

Sunday, January 29, 2012—Grace Life School of Theology—*Grace History Project*—Lesson 55
Darby's Dispensational System: The Current Dispensation

Review

- Charles C. Ryrie (*Dispensationalism Today*, 75), Arnold D. Ehlert (*A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism*, 50), and C. Norman Kraus (*Dispensationalism in America*, 29) present JND's basic dispensational system as follows:
 - Paradisiacal State, to the Flood—no dispensations
 - Noah—dispensations proper begin with Noah (government)
 - Abraham—the calling of God introduced
 - Israel—combination of government and calling
 - Under the Law
 - Under the Priesthood
 - Under the Kings
 - Gentiles—government but no calling (Times of the Gentiles)
 - The Spirit—calling but no government (Church Heavenly Parenthesis)
 - The Millennium—government and calling combined again in Israel

The Heavenly Parenthesis: The Current Dispensation

- “Those who hold dispensational truth are often accused of teaching that God has two purposes. Perhaps some have said such a thing, but the fact is that God has one purpose: to glorify Himself in Christ. But the display of His glory in Christ involves two spheres: the earthly and the heavenly. Israel especially is connected with the manifestation of God's glory in Christ in the ‘earthly places,’ while the body of Christ is especially connected with the manifestation of His glory in Christ in the ‘heavenly places.’ . . . **That Christ should head up the heavenly sphere was not revealed in the O.T.**” (Huebner, 47)
- “The calling of the saints now is not part of the development of the ways of God in government in the ‘earthly places.’ Israel was, and will be, connected with that government in a special way. The body of Christ has not replaced Israel, nor is it the (spiritual) continuator of Israel. The body of Christ is not an earthly people as Israel was, and will be, but rather a heavenly people, seated in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6), with a heavenly hope (Phil. 3:20-21).” (Huebner, 47)
- “We noted that after B.C. 605/604 (beginning of the Times of the Gentiles), God continued to work with Israel, though they were not owned outwardly as His people (declared to be Lo-Ammin—Hosea 1:9), until that work ceased in conjunction with the rejection of Christ. **This brought about another parenthesis, the heavenly parenthesis, from Pentecost to the rapture. After the rapture, God will commence dealing with Israel again,** though they still will not be outwardly owned, the heavenly parenthesis that interrupted such dealing with Israel having been terminated at the rapture. Thus there is a parenthesis within a parenthesis; a heavenly parenthesis within a wider earthly parenthesis.” (Huebner, 49)

- “**The heavenly parenthesis is not a subject of the O.T. prophecies.** The O.T. prophecies about Gentile blessing will find their fulfillment in the millennium, the 1,000 year reign of Christ.” (Huebner, 49)
- Since JND defined dispensations as dealing solely with the earth (see section above) he did not view the church as a dispensation.
 - “The church is not, **properly** so called, a dispensation. It is the assembling together the co-heirs in unity, whilst the kingdom is in mystery. When the law ends as a dispensation, the kingdom is not yet established in power, and all is in transition. Here the saints are seen above, and the throne of God is in relation with the earth.” (*Collected Writings*, 5:15)
 - “The Church, **properly speaking**, the body of Christ, is not a dispensation, it does not belong to the earth; but there is an order of things connected with it during its sojourning here below - an order of things whose existence is linked with the Church's responsibility.” (*Collected Writings*, 4:328)
- It is important to note the use of the word “properly” in the preceding quotations. JND did not view dispensations merely as periods of time; rather they deal with the ways of God in governing the earth. Consequently, dispensations deal with the earth not the heavenly body that is presently being formed.
 - “Really, this is not a dispensation. The Jews had a “this world” and “a world to come,” “**this age**” and an “**age to come**.” Messiah was to bring in the “age to come.” The **age of the law** went on and Messiah did come, but they would not have Him, and the whole thing stopped: then comes the church between that and His second coming; and this is why I said this is not strictly a dispensation, but when Messiah comes again, it will close this time, and then will be **the last day of this age**.”
 - The times of the Gentiles in Daniel, and the parenthesis of the church, are not at all contemporaneous; for the times of the Gentiles began in Babylon, being the times of the four Gentile beasts in Daniel. The times of the Gentiles will not end at the same time with the church, but go on a little after we are caught up. The temple of Jehovah on earth was set aside when the people were carried to Babylon, and they never got the ark again, but a remnant of them was spared to present to them Messiah.
 - I know what a person means by “the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven,” **but we belong to a heavenly thing in an interval, and there are no dispensations in heaven.** The kingdom of heaven is a dispensation; the dispensation of the gospel is an administration.” (*Collected Writings*, 25:244)
- “Previously we considered the *Gentile parenthesis* of judgment upon Israel (i.e., the times of the Gentiles). Our Lord lived here during that parenthesis and spoke of “this age.” It was the Mosaic age preceding the introduction of the earthly kingdom. Note, then, that the *Gentile parenthesis* of judgment upon Israel did not change the age!” (Huebner, 53)

- Huebner points out that there are three expressions that Christ used during his earthly ministry found in Scripture concerning “this age.”
 - *This Age(World)*—Matthew 12:32
 - *The Completion of the Age (World)*—Matthew 13:39-40, 49; 24:3; 28:20
 - *The Age to Come (World)*—Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30
- Based on the usage of these terms, one is left to conclude that JND viewed the current Age as having begun with Moses. Consider the following quotation from the pen of Darby:
 - **“And hence it is also that this present time is called (not I judge a dispensation, but) a parenthesis,**** because the Lord Jesus speaks of “this age” when He was upon earth, as the same as that which will close by judgment at the end; but this was a period connected with His relationship with Jews, and which will not be closed till He again is present in person; whereas, in the interval, the Church of the first-born has been gathered for heaven.” (*Collected Writings*, 13:155)
- JND did not view the present time as a dispensation. Rather the church was a parenthetical insertion into the age that began with Moses, i.e., the same age that Christ referred to as “this world” during his earthly ministry. “. . . the introduction of the *heavenly parenthesis* did not change the age, either. Several epistles refer to “this age/world” after the introduction of the heavenly parenthesis (I Cor. 2:8; II Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:21; I Tim. 6:17; II Tim. 4:10). Observe, then, that “this age” is still in progress. It will come to an end, of course, when “the age to come” (which means the millennial age—the dispensation, or administration of the fullness of times (Eph. 1:10)), is introduced.” (Huebner, 53)
- “The dispensation of the law will be followed by the administration of the fullness of times (Eph. 1:10), the millennial reign of Him Whose right it is to reign.” (Huebner, 57)
- While Huebner has been indispensable for the progression of our studies through church history it is important to point out that he blindly follows JND’s reasoning even when it clearly contradicts Paul’s own testimony in Ephesians 3:2. Please consider the following passages from Huebner’s book, *J.N. Darby’s Teaching Regarding Dispensations, Ages, Administrations*:
 - “It is true that Paul received an “administration of the grace of God which has been given to me towards you” (Eph. 3:2). Paul was not given “a time period during which man is tested . . .” Properly speaking, we are not in a dispensation; not in “the dispensation of grace.” Paul had an administration to discharge and he did discharge it. This involved the mystery, which is beyond the grace that Israel will experience in the millennium, of course. But nonetheless, grace will characterize God’s dealing with Israel in the millennium; and a blessed Israelite will be able to say, “This is indeed the dispensation of grace.” And as far as God’s dealings with an earthly people are concerned, that is true.
 - Observe again J.N. Darby’s remark: “To me the world is not under any dispensations, but the whole course of God’s dealing with it [with the world; with

the earth] are not over until He comes to judgment.” Dispensations have to do with the earth, not with a heavenly people. The personal administration committed to Paul does not contradict this. This was towards those composing a heavenly company during the heavenly parenthesis, while “this age,” began in the time of Moses, and continues on.

- So there has not been a change in the age; and it continues while God’s formation of the heavenly company is in progress. The kingdom as Messiah’s reign has not been inaugurated; but rather, in God’s ways, consequent upon the rejection of Christ, the manifested kingdom has been “postponed and the mystery form of the kingdom introduced, during the time of which, God is forming the heavenly company, although the mystery form runs from Christ’ ascension until His return in glory.” (Huebner, 57-28)
- When one reads between the lines, what Huebner is really upset with is the fact that C.I. Scofield’s definition of a dispensation has dominated dispensational theology for the past hundred years. According to Scofield, “a dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God. Seven such dispensations are distinguished in Scripture.” (Scofield, 5) One’s thoughts regarding whether Scofield’s definition is correct aside, Huebner views anyone who does not follow JND to the letter as not a real dispensationalist. Therefore, Huebner holds unswervingly to JND’s insistence that a dispensation is limited to God’s governmental dealings in the earth despite the fact that Paul thrice states that specific dispensations were committed to his trust (I Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2-3; Col. 1:25-26).

Works Cited

Darby, John Nelson. *Collected Writings*. <http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/darby/>.

Darby, John Nelson. *Letters of J.N. Darby*.
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Huebner, R.A. *J.N. Darby’s Teaching Regarding Dispensations, Ages, Administrations*.
 Morganville, NJ: Present Truth Publishers, 1993.

Chart A
The Three Administrations

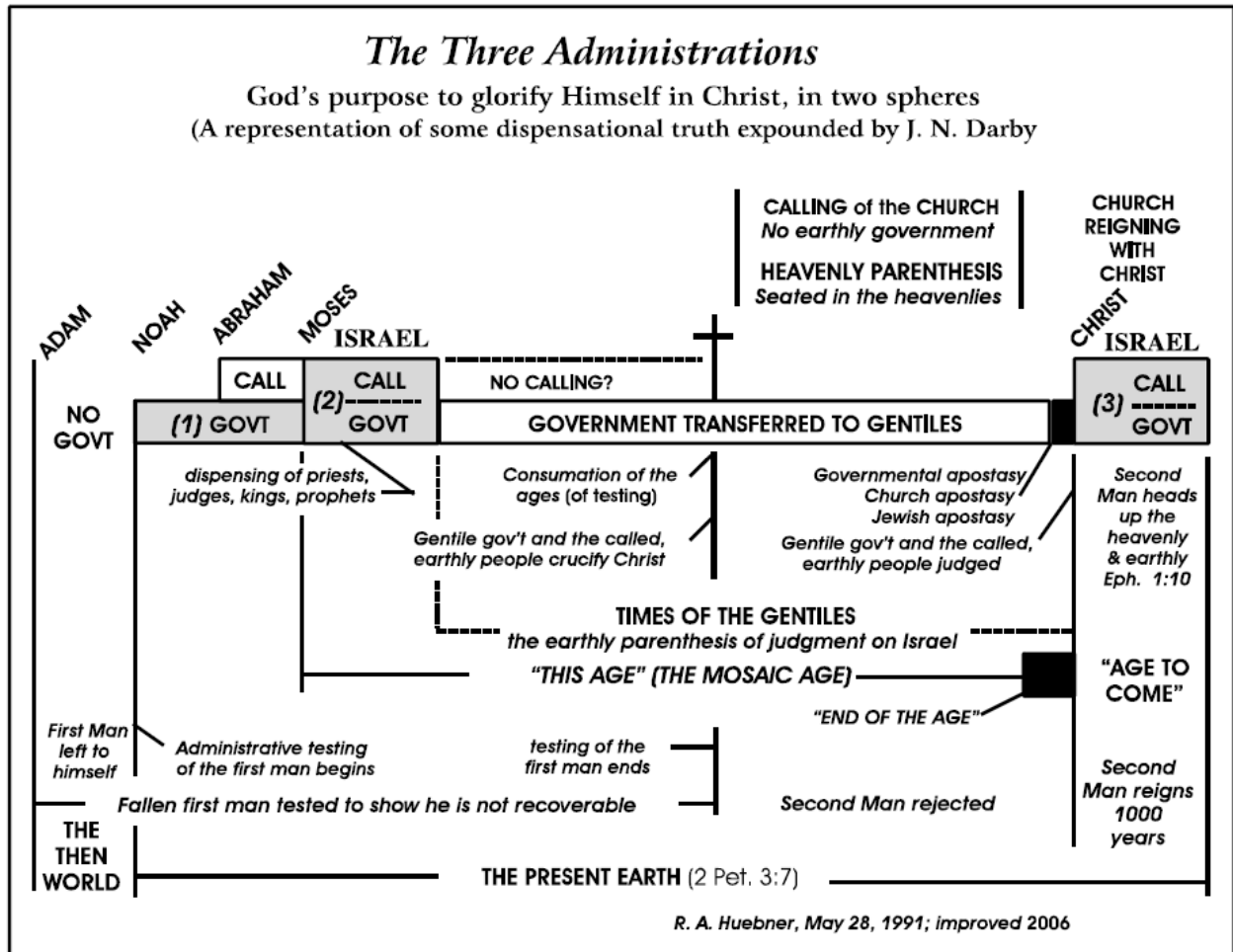


Chart B
The Two Parentheses

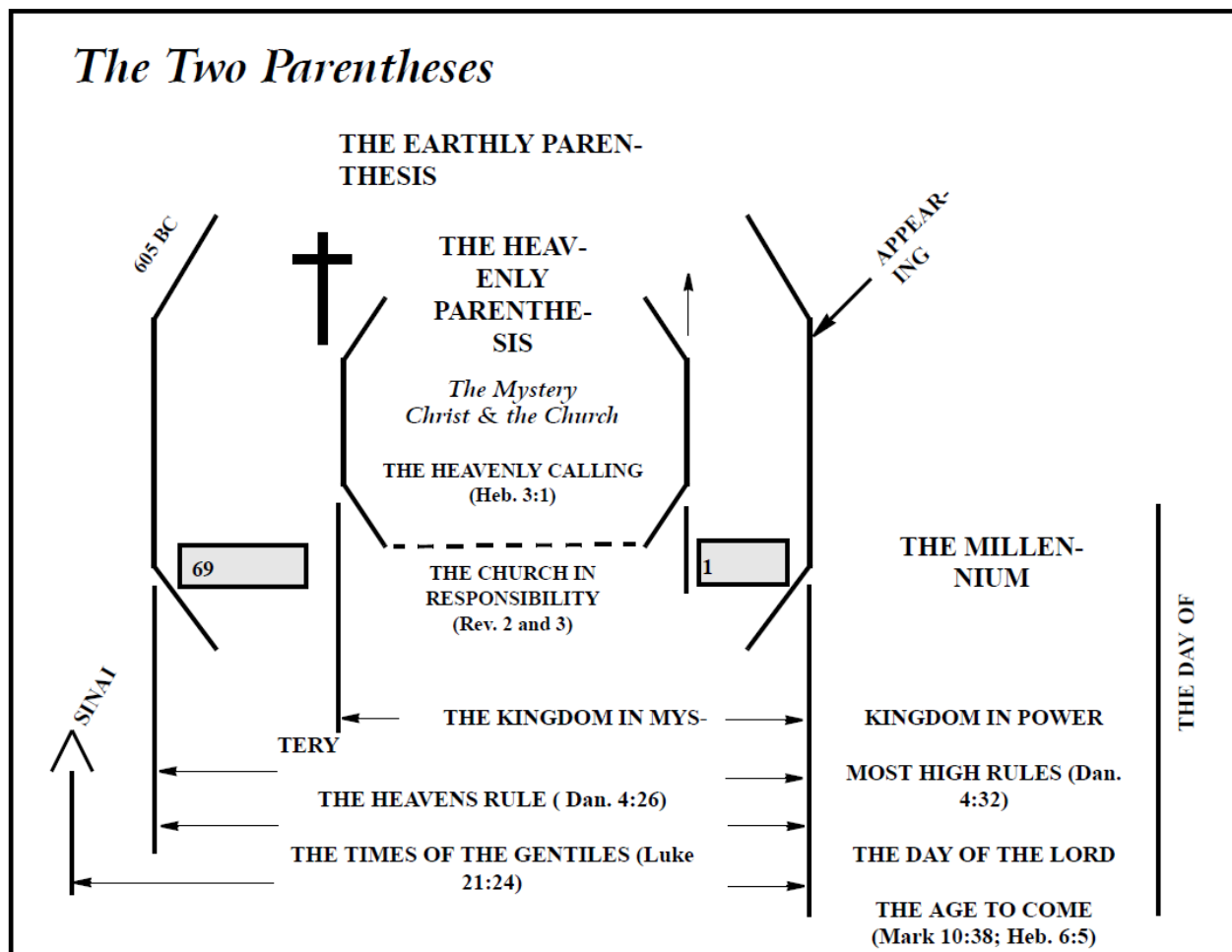


Chart C The Interposed Heavenly Calling

