

## II. The Doctrine of the Holy Scriptures

The words of the Lord are pure words;  
as silver tried in a furnace on the earth,  
refined seven times. (Psalm 12:6)

### A. God has revealed Himself

#### 1. Through His Creation

The universe, all that is in it both material and the living beings, proclaims the existence of God and that He is extreme power and intelligence. In Romans 1:20 the Apostle Paul wrote,

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

In Psalm 19:1, David declared,

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.

This is why the psalmist, in Psalm 14:1, could say,

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

The evidences are so numerous and outstanding that only a person lacking in normal mental capacities would say, "There is no God." The things created reveal the Creator. Behind the design there is an Architect. An orderly, functioning structure speaks to the fact that there is a Master Builder.

Science does not know the exact size and the age of the universe.<sup>1</sup> The little that is known reveals that it is old, immense, and magnificent. It functions like a precision clock. Within our own solar system, we have discovered that each planet is different. Saturn is an engineered wonder with her rings. Besides the beauty, there is more detail and precision in a butterfly than in a Boeing 747. The magnificent things we see all around us show that the One who made all of this has an unlimited aptitude and imagination that are beyond human comprehension. The one who creates is always greater than his invention. The Bible teaches us that God is present everywhere, knows everything, and is without years because He is eternal, and that His wisdom is measureless. As Paul said in Romans, the creation "*clearly*" reveals these truths about our Creator God.

However, all that God made does not reveal His plan for man, His sacrificial love, and His redemptive work to save man from his destiny as a rebellious sinner. It does not show us how to get right with our Maker. Because of this, God has stepped into time to reveal Himself through the written Word, known as the Holy Bible (2 Timothy 3:16), and

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<sup>1</sup> It is estimated to be 13 to 15 billion light-years in diameter.

through the incarnate Word (John 1:18), whom we know to be the Lord Jesus Christ—the Son of God.

## **2. Through the Human Heart**

The founding fathers of the United States of America, in the *Declaration of Independence*, made an outstanding pronouncement:

WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness . . .

They declared that there are truths that are “self-evident” to man. In their writings they often referred to Nature and Nature’s God. They based their stand against England on laws that were revealed in nature and in the human conscience, God’s Book of Works, not the Bible, God’s Book of Words. In Romans 2:12-16, Paul said that God wrote His moral laws on the human heart.<sup>2</sup>

The stories of the Patriarchs in the book of Genesis, of the family of Moses in Exodus, and of Job and his friends in the book of Job, describe men who had a profound knowledge of God and of moral laws, and that knowledge did not come from the Bible. Those people had only the revelation of God as seen in creation and as written upon the heart of man. Though they did not have one page of the Holy Scriptures, they knew a lot of truths about God, and they knew what right and wrong behavior was.

We know that the conscience cannot be trusted because we humans have developed methods to excuse and/or deaden that inner voice, just as we do the divine truths revealed in nature and those in the Bible—the written revelation of God. The revealed will of God in the Bible is a more sure revelation of the Creator and truth to live by. However, men distort and reject the truth and turn their backs on the message written in nature, the human heart, and the Holy Scriptures.

## **3. Through the Holy Scriptures**

[Timothy,] from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:15)

The 66 books of the Holy Bible (Bible means book) are a written revelation of God to man. This Book is the only way that men can truly know God in His fullness, learn about His infinite love and plan for each of us, come to an understanding of His redemptive mercy and grace and man’s responsibilities toward Him and his fellow man, and know the way of salvation and of the edification process for the saved.<sup>3</sup>

We believe that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments (testament means covenant or contract) are plenary and verbally inspired by God without error in the original manuscripts. By “plenary” we mean that from cover to cover it is completely the Word of God. By “verbally” we mean that the words used by the human authors were

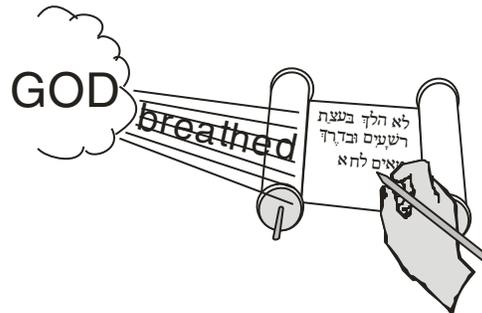
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<sup>2</sup> For further study: Genesis 42:21-22; Job 27:6; John 8:7-9; Acts 10:35; 17:16-31; 23:1; 24:16; Romans 1:18-32; 2:12-16; 1-Corinthians 9:21; 11:14; 2-Cor. 1:12; 5:11; 1-Timothy 4:2; Tit. 1:15; 1-John 3:19-21

<sup>3</sup> John 20:31; Hebrews 11:1-3

ordained by God. By “without error in the original manuscripts” we mean that what is recorded is factual and true, untainted with lies, exaggerations, fantasies, and imaginations.

In 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 the Apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, wrote: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” The word “inspired” θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*) is a combination of θεός (*theos*) meaning God and πνέω (*pneo*) meaning wind or to blow. The Bible is a document that is God breathed.<sup>4</sup> It is the breath of God. As man cannot speak without breath, the Bible is God's breath. It is His Book of Words.



Another verse that addresses divine inspiration is 2 Peter 1:20-21: “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” The word “moved” is φέρομαι (*pheromai*) meaning to strive, to press on, to carry, to lead, to move, to impel. The Holy Spirit overshadowed these men of God as they wrote the words and composed the books of the Bible, guiding, influencing, and impelling them as they gave us the Bible—God’s written revelation to man.

The Bible was given to us by God through Jewish men whom He chose, and the Holy Spirit breathed upon them and guided them as they wrote. God gave us the living Word, Jesus Christ, and the written Word, the Bible, through the nation of Israel. Thus the Bible is a Jewish book, written primarily in their culture and within their historical experiences. Through their writings, we can even perceive the personalities of the human authors. This was God’s choice as well. The Bible contains the words of men, the discourses and lies of Satan, the statements of angels, conversations directly from God, special visions from God to persons of His choice, historical records of events and family trees, etc. Because the Holy Spirit was directly involved in the recording of these materials, the content is accurate and reliable. Though not every word in the Bible comes from God’s mouth, they were written down for us by the direction of the Holy Spirit—so the message is from God. The Bible is a trustworthy document, because God’s involvement in its writing guarantees it.

In the Old Testament the phrase “the Word of the Lord came to me” appears more than 90 times; “the Lord said” occurs over 220 times; and “God said” is repeated more than 45

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Samuel 23:1-2; John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16

times. In the greater part of the 39 Old Testament books the human authors declared that they were transmitting the Word of God.

David said that “The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue,” (2 Samuel 23:1-2) indicating that he recognized that the Spirit of God had guided and empowered him as he composed his songs and recorded his words. Jesus and His disciples used the Old Testament with authority because they knew it was the inspired Word of God.<sup>5</sup>

Jesus guaranteed that the Apostles would be directed by the Holy Spirit as they composed the books of the New Testament when he said,

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.” (John 16:13)

Peter declared that Paul’s writings were the inspired Word of God when he wrote,

. . . our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-17)

These passages give us confidence that the New Testament is a God-breathed document. The Bible is a Book we can trust, believe, and proclaim with confidence.

The Bible testifies that it is the inspired Word of God. The fact that over the centuries the message of the Holy Scriptures has transformed lives and the recorded facts have withstood the attacks of the unbelieving world authenticates the truth that God was in the background guiding the holy men as they gave us His Book of Words. There is no book equal to the Bible.<sup>6</sup>

## **B. The book of Revelation closed the Canon**

### **1. Why are there sixty-six books?**

It is a generally accepted belief among Christian scholars and churches that the Spirit of the Lord guided the Jewish priests and scribes in their collecting and assembling of the 39 books of the Old Testament Canon. Today the word “Canon” is used as a synonym for the Holy Scriptures. The word means rule or standard. It is a collection of religious writings that have been accepted as the authentic body of Scripture because they give evidence that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

All evidence indicates that before the exile of Judah to Babylon, King Hezekiah was involved in the gathering together of the books that were considered to be Holy divinely inspired writings. After the exile Ezra the scribe oversaw this work, which eventually produced the Old Testament. Jesus Christ, His Apostles, and the early church of the First Century accepted the Old Testament as the authentic Word of God and used it as divine authority.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 21:42; 22:29, 31; Mark 14:49; John 5:39; Acts 2:14-36; 17:2; 18:28; Romans 1:1-3; 15:4; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15

<sup>6</sup> Luke 11:28; Hebrews 4:12

Ezra, the priests that followed, and the early church never considered the books of the Apocrypha as Holy Scripture.<sup>7</sup> Those godly men did not include the books of the Apocrypha.<sup>8</sup> The Roman Catholic Church officially added those books to the Canon during the Council of Trent—almost 15 centuries after the Canon had been closed.

We believe that God directed in the life of the first 70 to 100 years of the church, giving the church special insight and guidance in the gathering together of the 27 books of the New Testament Canon. Peter specifically called the writings of the Apostle Paul to be “Scripture” (2 Peter 3:15-16). The leadership of the church<sup>9</sup>, using high standards, because there were several fraudulent books, gave us the New Testament. The “Church Fathers,” a title given to men of exceptional reputation, who had been disciples of the Apostles, were influential in this process.

Before the year 150 AD, the 27 books of the New Testament had been selected and the Canon was closed. Over the centuries the church has considered those books as the inspired Word of God and has looked to them as the divine authority for the church and God’s people in matters of faith and practice.

## **2. Why do we not accept other writings?**

By the year 150 AD the entire Canon, both Old and New Testaments, were accepted as the inspired Word of God by the church and the Church Fathers. The *Revelation of Jesus Christ* was the last and final book, completing the Bible. Revelation 22:18-19 is a declaration from God through the Apostle John that affirms this truth:

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

Though these verses make a direct reference to the book of Revelation, because it is the final book of the Canon, it is our belief that these words apply to all of the divinely inspired Scriptures. Proverbs 30:6 states a similar condemnation to those who would try to defraud or add to the Word of God. Because of these passages and the fact that the Canon has been closed for about 19 centuries, the church has not accepted additions to the Canon.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Apocrypha means: (1) A work or fact without authenticity, or whose authenticity has not been proven. (2) Among the Catholics, those writings of a sacred nature not included by the Church in the authentic and divinely inspired Canon of Scripture." Translated from the *Novo Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa* (New Dictionary of the Portuguese Language), by Aurélio Buarque de Holanda Ferreira, second edition, page 144. I cite this because Brazil has been dominantly Catholic since its birth.

<sup>8</sup> Books of the Apocrypha: Esdras I, Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of the Sons of Sirach, Baruch, Epistle of Jeremiah, Song of the Three Children, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, Maccabees I through IV, prayer of Manasseh

<sup>9</sup> “Church” is used here to refer to the universal church, the body of Christ.

<sup>10</sup> See Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; 2 Corinthians 4:2.

## C. In giving the Bible, God used human language and events.

### 1. Therefore, we interpret literally.

Refer to the preceding chapter on hermeneutics for a fuller presentation on this subject.

In the written Word of God, He revealed Himself through the handwriting, language, and culture of the godly men He chose. The Bible is the best work of literature ever produced on Planet Earth. It contains all of the literary styles, such as poetry, parables, metaphors, prose, allegories, etc. The eternal Spirit communicated with man on his level, where he lives, in terms he would understand. The Lord did not use mysteries, fables, fantasies, and other literary tricks to hide the message or make it difficult to perceive. God spoke to be understood.

The biblical predictions of Jesus first coming to earth in human form were literally fulfilled.<sup>11</sup> Jesus and His disciples interpreted the Old Testament literally. Because God used human terms to communicate, and because of the way our Lord and His followers interpreted those revelations, we believe the Bible should be interpreted literally, as one would interpret a letter from a friend.

### 2. Therefore, we recognize dispensations.

A dispensation is an economy under which God places man, or a group of men such as Israel. In each dispensation a dominant order or responsibility (economy) prevails that does not prevail as dominant in others. A Brazilian dictionary (*O Novo Dicionário Aurélio da Língua Portuguesa*) defines an economy as: “The art of managing well a home or establishment.”<sup>12</sup> A steward is a person charged with the management of a house or business. Luke 16:1-13 speaks of a steward or economist who was charged with the responsibility of managing a large farm. In a biblical dispensation (economy), man is given a responsibility to obey a certain order or rules. These are tests that man fails because he is a poor steward who cannot perform well without involving God in his life. There is a dispensational chart at the end of this chapter.

When one follows the hermeneutical principles outlined in the first chapter, which are scientific rules that guide us in interpreting the Scriptures, the conclusion is that the Bible reveals different dispensations as part of the divine plan for man. They are economies under which God has placed man, or a group of men like Israel. Dispensations are not means of salvation. The purpose of God in placing man under these stewardships—economies—is to test him, causing him to see his shortcomings and to seek God.

Recognizing three of these economies, ***Israel, Church, and Millennium***,<sup>13</sup> which are subjects of large portions of the divinely inspired Scriptures, is essential in understanding the Bible and God’s plan for man. I highlight “three,” though the ***Tribulation*** is a fourth. Though a distinct economy, the ***Tribulation*** is the completion of the dispensation of ***Israel***, in that it is the seventieth week of Daniel’s seventy week prophecy in chapter 9,

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 22; Isaiah 53; Matthew 2:1-6; 12:1-8 & 38-42; 15:1-9; 21:1-9; 22:41-46; Acts 7:1-53; Romans 4; Hebrews 1:5-14; 7:15-28, chapter 11; and Judas 7-16

<sup>12</sup> Translation of: “A arte de bem administrar uma casa ou um estabelecimento.”

<sup>13</sup> The Millennium dispensation is the hope of Israel, when the Messiah will be their King-Priest and bring peace on earth. It will be the fulfillment of a very large segment of biblical prophecies.

covered in a chart in the chapter titled “The Doctrine of Last Things.” The 69 weeks brought Israel’s history up to the death of the Messiah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the scattering of the Jews.<sup>14</sup> The last week of seven years is still future. Between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks is a pause, when the prophetic clock for Israel stopped for an intermission, during which God’s mystery program,<sup>15</sup> the **Church**, is brought onto the scene. The Tribulation is “Jacob’s Troubles.” Israel will repent and recognize the true Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, during the last half of that week.

Dispensationalists make a distinction between Israel and the Church. Proper hermeneutics leads one to this conclusion. God has one program for Israel and another for the Church. The economies are different.

It should be clarified that throughout the ages, and in all dispensations, it is repentance from sin and faith in God’s Word that brings individuals to a blessed relationship with God.<sup>16</sup> Today we look back to the Cross, and salvation is through the appropriation of the finished work of the Christ through faith.<sup>17</sup>

Most dispensationalists follow Scofield’s seven,<sup>18</sup> one of which is the Dispensation of Promise. That dispensation begins with the promise of God to Abraham and goes through the time of Israel in Egypt. Since that promise was and continues to be unconditional and is the foundation for everything related to the nation of Israel and God’s plan of salvation through that nation, it is my belief that the “Dispensation of Promise” is not a biblical economy. I look at this as a progressive revelation of the economy that I have called “Israel” on the chart. The bulk of that economy was revealed at Sinai and is national in scope. The Dispensation of the Church is another economy that was progressively revealed through the teachings of the Apostles, though it started at the Feast of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit came to indwell the saints and unite them into one body—the church universal. (See the “Doctrine of the Church.”)

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<sup>14</sup> These three events all happened after the clock stopped with the close of the sixty-ninth week. The Dispensation of the Church is in that interval as well. The seventieth week begins when the anti-Christ signs a seven year treaty with Israel, yet future.

<sup>15</sup> Romans 16:25-27 and Ephesians 3:1-13 “the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested”

<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 11:6

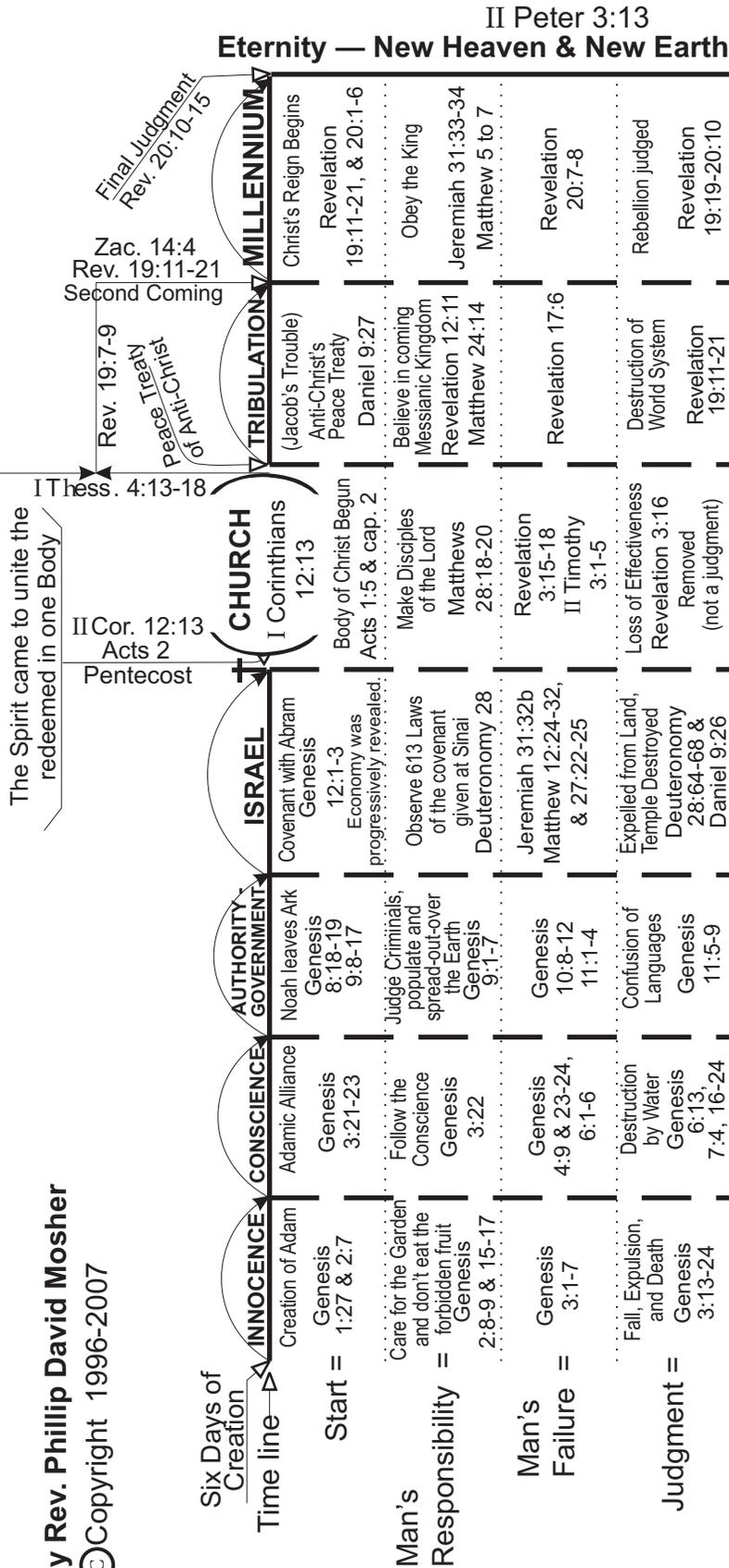
<sup>17</sup> John 3:14-18 & 36

<sup>18</sup> Scofield, C. I., *The Scofield Reference Bible*, pub. Oxford University Press, NY, © 1909, 1937, 1945, and *The New Scofield Reference Bible*, © 1967



# THE DISPENSATIONS

by Rev. Phillip David Mosher  
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## What is a Dispensation?

The English word *dispensation* is used to translate the Greek word *oikonomia* from which we receive our word "economy" (see Luke 16:1-3; II Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10, 3:2, 8, 9; Col. 1:25, & I Tim. 1:4). Each dispensation is an economy under which God places man, or a group of persons with whom He is working, like Israel. In each dispensation man is placed under particular conditions and responsibilities that do not prevail in the other dispensations.

For example, during the dispensation of conscience, man lived before God according to the laws written on his heart, which he failed to obey and suffered the consequences. We still have

a conscience, but today the principal order is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which the Church is to practice and teach, making disciples of the Lord and uniting them in local churches.

Dispensations are not means of salvation, but economies designed to bring man to God. In all dispensations, people are saved when they believe and obey the Word of God, a progressive revelation of God's love and work of Salvation for man through Jesus Christ. There is extensive revelation about three dispensations: **Israel**, **Church**, and **Millennium**. Though there are differences in the economies, the Tribulation completes the dispensation of Israel.



