

The Bible's Most Misunderstood Verse

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.
Hebrews 13:8

Many enemies of dispensationalism use this verse to attack the principles of right division. The reasoning goes something like this. If Jesus Christ has never changed, then the way He deals with man has never changed. A companion verse that is used in this regard is found in the book of Malachi.

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Malachi 3:6

This argument is characterized by statements such as, "If Jesus Christ ever healed, then He is healing today". Or, "If God ever poured out the Holy Spirit as He did on the Day of Pentecost, then He is still pouring out his Spirit in that way today." While these arguments are used to sway many away from "rightly dividing the word of truth", it is clear that they are unscriptural and illogical. Using these arguments, we could say, "If God ever commanded anyone to build an ark, then He is commanding us to build an ark today". Or, "If God ever judged a city with fire and brimstone, then He is judging cities that way today".

While these unscriptural arguments certainly give us no reason to abandon dispensational Bible study, they do illustrate that those who oppose right division do so largely because of a misunderstanding of what dispensationalism teaches. They seem to believe that dispensationalism teaches that God is a confused and befuddled deity who acts in a willy-nilly fashion, arbitrarily changing His mind about how to deal with man. This is certainly not the case, and dispensational Bible study in no way teaches that it is.

God's Eternal Unchanging Plan

Scripture makes very clear that God has only ever had one plan. That plan has been in effect since before the world began and will be fulfilled only after time is no more, in the dispensation of the fullness of times.

Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; Titus 1:1,2

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will,

according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: Ephesians 1:9,10

The heart of this plan is seen in the passage from Ephesians quoted above. God's eternal purpose and plan is to glorify His son, Jesus Christ, to "gather together in one all things in Christ". This eternal purpose can also be seen in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11

Clearly, God's eternal purpose is to have all creatures glorify the Son, Jesus Christ, which in turn brings honor to the Father. It is also clear from two of the passages quoted above that this one eternal purpose of God is to be carried out in two different locations, on earth and in heaven.

There is however, an impediment to God's plan. There is one who desires to usurp the rightful position of Christ as the one that is glorified by heaven and earth. The being who desires to have the honor and glory that belong to Christ is Satan. In the book of Isaiah, we read of his selfish desire.

For thou [Lucifer] hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Isaiah 14:13,14

It is very significant that Satan uses a specific title of God when he sets out on his course of rebellion. He refers to God as, "the most high". That title is a title that relates specifically to God's ownership of heaven and earth. This can be seen as we look at the first time that that title is used in Scripture.

And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:. . . And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD,

the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,
Genesis 14:19,22

What we are reading in scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, is an account of Satan's attempt to become the possessor of heaven and earth, to replace Jesus Christ as the ruler of the universe. We also learn of God's counterattack and that God's plan, in the end, will overcome Satan's plan. In the end, Jesus Christ will alone be glorified in heaven and earth.

Dispensational Bible study simply acknowledges the fact that Satan has attacked God's authority on two fronts, the heaven and the earth, and that God will repel that attack and be victorious on those same two fronts. The first person to rightly divide the Word of Truth was not some modern-day dispensationalist. It was God.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
Genesis 1:1

God presents his creative act as an act that produced a divided universe, a universe that consists of two parts, the heaven, and the earth. In order to fully understand God's plan we must understand how that plan will be carried out in both of these areas.

God's Plan on the Earth

As we continue in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, we immediately see where God's plan is focused initially.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Genesis 1:2

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Genesis 1:28

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. Genesis 1:14,15

It is clear that the creation described in Genesis 1 is focused exclusively on the earth. It is the earth that is said to be "without form, and void". It is the earth that man is told to "replenish" and "subdue". Even the lights that God created in heaven were for the purpose of giving light "upon the earth".

After the flood, God gave similar instructions to Noah and his sons.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. Genesis 9:1

With the setting aside of Abraham to begin the formation of the nation Israel we see that the focus was still on the earth.

And I will bless them that bless thee [Abraham], and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. Genesis 12:3

The singular message of the prophets is the establishment

of God's righteous rule and reign on a renewed earth.

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. Isaiah 35:1

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Isaiah 60:1-3

Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. . . . And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Daniel 2:35,44

Notice that Isaiah points to the wonderful utopian conditions on the renewed earth and how the Gentile nations will flow into that blessing. Daniel emphasizes the fact that the "God of heaven" will establish a kingdom that fills "the whole earth". These passages are typical of the message that the prophets brought to the nation Israel. They were continuing God's focus on reestablishing His authority on the earthly part of His creation.

The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles continued the prophetic focus on the earth.

Christ was presented to Israel as the rightful heir to the earthly throne of David.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Luke 1:30-33

Christ taught His disciples to pray for the kingdom to come to the earth.

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9,10

The apostles tied their message and its returning, triumphant Messiah to the fulfillment of the prophetic Scriptures.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. Acts 3:19-21

All of the facts above show us that during the time frame covered from Genesis 1:2 to Acts 9, the focus of God's

message was on the earth.

God's Plan in the Heavens

In the ninth chapter of Acts we see a significant change begin to take place as Jesus Christ speaks from heaven to a man who would become the Apostle of the Gentiles.

And as he [Saul] journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Acts 9:3-5

Clearly, Paul had a calling that was heavenly in nature. The setting aside of Paul and the formation of the Body of Christ marks a change in God's focus from the earth to heaven. God's basic plan to glorify Christ has not changed at all. His purpose is still the same one that He conceived before the foundation of the world. With the ministry of Paul, He is now simply revealing the heavenly aspect of that plan. In the book of Ephesians, Paul makes quite clear that the focus of the Body of Christ is heavenly.

The Body of Christ is blessed in heavenly places.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: Ephesians 1:3

The Body of Christ is seated in heavenly places.

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 2:6

The Body of Christ is ministering to beings in heavenly places.

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, Ephesians 3:10

The Body of Christ has as its head a Christ who has ascended above and therefore rules over heavenly places.

He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) Ephesians 4:10

The Body of Christ is fighting a war with beings in heavenly places.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Ephesians 6:12

Paul is also careful to make sure that we understand that our eternal destiny is in the heavenlies, not on the earth.

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself. Philippians 3:20,21

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words. I Thessalonians 4:16-18

Notice that our comfort is not found in the return of Christ to establish an earthly kingdom, as it was for Israel. Our comfort is found in Christ catching us off this earth to reign with Him for all eternity in the heavenlies. Our eternal destiny and conversation is in heaven, not on the earth.

We should note one other important truth about all of this information about God's purpose being fulfilled in heaven. It was all kept secret in the mind and heart of God until it was revealed to and through Paul.

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: Romans 16:25,26

Notice that Paul says that the information he is preaching was "kept secret since the world began". This is in marked contrast to Peter's preaching things "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (See Acts 3:21, quoted above.) God's plans concerning the heavens were kept secret until revealed to and through Paul.

These facts show us that the truth of God's plan being fulfilled in heaven, the truth under which we operate today, is found exclusively in the writings of Paul to the Church, the Body of Christ. We must go to those writings to understand how God will fulfill His purpose in heaven, and how we should live based on our place in that heavenly plan.

The Fulfillment of God's Plan

We have already seen that in the book of Ephesians God reveals the fulfillment of His plan in eternity future, both on the earth and in heaven, as all things are gathered "together in one . . . in Christ". As God closes out His revelation to man we see that He has in fact brought everything full circle.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. Revelation 21:1

God's one eternal plan will be fulfilled, both in heaven and on earth. Jesus Christ will be honored and glorified in the entire universe.

The only way that we can truly understand the entirety of God's plan is to rightly divide the Word of Truth and realize that He is working to carry out that plan in two areas, the heaven and the earth.

