the human race, that is, from Adam, who was the first man that was made, down to Noah, who constructed the ark at the time of the flood.<sup>1464</sup>

Then the second extends from that period on to Abraham, who was called<sup>1465</sup> the father indeed of all nations<sup>1466</sup> which should follow the example of his faith, but who at the same time in the way of natural descent from his own flesh was the father of the destined people of the Jews; which people, previous to the entrance of the Gentiles into the Christian faith, was the one people among all the nations of all lands that worshipped the one true God: from which people also Christ the Saviour was decreed to come according to the flesh.

For these turning-points<sup>1467</sup> of those two ages occupy an eminent place in the ancient books. On the other hand, those of the other three ages are also declared in the Gospel,<sup>1468</sup> where the descent of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh is likewise mentioned.

For the third age extends from Abraham on to David the king; the fourth from David on to that captivity whereby the people of God passed over into Babylonia; and the fifth from that transmigration down to the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. With His coming the sixth age has entered on its process; so that now the spiritual grace, which in previous times was known to a few patriarchs and prophets, may be made manifest to all nations; to the intent that no man should worship God but freely,<sup>1469</sup> fondly desiring of Him not the visible rewards of His services and the happiness of this present life, but that eternal life alone in which he is to enjoy God Himself: in order that in this sixth age the mind of man may be renewed after the image of God, even as on the sixth day man was made after the image of God.<sup>1470</sup> For then, too, is the law fulfilled, when all that it has commanded is done, not in the strong desire for things temporal, but in the love of Him who has given the commandment.

Who is there, moreover, who should not be earnestly disposed to give the return of love to a God of supreme righteousness and also of supreme mercy, who has first loved men of the greatest unrighteousness and the loftiest pride, and that, too, so deeply as to have sent in their behalf



His only Son, by whom He made all things, and who being made man, not by any change of Himself, but by the assumption of human nature, was designed thus to become capable not only of living with them, but also of dying at once for them and by their hands?

40. “Thus, then, showing forth the New Testament of our everlasting inheritance, wherein man was to be renewed by the grace of God and lead a new life, that is, a spiritual life; and with the view of exhibiting the first one as an old dispensation, wherein a carnal people acting out the old man (with the exception of a few patriarchs and prophets, who had understanding, and some hidden saints), and leading a carnal life, desiderated carnal rewards at the hands of the Lord God, and received in that fashion but the figures of spiritual blessings;—with this intent, I say, the Lord Christ, when made man, despised all earthly good things, in order that He might show us how these things ought to be despised; and He endured all earthly ills which He was inculcating as things needful to be endured; so that neither might our happiness be sought for in the former class, nor our unhappiness be apprehended in the latter. For being born of a mother who, although she conceived without being touched by man and always remained thus untouched, in virginity conceiving, in virginity bringing forth, in virginity dying, had nevertheless been espoused to a handicraftsman, He extinguished all the inflated pride of carnal nobility. Moreover, being born in the city of Bethlehem, which among all the cities of Judæa was so insignificant that even in our own day it is designated a village, He willed not that any one should glory in the exalted position of any city of earth. He, too, whose are all things and by whom all things were created, was made poor, in order that no one, while believing in Him, might venture to boast himself in earthly riches. He refused to be made by men a king, because He displayed the pathway of humility to those unhappy ones whom pride had separated from Him;<sup>1471</sup> and yet universal creation attests the fact of His everlasting kingdom. An hungered was He who feeds all men; athirst was He by whom is created whatsoever is drunk, and who in a spiritual manner is the bread of the hungry and the fountain of the thirsty; in journeying on earth, wearied was He who has made Himself the way for us into heaven; as like one dumb and deaf in the presence of His revilers was He by whom the dumb spoke and the deaf heard; bound was He who freed us from the bonds of infirmities; scourged was He who expelled from the bodies of man the scourges of all distresses; crucified was He who put an end to our crucial pains;<sup>1472</sup> dead did He become who raised the dead. But He also rose again, no more to die, so that no one should from Him learn so to condemn death as if he were never to live again.

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<sup>1464</sup> Gen. vi. 22

<sup>1465</sup> Instead of *dictus est* the MSS. give also *electus est* = was chosen to be.

<sup>1466</sup> Gen. xvii. 4

<sup>1467</sup> *articuli* = articles.

<sup>1468</sup> Matt. i. 17

<sup>1469</sup> Gratis.

<sup>1470</sup> Gen. i. 27

<sup>1471</sup> Reading *ab eo*; for which some editions give *ab ea* = from that humility.

<sup>1472</sup> There is a play in the words here: *crucifixus est qui cruciatus nostros finivit*.

# The Stages of God's Plan

From *The Psalms Course Book* written by Steve Clark

Christians reading the scripture are often puzzled by what seem contradictions. Why, for instance, did God at one time direct some people to raise an army and to kill their enemies and then tell others not to raise an army but to try to save their enemies? Why, for instance, did God allow polygamy at one time but then forbade it at another?

Christ tackled a question like this in Matthew 19:3–9, a question in the area of divorce. He gave a strong teaching against divorce. Then some of the Jewish teachers who did not agree with him asked how come God seemed to allow for divorce in the law of Moses. Christ's answer is very interesting. He said, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."

In effect, Christ taught that God has handled the matter somewhat differently at different times. "In the beginning", that is, when God created the human race, he created human beings without allowing a possibility of divorce. Then, after the fall, when Moses was giving the law to the Jews in the wilderness who had shown themselves to be stubborn and disobedient, God prescribed a way that divorce could happen so that it would cause less harm. But now, in Jesus, God was offering grace to men and expecting that they should be able to live up to his original intention.

We are not interested here in the question of divorce. We are interested, however, in the changing way God has handled his teaching as illustrated by this case of divorce. We can notice two things. First, God's intention has never changed in regard to divorce. He said through the prophet Malachi, "I hate divorce" (Mal 2:16), and he has hated it from beginning to end. He created marriage so that the couple would remain united all the days of their life.

Yet, he has handled the area somewhat differently at different times. At a certain point he made a concession. He treated the human race the way parents often need to treat children: **he allowed them to live in a less mature way until he could train them out of it.** Parents usually work to get their children not to fight with one another, but at a certain point, they simply expect them not to fight any more and to deal with their disputes in a more mature way.

In other words, God has had a plan for handling the different situations human beings have presented him with, and that plan has varied over time. He particularly has had an approach for the fact that he could not get his people to live up to his own standard for some areas of their lives. The goal has always been the same. The approach has been different, depending on the period of time. So God has had a plan for how he would save people and bring them to the place he always wanted them to be, and that plan has varied over time.

When we understand God's plan, we can understand many things about scripture better, especially how various things God said and did go together. As Augustine put it, **"Distinguish the ages, and the scriptures harmonize"**. Or, as we might say: understand the stages of God's plan and you can see God's work as a harmonious whole. The following chart summarizes the stages of God's plan.

## The Stages of God's Plan: The Elements

Stage	Father	Events	People	Covenant	Inheritance
<b>I</b> Sons of Adam	Adam	Creation	Human Race	Sonship	Paradise
<b>Fallen</b>		The Fall		The Curse	Wandering
<b>II</b> Sons of Noah	Noah	Flood Ark	Human Race	Noahide Covenant	Wandering
<b>III</b> Patriarchs	Abraham	Call of Abraham Making Covenant	Sons of Abraham	Covenant of Friendship	Promise of the Land
<b>IV</b> Dispensation of Sinai	Moses and Aaron)	Exodus Giving of the Law	Sons of Israel	Covenant of Sinai	Land of Canaan
<b>V</b> Kingdom of Israel (Exile)	David (Solomon)	Anointing of David Building the Temple	Zion Jerusalem	Covenant with David	Full Kingdom
<b>VI</b> Dispensation of Grace	Jesus Christ	Crucifixion and Resurrection Pentecost	Church of Christ	New Covenant	Life of the Spirit
<b>VII</b> Glory	Jesus Christ	Second Coming Restoration of All	New Jerusalem	New Covenant	New Earth (Heaven on Earth)

## The Stages of God's Plan: The Development

Stage	Access <i>Change Constant</i>	Worship <i>Change Constant</i>	Teaching <i>Change Constant</i>	Blessing <i>Change Constant</i>	Security <i>Change Constant</i>
<b>I</b> Sons of Adam	<b>Presence</b> Walking	<b>Union</b> Standing Before God	<b>Wisdom</b> Command	<b>Life</b> Unfallen	<b>Salvation</b> No Enemies
<b>Fallen</b>	Exile	Calling Upon the Name	Law by Nature	Provisional Provision	Primitive Justice
<b>II</b> Sons of Noah	Same	Primitive Sacrifice	Noahide Commandments	Same	Same
<b>III</b> Patriarchs	God's Visits	Primitive Sacrifice	Promise to Abraham	Prosperity of the Chosen Ones	Protection of "God's Anointed"
<b>IV</b> Dispensation of Sinai	In the Tent	Ritual of the Law	Law of Moses	Covenant Prosperity	Nation among Nations War with Nations
<b>V</b> Kingdom of Israel (Exile)	In the Temple	Temple Worship	Same	Same	Same
<b>VI</b> Dispensation of Grace	Holy Spirit in Us	In Spirit and Truth	Teaching of Christ	Every Spiritual Blessing Life of the Spirit	Universal Evangelism & Spiritual Warfare
<b>VII</b> Glory	God's Glory In All ↓	Face to Face ↓	Vision of God ↓	Glorification ↓	Living With Christ ↓

## God's Plan: The Stages

The word *plan* here comes from a Greek word used in the New Testament and often translated "plan" (see Eph 1:10; 3:9 RSV). A plan, in this case, means a plan of operation. It is the way someone who is responsible for an area, someone who holds an office or position, goes about getting things done.

New farm managers or city managers, for instance, will often bring a new approach to getting their newly acquired responsibility handled. **"Things change" when a new manager is appointed. The requirements of the job do not change, but the way the situation is being handled to "get the job done" often does change.** To use the scriptural translation we could say the new manager comes with a new plan.

In our case, God has a plan for how to govern human affairs and reach the goal for which he created the human race. The goal was present in his mind at the beginning. But his plan had to face an obstacle as a result of the situation caused by sin and the fall. "An enemy got in" (Mt 13:24), and consequently God had to come up with a new approach after the fall. Now step-by-step he is in the process of bringing the human race to be what it was supposed to be from the beginning. The word we are going to use for the main developments in the way God handles human affairs is *stages*. Each major new approach he takes is a different stage in his plan.

A scriptural word that often is used to speak about the stages of God's plan is the word *age*. The Greek word for "age" can sometimes also be translated "era" or sometimes "world". Modern English-speakers would be more likely to use the word "era". They would most readily speak of, for instance, the "era" of industrialization, as in the sentence "the invention of the steam engine brought in a new era".

When we use such a sentence, we mean several things by the word *era*. First, we mean that a new period of time that has begun. But we mean something different by "period of time" than when we speak of the Tenth Century as a period of time. The Tenth Century is nothing more than a convenient division of time, while an era is not only a period of time but also involves some important human development. A new era is a period in which things work in a new way. The era of industrialization is a period of time in which people handled life quite differently than previously.

It is helpful to note, moreover, another difference between a century like the Tenth Century and an era like the era of industrialization. The Tenth Century began everywhere in the world at the same time and ended everywhere at the same time. The era of industrialization did not. Historians have said that Japan entered the industrial era in 1853. But in 1853 Britain had been in the industrial era for quite a while. Two different eras or ages are even able to coexist in the same place. An anthropologist once said about living in a village in New Guinea, "I was living in the modern age, but they were still living in the stone age".

The scriptural term "age", then, refers to an era of God's work. The New Testament often speaks of "this age" (1 Cor 2:6 RSV) or "the age to come" (Lk 18:30 RSV). These phrases concern the changes in the eras of human history introduced by the coming of Christ.

"Age" can sometimes also be translated in English *world* (Lk 16:8 RSV) because a new age creates a very different situation. Things are done so differently in the Stone Age and in the modern age that our Stone Age New Guinean and our modern anthropologist live in "completely different worlds". Note, however, that most of the time "world" appears in the English scripture, it does not translate the Greek word for age but a different word, which is a synonym for universe or perhaps material creation.

Another word that can be used to describe an age or era is the word *dispensation*. This word too comes from the scripture. Paul speaks of the “dispensation of death” and the “dispensation of the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:7–9). To “dispense” means to “serve up” or “give out”. The age that came to us in Christ, then, is the age in which the Spirit is given out to God’s people instead of death being given out as a result of the sin of Adam. In the old covenant, God has had a different plan of operation that brought about somewhat different results than he had in the new covenant.

Above we saw that “plan” means plan of operation. “Dispensation”, then, can be used to describe what happens in the different stages of God’s overall plan of operation. He “serves up” or “gives out” his grace in different ways during different eras of history. The main stages of God’s plan, therefore, can also be described as the different dispensations of God’s plan, and they correspond to the ages of God’s plan.

## **The various stages**

Look briefly at the chart “The Stages of God’s Plan”. This chart may be printed as one long chart or as two pages, depending on the copy you have. It sketches the main stages. They are as follows:

- I. The first stage, the stage of the sons of Adam, is that of the creation and fall. God’s plan, originally designed for human beings as he created them, became in this stage a plan for dealing with a fallen, sinful human race.
- II. The second stage, the stage of the sons of Noah, is the one following upon the flood. The human race reached a point in which God judged it and then re-created it through Noah and in doing so took a somewhat new approach to fallen people.
- III. The third stage, the stage of the Patriarchs is the one in which God worked with the Patriarchs and their descendants to form them into a special people among other peoples on the earth, a people that was ready to be the vehicle to move the human race forward spiritually, the old covenant people of God.
- IV. The fourth stage, the stage of the dispensation of Sinai, is the one in which God gave the descendants of Israel a law and a way of life so that they might be a priestly people. This is the second stage of the old covenant.
- V. The fifth stage is the one in which the children of Israel were ordered as a kingdom under David and so would be ready to receive the king to come, the son of David. This is the third stage of the old covenant.
- VI. The sixth stage is the stage in which Christ comes to bring new life and salvation to those who receive him. This is the stage in which those of us who are Christians live.
- VII. The seventh stage is the last stage, the completion of God’s work after the second coming of Christ when the redeemed human race and all creation will be brought to the glory God has for it.

Look now at first the five vertical columns: the father, the events, the people, the covenants, and the inheritance. Each presents a different aspect of the relationship God sets up with the human race in each stage:

*The people:* those who are the vehicle of God’s purpose are described in this column. This is the central column, because the stages of God’s plan are the stages of God bringing human beings to fulfill his purpose for them.

*The covenant:* a covenant in this sense is an agreement to enter into a relationship of a certain sort. This column describes the various covenants God makes with people.

*The father:* most of the new stages begin with one human being, the “father of the age”, through whom God works to begin something new. This column lists those men.

*The events:* there are a few decisive events, actions of God, by which he establishes a new stage. This column lists some of those.

*The inheritance:* God provides for his people something that can be the source of life for them. This is their inheritance, sometimes material, sometimes spiritual. This column lists the changing form of the inheritance he gives people.

The other columns (sometimes on a second page) list other aspects of the relationship between God and man that change as the stages of God’s plan unfolds. They pick out different areas in which God relates to the human race in a somewhat different way as human history moves on. In each area, God’s work of fulfilling his purpose and providing life for those in relationship with him remains the same. His aim or intention for human beings is the same throughout all of history. Yet in each area, the form his work takes, the way he does it, the grace he gives, changes. The main things that change are:

*Access:* God is present to people in various ways through history, and the form of his presence makes different kinds of access to him possible.

*Worship:* God allows people to interact with him and respond to him to establish a good relationship with him. This column lists the ways he allows people to enter into direct relationship with him.

*Teaching:* God teaches people, gives them wisdom and understanding about what he will do for them (his promises) and how they are to live (his commandments). His teaching becomes fuller and more developed as he moves human beings on.

*Life:* God gives people life by creating them and providing for them and then by recreating them through the gift of the Spirit and bringing them to glory.

*Security:* God protects people from dangers and their enemies in the course of history by helping them but also by fighting with them when they confront their enemies.

God’s purpose for his creation was to be accomplished through the creation of the human race. The human race was to be his son, sharing his rule over all creation, acting as priest on behalf of all creation, returning glory to God. Adam fell and disrupted the relationship God had given him, with evil consequences for the human race, indeed, for all of creation. God, however, responded first by containing the damage, then by restoring his relationship with human beings, first with one people, the Israelites, then with all who would turn to him in Christ.

At each stage of the way, he has entered into a new relationship with human beings. He has saved them, and has blessed them with his presence and with true life in him. At the end, he will restore everything in Christ, and the glory of his everlasting kingdom will be manifest to all. As we understand God’s purposes and plan, we will learn to read all scripture in a way that applies to us as people who live in the new dispensation in Christ.

## **Alternate divisions**

The chart on the stages of God’s plan gives seven stages. There are, however, various ways of dividing up God’s plan. One common way centers around the division between the two covenants. The old covenant includes stages III, IV, V; the new covenant VI and VII. The decisive change is the coming of Christ. In this view, the first two stages (I and II) are preparation or background to God’s work of restoration

and are the stages for all humanity. This way of dividing up the stages of God's plan highlights the importance of the two covenants, the old and the new.

A second common way of dividing God's plan is the division between "figure", "grace" and "glory". Stages I, II, III, IV, and V are the stages of "figure" or "type" in which New Testament realities are prefigured. Stage VI is the age of grace. Stage VII is the completion of Christ's work in glory. This way of dividing up the stages of God's plan highlights the importance of what Christ has done for us when he was born on earth and will do for us when he comes again in glory.

These two alternate ways of dividing up the stages show us that the seven stages on the chart are not equal in importance. The change from stage V to stage VI, for instance, is more noteworthy than the change from IV to V. On the other hand, seeing all the stages helps us to observe the whole development more accurately.<sup>1</sup>

There are also various theological views of how the stages go together. For the most part, we do not have to be concerned with the differences between them, because we only have a simple purpose in mind: we want to learn how to read the Old Testament as Christians.

For instance, we want to pray the Psalms. The Psalms were written in stage V. We live in stage VI. God's plan is quite different in stage VI from stage V. Yet we, like Christ and the apostles and Christians through the ages, use prayers composed by old covenant people to express a new covenant relationship with God. When we pray we use the same words as old covenant people, but we understand them in a different way—as fulfilled in Christ (stage VI) and looking forward to the glory to come (stage VII). To do this we need to understand the differences between the stages of God's plan and how those differences affect the way we pray the Psalms.

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1 Note: there are other smaller differences in marking off the stages:

- Some would see little difference between the stage of the sons of Adam and the stage of the sons of Noah and so make them one stage.
- Some would see little difference between the dispensation of Sinai and the kingdom of Israel, because the establishment of the kingdom just completed what Sinai began.
- Some, on the other hand, would divide the first stage into two, with the fall opening a new stage of God's plan.
- Others would divide the fifth stage into two, beginning a new stage with the exile and diaspora as the gospel of Matthew does (Mt 1:17).
- While most would end up with seven stages, some would have eight and would see the last stage as the consummation of all the previous one and so outside the "week of ages".

The different ways of dividing the stages of God's plan are all legitimate and each can be helpful for different purposes.



# Introduction to the History of Salvation in the Old Testament

By Peter Kreeft

The first and longest half of the Bible is called by Christians the “Old Testament” (or “Old Covenant”). Jews call it simply their Bible, or sacred Scriptures. They too believe it is divinely inspired, but they do not believe this about the New Testament, unless they are “Messianic (Christian) Jews”. Jews worship the same God Christians worship, but not the same Messiah (Christ).

The Old Testament story distinguishes Judaism (and Christianity) from all other religions of the world in two main ways. First, we find here a religion based on historical facts, not just abstract ideas and ideals or mystical experiences. Second, the God of the Old Testament differs from the gods of other religions in at least four important ways:

1. Only a few individuals in the ancient world, like Socrates in Greece and Ahkenaton in Egypt, rose above their society’s polytheism (belief in many gods) to monotheism (belief in one God) like the Jews.
2. Only the Jews had the knowledge of a God who created the entire universe out of nothing.
3. Other peoples separated religion and morality. Only the God of the Bible was perfectly good, righteous, and holy as well as the Giver of the moral law, demanding moral goodness in all men.
4. These differences are accounted for by a fourth one: although other peoples sometimes arrived at profound truths about God by their imagination (myth), their reason (philosophy), and their experience (mysticism), they mixed these truths with falsehoods because they did not have a word from God Himself. Other religions tell of man’s search for God; the Bible tells of God’s search for man. Other religions tell timeless truths about God; the Bible tells of God’s deeds in time, in history.

God reveals Himself both through words (especially the law given to Moses and the words of the prophets, God’s mouthpieces) and deeds. These deeds are both supernatural (miracles) and natural (providence: God providing for His people).

Throughout the Old Testament story, God selects His special instruments: Abel (not Cain), Noah (not the rest of the world), Abram (not Lot), Isaac (not Ishmael), Jacob (not Esau), Joseph (not his brothers), and, in general, the Jews (not the Gentiles)—until Christ the Messiah finally comes. Then Christ’s Church, the “New Israel”, spreads the knowledge of the true God, the same God of Israel, throughout the world.

Until that time, God’s providential care created, preserved, and educated the nation of Israel to be like a womb, like a mother for the coming Messiah. When Jesus was born from Mary’s womb, she became the fulfillment of all that Israel was about.

Yet God is not finished with Israel, even now, according to the New Testament (see Rom 10–11). The Church as the New Israel does not simply displace the old, any more than a daughter can displace her mother. For the New Testament is not a mere addition to the Old, nor is it the setting aside of the Old. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.” The Old Testament, like the New, is about Jesus. It is the beginning of the story of salvation, the same story Jesus completes, the same story we are in now.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kreeft, Peter (2005). *You Can Understand the Bible: A Practical Guide to Each Book in the Bible* (3–5). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

# Christ in Resurrection Power - [Acts](#) -- The Risen Christ

By Alice M. Hodgkin

In the Acts, we see the risen, ascended, glorified Christ, still living and working on by the power of the Holy Spirit through His Church on earth. The Epistles, likewise, are the continuation of His teaching through the Holy Spirit, according to His promise ([John 16:12-14](#)). There is no fundamental truth revealed in the Epistles which is not contained in germ in the Gospels. For instance, the Epistle to the Hebrews is one long commentary upon our Lord's words: "This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

The teaching of the Epistles is one. The great theme is salvation through Christ. Like the Gospels, they have the advantage of giving us different aspects of our Lord's work, by different writers. There is, moreover, a certain correspondence between the Gospels and the Epistles.

- James reminds us of Matthew, especially the Sermon on the Mount.
- The teaching of Peter is grounded mainly on the example of Christ, and reminds us of Mark's Gospel.
- There is an affinity between Paul and his companion Luke, whose Gospel is emphatically the Gospel for the sinner.
- "John, in his Gospel, tells us how the Divine life is exhibited in the person of Christ. In his Epistle, he shows how it is imparted, and how it manifests itself" (Moorehead).

This book might be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," or "The Acts of the Risen Saviour." Luke, in his Gospel, told us what Jesus "*began*," and here what He *continued* both to do and to teach by the Holy Ghost, through the disciples. [cp. [v.1](#)]

Our Lord told His disciples that He would send the Spirit, "And He shall bear witness of Me; and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning" ([John 15:26,27](#)). Our Lord fulfilled His promise on the day of Pentecost, and poured forth the Holy Spirit upon His disciples ([Acts 2:16,17,33](#)), and from that moment, as they bore witness to the Saviour, the Holy Spirit bore witness at the same time in the hearts of the hearers, and multitudes were converted to the Lord.

"We are His witnesses of these things," said Peter, "and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him" ([5:32](#)). Throughout the book of Acts, we see the mighty working of the ascended Saviour through this twofold witness. It was He who shed forth the Holy Spirit at Pentecost ([2:33](#)). It was He who chose the workers and selected their various fields of service. His last words to His Church before He ascended were, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" ([1:8](#)). The infant Church was slow to recognize the breadth of this commission and to lay aside its Jewish prejudices. They confined their preaching to Jerusalem till persecution was allowed to scatter them. The blood of the first martyr, Stephen, proved indeed [to be] the seed of the Church. It was one of the means used in preparing the great Apostle of the Gentiles [[8:1-4](#)].

Those that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word. Philip preached Christ in Samaria, with the result of a great ingathering. Caesarea ([8:40](#)), Phenice, Cyprus, Antioch ([11:19](#)), Damascus ([9:2](#)), heard the Word. The direct intervention of the risen Saviour is seen in the admission of the Gentiles into His Church. He used Peter to open the door of the Gospel to the Jews at Pentecost [[ch. 2](#)], and to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius [[ch. 10](#)], and so fulfilled His promise concerning the keys ([Mat 16:18,19](#)).

The risen Saviour appeared to Saul of Tarsus [[ch. 9](#)], to make him "a minister and a witness" ([26:16](#)), to send him "far hence unto the Gentiles" ([22:21](#)); and at every step of his three great missionary journeys, he made known His will with unmistakable clearness. The record of the book of Acts mainly clusters around these two Apostles: Peter, the Apostle to the dispersed of Israel; Paul, to the Gentiles. It deals chiefly with the devoted labors of the Apostle Paul, the last called, but most honoured of the Apostles, and shows us that it is his name, and not that of Matthias [[1:15-26](#)], that we must look for among "the twelve Apostles of the Lamb" ([Rev 21:14](#)). The book opens with the preaching of the Gospel in Jerusalem, the great center of the Jewish nation. It closes with its preaching in Rome, the great center of the world-power.

The book of Acts is the best guide-book to missionary enterprise. It tells us the true motive, the best plans, and the source of power. Guided by their risen Lord, the Early Church pursued a definite program in its extension,

always selecting some great radiating center of population for its operation, whence the influence might spread to the surrounding district-- Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch, Cyprus, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome. Their methods were simple, straightforward, and successful. They went forth in dependence on the living God, with unquenchable zeal and undaunted courage. Their one aim was to bring men to a saving knowledge of Christ. He was their one theme, and the Word of God their efficient weapon. Christ was always and everywhere the center of their testimony, and the Holy Spirit their power for service. (Moorehead)

## Christ in Future Glory: [Revelation](#) -- Christ the Lamb of God

The majestic presence of the eternal Son of God fills the last book of the Bible with the glimpse it gives us of His glory throughout the eternal future, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever; one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. [[Heb 13:8](#)]

"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." [[Rev 4:8](#); [Isa 6:3](#)]  
"The Lamb is all the glory in Immanuel's Land." [hymn: "The Sands of Time are Sinking..."]

[Rev 13:8](#) takes us back to the earliest ages:

"The Lamb slain (in the purpose of God) from the foundation of the world."

[Rev 5:6](#). John's vision of the future shows us till all eternity "a Lamb as it had been slain."

Between these two records, lies the progressive teaching of the whole Bible with regard to the Lamb of God.

- Abel's lamb;
- Abraham's words, "God will provide Himself a Lamb," prefigured in the sacrifice of his beloved son;
- the ram caught in the thicket, sacrificed in his stead.
- The Passover Lamb;
- the two goats on the day of the Atonement.
- The Lamb of [Isaiah 53](#) is seen to prefigure a person, the coming Messiah.
- The words of John the Baptist, recorded by this same John [who wrote the Revelation] in his Gospel: "Behold the Lamb of God, which beareth away the sin of the world!" [[John 1:29](#)].

God's eternal purpose for our salvation is seen behind all these Scriptures.

"It is this book [Revelation] which contains the title of 'Lamb' no less than twenty-six times, emphasizing thereby the increasing value of the sacrificial nature of Christ in the last dark times." [Rev. Charles Fox in *The Spiritual Grasp of the Epistles*]

- ☐ [Rev 5:5,6](#). *The Lamb is one with the Lion of the tribe of Judah.* John looked up, expecting to see a Lion, and he saw a Lamb as it had been slain. The same thought is brought out in that remarkable expression "the wrath of the Lamb" ([6:16](#)). In connection with this we may note that the strongest words, relative to future judgment, fell from the lips of Him who was perfect love. [eg. [Mat 23:13-33](#); [Joh 8:23,24,44,45](#)]
- ☐ [Rev 7:14](#). *Salvation through the blood of the Lamb.*
- ☐ [Rev 12:11](#). *Victory through the blood of the Lamb.*
- ☐ [Rev 5:9-13](#). The new song of eternity will be "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.*"
- ☐ [Rev 5:8](#). *The worship of the Lamb.*
- ☐ [Rev 7:17](#). *The Lamb identified with the Good Shepherd of John's Gospel* [[John 10](#)].

- [Rev 13:8](#). *The Lamb's book of life* ([21:27](#); [22:19](#)).
- [Rev 14:1-4](#). *The faithful followers of the Lamb*.
- [Rev 17:14](#). *The victory of the Lamb* over all His enemies.
- [Rev 19:13,16](#). *The Lamb is identified with the Word of God* of John's Gospel [[John 1:1,2,14](#)].
- [Rev 19:7,9](#) and [21:1-9](#). *The bride of the Lamb*, and the *Marriage Supper of the Lamb*, identifying Him with the *Bridegroom* of John's Gospel [[John 3:27-30](#)].
- [Rev 21:22](#). *The Lamb and the Lord God Almighty are the Temple of the New Jerusalem*.
- [Rev 21:23](#). *The Lamb is the Light of the heavenly city*, identifying Him with the *Light of the World* in John's Gospel [[John 1:4,5,9](#); [3:19](#); [8:12](#); [9:5](#)].

sis	lation
ise Lost	ise Regained
ion of heaven and earth.	v heaven and a new earth.
urse enters-- Sin, Sorrow, Suffering, Death.	ore curse-- No more Sin, Sorrow, Suffering, Death.
of Life guarded.	of Life restored.
rivers watering the garden.	e river of water of life.

The [last chapter](#) contains Christ's thrice uttered word, His last recorded word to His Church,

**"Behold, I come quickly."**

"Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."