

Dispensations, Part 5

As we continue our study, we find ourselves at a point where the Church has been taken by the Rapture and is now in Christ's presence in Heaven. There, we will face our own judgment, known as the Bema Judgment. This judgment, more accurately described as an “evaluation,” occurs in Heaven while the Tribulation unfolds on earth.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

The term “Judgment seat” is derived from the Greek word “bema,” which denotes a raised platform accessed by steps, similar to the three-tiered stand Olympic athletes use to receive their medals. While it can be viewed as a throne, it differs from the “throne” of a ruler, which is represented by the Greek word *thronos*. The Bema should be seen more as an evaluation seat than as a traditional place of judgment.

Notice that we are to receive what is “due” to us. Whatever it is, we have it coming, based on what we did “in the body,” meaning before we were resurrected/translated in the Rapture. What was done could have been either “good or evil.” “Good” is *agathos*, referring to something of intrinsic value. “Evil” is *phaulos*, which describes that which is ordinary or worthless.

And did you think I was going to say “sin”?

Sin was judged at the Cross, and Jesus took our place in judgment for our sins. Sin will never be mentioned at any of the judgments after the Cross—not at the Bema or even the Last Judgment. So, what will be judged?

Your “works.”

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— ¹³ each one’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it

will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. ¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Jesus Christ laid the foundation, and we are called to build upon it. Unfortunately, many Christians don't build anything; if they do, their work is shoddy, or they build on the wrong foundation—human good. This refers to our spiritual lives. God has a ministry for each of us, a calling to serve Him. He supplies all the resources we need to be successful in that calling, starting with the indwelling Holy Spirit. How diligently we build on that foundation laid by Christ will determine the possible rewards in eternity. The “work” that God calls us to do for Him will be accomplished using those God-given resources.

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

That “work” will be rewarded at the Bema as “gold, silver, and precious stones.” However, unproductive acts, neglecting our calling, or “works” done in the power of the flesh for personal gain, even if they yield positive results, will burn up as “worthless wood, hay, and stubble” in the judgment fire, because they were not done while “abiding in the vine.”

Options at the Judgment Seat involve either rewards or the forfeiture of potential rewards based on the believer's works being deemed “good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5). Among the potential rewards, Crowns are awarded for specific services:

- For a temperate or disciplined service (I Corinthians 9:24-26)
- To anticipate and desire the Lord's return for the church (II Timothy 4:8)
- For enduring temptation (James 1:12)
- For faithful pastoring (I Peter 5:4)
- For martyrdom (Revelation 2:10)
- For “holding fast” = endurance (Revelation 3:11)
- For the evangelism of the lost (I Thessalonians 2:19)

These “crowns” are *stefanos*, which are similar to laurel leaf crowns awarded to Olympic winners, rather than *diadems*, which are crowns worn by a king. Additionally, part of such a “reward” involves promotion to positions of leadership and authority in Christ’s coming reign on Earth (1000 years) and in eternity (Romans 8:17, II Timothy 2:12, Revelation 1:6, 20:6). The bottom line is that you will receive rewards for faithful service and none for failure.

Meanwhile, Back on Earth

While the resurrected Church is in Heaven after the Rapture and is being evaluated and rewarded for services rendered, the Tribulation is occurring on Earth. Since the Church has been removed, the Tribulation should be viewed as God returning to deal with Israel and fulfilling Daniel’s Seventy Weeks Prophecy. God will complete the judgment of Israel for their rejection and killing of the Messiah, as well as for their idolatry, which is seen as the worship of self by perverting the Law into a system of salvation by works. The focus of the judgment is on Israel; however, the *nominal* church will also be present and undergoing judgment for their rejection of salvation by faith and apostate teachings. This “harlot” religion will actively support the Antichrist.

The Second Advent and Judgments

The Tribulation culminates in a great war and the Second Advent, when the Lord returns with His Bride.

Revelation 19:9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God” ...

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury

of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

The passage above is a “snapshot” depicting the coming of the Lord for the establishment of the “Wedding Supper of the Lamb. ” “From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.” This refers to the defeat of Satan’s armies and our Lord’s reign during the subsequent Kingdom.

Two words could be used for “nations.” The first is the Greek *goyim* (singular *goy*), which refers to nations other than Israel. However, the term “nations,” in this context, is *ethnos*, meaning a multitude (whether of men or beasts) associated or living together, consisting of individuals of the same nature or genus. The common interpretation suggests that these refer to heathens, which is how this word is sometimes translated. The focus of the *ethnos* seen here is on Satan and those under his control.

Several significant events occur that are associated with the Second Advent:

- The armies of the Antichrist are defeated. (Revelation 19:19-21)
- Satan is bound and sent to the Abyss to bide his time for 1,000 years. (Revelation 20:2-3)
- The Antichrist and the False Prophet will be cast into the Lake of Fire. (Revelation 20:1-3)
- The resurrected Old Testament saints and Tribulation martyrs came to life and reign with Christ for a thousand years. The lost do not come to life until the thousand years are over. (Revelation 20:4-5)
- All Israel will be saved (Romans 11:25-27)
- Tribulation survivors from the nations (*ethnos*) will be gathered, and the sheep (regenerate) will be separated from the goats (lost). The “sheep” (righteous, Matthew 25:37) will enter the Kingdom in their human bodies, with their sin natures intact and fully functional (Matthew 25:32-34; 41; Isaiah 35:8-10).
- The war-damaged earth will be restored in preparation for the perfect environment of the Kingdom Age.

The length of the period between the Second Advent and the start of the Kingdom Age is not specified; however, all the aforementioned events will likely require several months or possibly a year or more to complete.

The Kingdom Is for Israel

Those who inhabit the millennial kingdom in glorified bodies can be divided into three subgroups:

- The Church, whose bodies were either resurrected or transformed at the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:21-23, 51-53);
- Tribulation martyrs resurrected after Christ returns to Earth (Revelation 20:4-6).
- Old Testament saints resurrected at the same time (see Daniel 12:2).

There will be two distinct groups of people:

- Those who have been resurrected with glorified physical bodies
- Those who remain in their natural, earthly bodies with their sin natures.

Those who inhabit the Kingdom with earthly bodies have survived the Tribulation and can be subdivided into two groups:

- Believing Gentiles
- Believing Jews.

Everyone who enters that kingdom will be redeemed by God and thus declared righteous (Isaiah 35:8-10).

At the beginning of the Kingdom/Millennium, its inhabitants will include the *righteous* from all previous dispensations.

- Believing Gentiles in earthly bodies
- Redeemed Israel in earthly bodies
- Resurrected/raptured Church Age believers in glorified bodies.
- Resurrected Tribulation martyrs and Old Testament believers in glorified bodies

The Age of Israel was very much Israel-focused, whereas the Church Age centers on the Gentiles. The Tribulation, which marks the final seven years of the Age of Israel and occurs after the Church is taken away in the Rapture, is also centered on Israel. The same applies to the Kingdom Age.

The Four Unconditional Covenants

The four unconditional covenants that God made with Israel are significant to both the Tribulation and, especially, the Kingdom. Understanding these covenants is crucial for comprehending why Satan felt compelled to destroy all Jews during the Tribulation.

God established four distinct unconditional covenants with Israel. Since these covenants are unconditional, their fulfillment relies entirely on God's integrity and ability to deliver on His promises to Israel. If no Jews are alive to receive them when they are fulfilled, God would be a liar and incapable of keeping His word, thus unqualified to judge Satan. In this scenario, Satan would prevail in his case against God as a fair judge.

What are the four unconditional covenants?

- Abrahamic Covenant
- Land Grant Covenant
- Davidic Covenant
- New Covenant to Israel

They are unconditional covenants because Israel has no obligations to fulfill in order to receive the promises of these covenants. Only God is obligated under these unconditional covenants. This contrasts with the Mosaic Covenant (The Law), which was conditional. Both parties, Israel and God, were obligated under its terms: if Israel kept the Law, they would be blessed; if they failed to keep the Law, they would be disciplined. In these unconditional covenants, however, only God has obligations. Israel's sole requirement is simply to be present to receive the covenant's blessings when they are ultimately fulfilled; thus, Satan must destroy Israel. This explains much about the antisemitism we have seen throughout history.

Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who

bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

The covenant is reiterated in Genesis 15:7-21 with a blood ceremony and amplified in Genesis 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-18.

What does the covenant guarantee?

- Abraham's name will be great.
- A great nation will emerge from him.
- He would be a blessing, and through him, all the families of the earth would be blessed.
- The land would be given to him personally and to his descendants forever to inherit.
- His descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:6) (Restated to Jacob, Genesis 28:13)
- Whoever blesses him will be blessed, and whoever curses him will be cursed.
- He would be the father of many nations (Genesis 17:4), including Ishmael and Isaac.
- Kings would proceed from him
- It will be an everlasting covenant.
- Canaan would be an everlasting possession
- God will be a God to him and his seed
- In his seed, all nations shall be blessed.

Some of these promises are made to Abraham personally, some to his seed, and some to Gentiles (“all the families of the earth”). (Genesis 12:3)

Promises Made to Abraham

- He would be the father of a great nation
- His name would be great and he himself would be a blessing

Promise to Abraham's seed

- The nation itself will be great (Genesis 12:2)
- And innumerable (Genesis 13:16; 15:5)
- The nation is guaranteed the possession of the land.
- The covenant is everlasting and possession of the land is everlasting

Promise to the Gentiles

- "All the families of the earth" are promised blessings (Genesis 12:3).
- It is assumed that, as a general promise, it has general fulfillment
- This is Jesus Christ and the offer of salvation to all that we are seeing here.

The other three covenants come out of the Abrahamic Covenant

- The Land Grant (or Palestinian) Covenant refers to the land granted to the descendants of Abraham.
- The Davidic Covenant given to King David promised that his descendants would inherit the throne of Israel forever.
- The New Covenant to Israel promises redemption for the nation, hinted at in the veiled promise of a redeemer from his seed, ensuring that the nation would be great and occupy the land forever.

It must be understood that there are two Israels in Scripture:

- Israel, a nation of both believers and unbelievers
- Born-again Israel — Israel as individuals who are redeemed through faith, viewed collectively as a nation within a nation.

These promises were made to and will be delivered to *redeemed or born-again Israel*. Time and again, Abraham serves as an example of faith: "Abraham believed, and it was credited to him for righteousness" (Galatians 3:6). Abraham trusted in God's promises and His limited revelation of a promised deliverer.

For the Abrahamic Covenant to be fulfilled literally, Israel must be restored as a nation in the land. There is an expectation of a national entity, and within that nation, there must be born-again Jews. That remnant of born-again Jews, representing the nation of Israel, must survive the Tribulation to receive the promises, which will be fulfilled after the Tribulation when God brings Israel to national redemption.

Who then are Abraham's seed?

Genesis 17:19 but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.

Abraham clearly understood that by "seed," God referred to his physical lineage, and that Isaac's descendants would inherit the promises made to the "seed of Abraham." Abraham, Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob all recognized that the term "seed" denoted their physical heritage.

This clarification comes when one understands that in Scripture, there are three ways to be a child of Abraham:

- Natural lineage or natural seed restricted to the descendants of Jacob and the twelve tribes.
 - To them God promises to be their God
 - To them was given the Law
 - To them was given the land of Israel in the Old Testament.
 - With them God dealt in a special way
- Spiritual lineage within the natural. These are the natural racial Israelites who trusted God — regenerate Israel
 - They kept the Law, meaning they met the standards of the Mosaic Covenant to be found “blameless” under its terms, *thereby demonstrating their faith in God while looking forward to the coming Messiah.*
 - They will ultimately possess the land in the Millennium
 - They are spiritual Israel
- Spiritual seed who are *not* natural Israelites
 - The promises "to all the families of the earth" (Gen 1:3)) come in here

Galatians 3:6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? ⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Through faith in Christ, the Gentile believer becomes the spiritual seed of Abraham.

Galatians 3:29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Believing Gentiles are Abraham's seed in the spiritual sense and heirs of the promise given "to all the families of the earth." This explains how the Church can be related to the promises without being a covenanted people. No covenants were made with the Gentiles.

The Church Is Not Israel

Gentile believers in this age, while regarded as a seed of Abraham, are not the seed of Abraham to whom national promises will be fulfilled. This is easily demonstrated by examining the word usage in the New Testament.

The New Testament contrasts Natural Israel and the Church. That is seen in 1 Corinthians 10 where they are spoken of as three distinct entities.

1 Corinthians 10:32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God

In Romans 11:1-25, we encounter the parable of the olive tree, where God has removed the nation of Israel from a place of blessing. In verses 17-18, Paul states that the branch of the "natural" olive tree (Israel) has been broken off (interrupted Age of Israel) and that the wild olive tree (Gentiles) has been grafted in its place (Church Age). Furthermore, he notes, "if they (the natural branches, Israel) do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted in" (v. 23). Clearly, Paul differentiates between the Church and Israel as two distinct entities.

Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are contrasted in the New Testament.

Romans 9:6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

Not everyone who identifies as Israel is the true Israel (the spiritual seed of Abraham). Verses 7 and 8 reference Abraham's other children, Ishmael

and the six sons of Keturah, who, though they are Abraham's biological offspring, are not part of the promise.

The promise was fulfilled through Isaac, both in the physical and spiritual sense. It is through faith in God that Isaac is the child of the promise, not Ishmael or the sons of Keturah.

Galatians 6:15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Paul argues that true Israel, the recipients of the covenant promises, does not encompass all descendants of Abraham but is confined to those who are born again, described as “a new creation.”

Summarize the Abrahamic Covenant:

- A great nation would come out of Abraham — partially fulfilled
- He was promised a land — partially fulfilled
- Abraham would be greatly blessed — fulfilled
- Abraham's name would be great — fulfilled
- Abraham would be a blessing to others — partially fulfilled
- Those who bless Israel would be blessed and those who curse Israel would be cursed — partially fulfilled
- In Abraham all would be blessed (the promise of Gentile blessing) — partially fulfilled
- Abraham would receive a son through his wife Sara — fulfilled
- Other nations would come from Abraham's seed — fulfilled

These partially fulfilled promises will be fully fulfilled during the Kingdom Age, when Abraham's spiritual seed, which includes born-again Israel and born-again Gentiles as co-heirs to the promises, will receive *all* that Abraham was promised.

More covenants to come ...