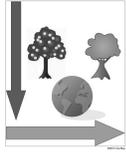


The 14 Eras of the Bible

Creation Era

Genesis 1:1-11:26



(Approximately 2,500 years)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. He created the earth empty and formless and over the following six days, He simply spoke and the “things which are seen were not made of things which are visible” (Heb. 11:3).

At the beginning of each day, God spoke, and successively the earth was formed and then filled with order and life. God created all the animals and the plants and He commanded that each plant and animal reproduce after its kind. On the sixth day, God created animals, and man was His final creation—what He called “very good.” He created man in the image of God, male and female. He created the man from the dust of the ground, formed him, and breathed His very life into him. He blessed them and commanded them to reproduce and fill the earth with more God-image bearers. He commanded them to have dominion over all animal life.

When God created Adam, the man, He placed him in the Garden of Eden, assigned him the task of naming the animals, and gave him specific instructions regarding the garden. God put two special trees in the middle of the garden, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God told Adam that he could eat from all the trees in the garden except for the tree of knowledge of good and evil, because if Adam ate from it, he would surely die.

When Adam had completed the task of naming the animals, he realized that he, out of all creation, was alone. So God put him to sleep; and while he was sleeping, God took one of his ribs and made him a helper comparable to him—a woman. God established marriage in the garden—the man and his wife together as one flesh. God commanded them to reproduce according to their kind, and they walked with God in the garden, naked, and without shame (Gen. 2:25).

God also created spirit beings who are powerful but invisible to man. One spirit God created was very wise, very powerful, and very beautiful. God assigned to him a special work, to guard God's holy throne in heaven. But this spirit soon became filled with pride because of his great beauty. He desired to take God's place in heaven and rule over all the other spirits God had created. He even said, “I will be like the Most High.” This spirit being led a rebellion among the other spirits. Because of their wickedness and rebellion those spirits who joined him were driven from heaven. The spirit who rebelled against God we know today as Satan, Lucifer, and the serpent. His name means adversary. The spirits who follow Satan are called demons (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12b-17).

Satan knows that he has been defeated and that his time is short, so he is filled with hatred and works furiously against man. One day, the serpent, described as more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, entered the garden of Eden, misrepresented God and His instructions, and deceived Eve. She took of the fruit from the forbidden tree and ate; she gave to her husband with her and he ate. Immediately their eyes were opened and, in their guilt and shame, they hid from God, because they were afraid of Him.

The Lord confronted the couple. Instead of being honest with God about his sin, Adam blamed his wife, and the woman blamed her disobedience on the serpent's deception.

In response, the Lord punished the couple for their sin. He also cursed the serpent and made a promise regarding a coming Seed who would destroy Satan and restore humanity. God pointed to that day as He slew a “good,” innocent animal, and with its skin, He covered the shame of their nakedness. In His mercy, God exiled man from the garden, so that he would not eat from the tree of life and be separated from Him forever.

Second Generation

Just as God commanded, the man and his wife, Eve, began to be fruitful and multiply; they had children, born in the image of Adam. Their firstborn, Cain, was a farmer, and their second-born, Abel, was a shepherd. When the time came to worship God, Cain offered the fruit of the ground, and Abel offered the firstborn of his flock. God looked at Abel's offering with pleasure, but He did not regard Cain's offering. Cain became so angry that even his face changed. God came to Cain, pleading with him and warning him to resist sin's temptation. Cain, however, killed Abel, so God cursed Cain. He told him that his life would be hard and that he would now live in fear and outside of the presence of God as a fugitive and vagabond. Cain went out from the presence of God. He knew his wife, began to have children, and created cities. His sons took multiple wives and murdered those who hurt them. He and his descendants created a world for themselves away from the presence of God.

God then gave to Adam and Eve another son, whom they named Seth. They understood that through him the seed would come who would crush the head of the serpent. Through Seth's descendants, men began to call upon the name of the LORD.

The Flood

Both the descendants of Cain and Seth began to multiply and fill the earth. Instead of being full of God-image bearers, the world became corrupt and filled with violence. Some of Seth's descendants called upon the name of the Lord and walked with God. Others, however, noticed the beauty of Cain's female descendants and began to intermarry with Cain's descendants, filling the world with violence and corruption. God grieved in His heart over man's sin, so He promised to destroy man from the face of the earth. But one man, Noah, found grace in God's sight, because he walked with God. God promised to destroy all flesh from the earth with a flood, except for Noah and his family, and God commanded Noah to build a very large boat. Noah's faith in God moved him to obey God. When the boat was completed, Noah, his family, and the animals God appointed entered the boat, and God shut the door. The flood came.

All flesh died on the earth—every animal and man. The waters flooded the earth for 150 days; afterward God sent a wind to dry the waters. God opened the door of the boat and released Noah and his family. Noah then built an altar to the Lord and offered one of every clean animal to God as a burnt offering on the altar. When the Lord smelled the soothing aroma, He said, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the thoughts of his heart are evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). God made a covenant with Noah that He would never again destroy the earth by flood, and He placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of His covenant to remind man of God's His faithfulness.

Noah's sons and their wives had children and began to repopulate the earth, and his descendants, unwilling to obey God by filling the earth, stayed in one place and built a huge tower, called Babel. So the Lord scattered all the people over the face of the earth by confusing their language, creating many languages so that they could not understand one another.

The Book of Job

Many theologians place the Book of Job early in the Patriarch Era. Though Job possessed only the biblical stories of the Creation Era he expressed great faith in God. These stories gave Job enough truth about God to develop a robust faith that took him through his trials. Job reveals the Sovereignty of God, the limitations of Satan, and the faith that perseveres.

What does the Creation Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God brings all of creation into being by His spoken word.

God ascribes names to what He creates and evaluates all that He creates as "good."

God gives instructions for the present and for the future.

God establishes boundaries for creation and man.

God confronts Adam and Eve regarding their sin. He curses the serpent and Cain.

God promises to redeem man.

God shortens man's life and promises He will not destroy the world again by flood.

God Acts

God created the heavens and the earth and all that fill them.

God provides for man's every need.

God kills an animal and uses the skin to cover man's nakedness.

God evicts the first couple from the garden and prevents their re-entry.

God opens the heavens and destroys every living thing on the earth except for the contents of the ark.

God scatters all the people of the earth and divides the continents.

God Reveals

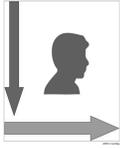
God is good. God desires relationship with man based on trust.

Man's sin separates him from God. As a result, man lives in fear of others and of the spirit world. The evidence of broken harmony with God is the fear, shame, and guilt experienced by all of humanity.

God moves redemptively toward man as He promises to redeem man through the seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent. He grants them an initial picture of atonement when He slays an innocent animal and covers guilty man's nakedness. God does not accept other sacrificial systems.

God gives instructions to one generation that will affect future generations. Each generation must communicate them to the following generation.

The Patriarch Era



Genesis 11:27-50:26

(Approximately 360 years)

Ten generations after the flood passed, God spoke to a man named Abram, whose father was an idol worshiper. God promised Abram that He would bless him and make him a great nation, although Abram was 75 years old and his wife, Sarai, could have no children. God promised Abram that He would give him a land — the land of Canaan. God promised that He would bless those who bless Abram, curse those who curse Abram, and that in Abram's seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God also told Abram that his descendants would go into captivity for four hundred years, and that God would bring them out of captivity to the land that God had promised him. God's promises demanded faith on Abram's part; Abram in response simply believed God. God eventually changed his name to Abraham and God counted Abraham's faith as righteousness.

After ten years of waiting on God to fulfill His promise, Sarai succumbed to unbelief, persuaded Abraham to sleep with Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant, who then bore a son, Ishmael. He was not the child of promise.

God commanded Abraham and his male descendants to be circumcised as a physical reminder of His covenant that one day One would come who would fulfill the promises of God. For twenty-five years, Abraham trusted God to fulfill His promise regarding a male heir, and God gave him a son through Sarah named Isaac.

God began to keep his promise to Abraham through succeeding generations. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. God promised that the older son would serve the younger. Isaac's younger son, Jacob, had twelve sons. The eleventh son, Joseph, was given two dreams about the future and had to wait thirteen years for God to fulfill them. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him and sold him as a slave to Egypt, trying to keep his dreams from being fulfilled. God delivered Joseph in Egypt, where he eventually became prime minister. Through Joseph's position in Egypt, God rescued all of Jacob's family and united them during a time of famine. Before his death, Jacob blessed all of his sons. Jacob promised his son, Judah (through Leah), that from his descendants would proceed kings, a lawgiver, and Shiloh (the Messiah).

What does the Patriarch Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God initiates a relationship with Abram and obligates Himself to Abram by promising him an heir, a land, and a nation who will be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

God's detailed instructions reveal His knowledge of the future and His determination to fulfill promises made to past generations.

God Acts

God opens Sarah's barren womb twenty-five years after He promised Abraham a son.

God provides a substitute ram in place of the offering of Isaac.

God Reveals

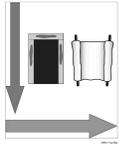
A gap exists between the promises of God and the fulfillment of His promises. During this gap man must learn to walk with God by faith (Hebrews 11:6).

Things are never as they appear in the natural realm. Circumstances are the least reliable gauge to spiritual reality.

God takes a man as he is and changes him over time as He orchestrates his circumstances, teaches him to trust Him, and demonstrates His covenant faithfulness.

Flawed people do not prevent God from fulfilling His promises; rather, He receives great glory for accomplishing His purposes through unlikely participants.

The Exodus Era



Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

(Approximately 470 years—Ex. 12:40-41)

Over the next four hundred years, Abraham's descendants multiplied in Egypt; eventually, the attitude of the Egyptians changed and they forced them into slavery, as God had foretold Abraham. Abraham's descendants lived in Egypt for 400 years until the Egyptians treated them harshly and killed their baby boys because they were afraid of them. Abraham's children, the Israelites, called out to God in their misery. God heard their cry and raised up a deliverer named Moses. God sent ten plagues on the Egyptians until they released the Israelites. Each of the ten plagues showed God's power over the gods of Egypt, proving that God is more powerful than any idol or evil spirit. In the tenth plague, God promised to send death to every firstborn child in Egypt. He promised to spare any household that took a spotless lamb (The Passover Lamb), killed it, and put its blood on the doorposts of the house. The blood on the doorposts announced that death had already come to the house (through a substitute lamb). In this way, God delivered Israel out of Egypt. He parted the Red Sea and dried out the ground so that His people could walk across; He then brought the sea back to destroy the pursuing Egyptian army.

Israel spent forty years wandering in the wilderness because they refused to trust God, even though He brought them out of Egypt just as He promised. He provided food and water through miracles, but they complained about God anyway. He went before them by day "in a pillar of cloud to lead the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light."

In the first year of their travels, God gave Israel His laws, including the Ten Commandments, which He engraved on tablets of stone. He also gave them moral laws (especially the Ten Commandments), civil laws for societal function, and ceremonial laws (instructions about the tabernacle—Tent of Meeting, the priests, the sacrifices, the annual feasts of celebration such as the Passover, marriage and intermarriage, and the future). God instructed the people to have no other God but Him and not to make idols in the image of any earthly thing. God commanded that His people worship Him only.

While God was giving Moses the remainder of His laws, the Israelites turned away from God and called Moses' brother, Aaron, to make them an idol to worship. They wanted a god they could see. God told Moses that He would kill the Israelites because of their idol worship, but Moses stood between God and the people and asked Him to show them mercy. God punished them so they would stay away from idols, but God allowed them to live. After their sin, Moses guided the people to build the tabernacle, fulfill the priesthood, offer the sacrifices, and keep the celebrations.

God promised His people a Prophet like Moses who would someday lead His people. God also commanded that a golden container (box) be built to hold the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a bowl of the food that God had provided in the wilderness, and the rod of Aaron, God's priest. This container was the Ark of the Covenant, a physical symbol of God's presence among His people. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16), the blood of a slain goat was to be sprinkled on the lid (the mercy seat) to remind the people of sin's penalty (the blood of the innocent on behalf of the guilty).

God also gave Israel instructions for the future, when they would want a king. He raised up a leader to take them into the promised land—Moses' assistant Joshua. Before the Israelites went into the Promised Land, God gave them the Blessings and the Curses (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28), which they were to recite in the new land: blessings to enjoy the land and live in it forever if they followed and trusted God, and curses of drought and captivity from enemies if they turned from God to worship idols and evil spirits and commit sexual immorality.

Concerned about continuing Bible knowledge, God commanded Moses that the Book of the Law be read to the entire congregation once every seven years. He also spoke of the day when Israel would want a king like the peoples around them and instructed those future kings to write their own copy of the Book of the Law from which they were to read all the days of their life.

What does the Exodus Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God calls Moses to return to Egypt and lead Israel out of Egypt.

God gives Israel's commands, laws (ceremonial, moral, and dietary) to distinguish them from other peoples and to reveal their need of redemption. He instructs Moses to construct the Tent of Meeting so that He may dwell among them. He also designates the Levites to serve Him.

God Acts

God afflicts Egypt with ten plagues to induce them to release the nation of Israel to worship Him in the wilderness.

God divides the Red Sea to rescue Israel from the Egyptians and to drown the Egyptians.

God guards and guides Israel with a cloud by day and a fire by night.

God destroys the rebellious people in Israel's midst.

God establishes the Passover and the Day of Atonement as annual celebratory events to keep the promise of redemption before them.

God Reveals

God hears the cries of His people (even when they are oblivious of His attention) and raises up men to lead them out of their oppression.

God delights to dwell among and lead His people. He makes a way so that Holy God may dwell among unholy people (the Tent of Meeting).

While God works redemptively on behalf of His people, He also judges those who oppress them.

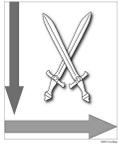
God gives Israel instructions regarding future scenarios and expects them to pass them to the following generations.

Bible literacy prepares God's people keep His promises of redemption before them and to embrace God's providential work in their lives.

Man needs laws to guide spiritual and social behavior. Laws do not change the heart but they establish righteous standards to reveal man's sinfulness and his need for salvation.

The Conquest Era

Joshua



(Approximately 50 years)

Under Joshua, God delivered the land into the hands of His people. He divided the land into twelve sections and led Israel to conquer the peoples of the land. God used Joshua to fulfill the promise that He had made to Abraham regarding the land of Canaan in Genesis 15.

Joshua's encounter with the Commander of the army of the LORD prepared him to lead Israel. During the early days of his leadership he built an altar to the Lord, gathered Israel, and read the Book of the Law to the entire assembly.

Israel's first battle (at Jericho) offered the nation an opportunity to see God demonstrate His power. God met with Joshua and gave Him precise instructions for taking the city—instructions that made no sense and required faith on his part. God had Israel march around the city walls for seven days and caused the walls to collapse at the sound of His people's shout on the seventh day. Out of this large walled city only one woman and her family were saved. Rahab exhibited extraordinary faith in the God of Israel because she had heard of His exploits for Israel to dry up the Red Sea as they left Egypt, provide for them in the wilderness for forty years, and protect them from the people on the other side of the Jordan River.

After conquering most of the Canaanites Joshua divides the land of Canaan among the twelve tribes.

Joshua loved God; he began his leadership role by exalting the Book of the Law of Moses (1:8) and celebrating the Passover (5:10), and ended his leadership by reciting Israel's history and God's faithfulness. He recorded His final exhortation in the Book of the Law of God (24:26). He lived his life in the shadow of God's Word. Joshua was faithful in his task and as long as Joshua was alive, the people followed the Lord. After he died, they began to worship the idols of the people who had lived in the land, and they turned away from God.

What does the Conquest Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God links Bible literacy to the spiritual vitality of Israel (1:8).

God establishes Himself as the Commander of the army of Israel.

God gives instruction that require faith in Him and demand obedience from them.

God Acts

God exhibits His power as He parts the Jordan River and destroys Jericho in a most unusual way.

God protects Rahab and her family when she places her trust in Him.

God destroys Achan and his family for Achan's disobedience.

God holds the sun in place while Joshua battles to protect the Gibeonites.

God divides the land of Canaan among the twelve tribes.

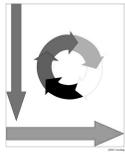
God Reveals

Godly leaders must mentor next-generation leaders by exalting Bible literacy and trust in the Living God. The majority of God's people are followers and need strong godly leaders to prevent them from drifting and disobeying God.

God rescues people who put their trust in Him, even if they are from pagan nations.

God allows His people to encounter enemies to teach them to rely upon Him and to demonstrate His power.

The Judges Era



Judges; Ruth

(Approximately 300 years)

Following the death of Joshua a new generation rose up who did not honor God nor follow His ways. Because the Israelites kept turning away from God to worship the idols of the people of the land, they spent the next 275 years in a series of sin cycles. They would worship idols (sin) and God would give them into the hands of their enemies (slavery and oppression). They would live under oppression until they finally humbled themselves and cried out to God for help (supplication). In response to their humility, God would raise up a judge to deliver them from their enemies (salvation). As long as the judge was alive, the people followed God and lived in safety (peace), but when the judge died, the people turned back to idols, and God gave them into their enemies' hands again until they called on Him.

Seven times, over this 275-year period, the Israelites turned away from God, and God raised up fourteen judges (notable judges include a woman named Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Eli, and Samuel) to deliver them when they cried out for mercy. Their times of oppression lasted from seven to forty years. The people also asked several of the judges to reign over them as king, fulfilling the word that God had promised Moses (when they would ask for a king—Deuteronomy 17:14ff). Ruth and Naomi's story occurs during one of the sin cycles. Naomi flees Israel during famine and returns when she hears that bread again is in the land. This coincides with the provisions in the Blessings and Curses listed in Deut. 28. Ruth has a son by Boaz (descendant of Judah). Their great-grandson will become Israel's second king.

Horrible sexual sin and crimes occur during this period of Israel's history, as well as a corrupt priesthood (even Moses' own grandson—Judges 18:30).

What does the Judges Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God uses oppression and oppressors to get the attention of His people and to turn them to Him.

God Acts

God raises up enemies to oppress His people in hopes that they will turn to Him.

God raises men and women as prophets, judges, and military leaders. God not only gives leadership roles to women but He brings unlikely women (and men) into His story.

God Reveals

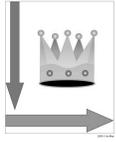
Spiritual declension occurs among God's people in the absence of a godly priesthood and the proclamation of God's Word.

Man in his pride will live under oppression for many years before he humbles himself and cries out to God.

Man would rather live under oppression than to have God reign over him as King.

God responds to the humble cries of His people.

The Kingdom Era



1&2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-11; 1 Chronicles; 2 Chronicles 1-9; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Songs; Psalms

(Approximately 120 years)

At the end of the time of the judges, God gave a barren woman, Hannah, a son whom she named Samuel. Samuel ruled as Israel's last judge and first post-Judges prophet. He anointed Israel's first king in 1051 BC. Saul, the king, was everything the people thought they wanted in a king: he was handsome, a head taller than other men, and he came from a prosperous family. While the fulfillment of the people's request, Saul actually proved the truth that man sees the outside, but God looks at the heart. Early in Saul's reign, God told Samuel to tell Saul to destroy all the Amalekites, a tribe who had attacked Israel in the wilderness four hundred years ago. Had Saul taken the time to read the Book of the Law he would have read about the prophesied destruction of the Amalekites (Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 25:17). Instead of obeying God, Saul spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, and he spared the king, Agag. When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul blamed the people for his disobedience; this defiance cost him the kingdom.

God then raised up a shepherd boy named David, a descendant of Judah, the youngest of eight sons, who had known God from his youth and had experienced God's deliverance and power as he defended his father's sheep from a lion and a bear. On the outside, David did not look like a king on the outside, but God looks at the heart. One day, when all of David's brothers were at war in Saul's army, David's father sent David to see how his other sons were doing. David obeyed his father. When David reached the army, he saw that Saul and his army were terrorized by Goliath, a mighty warrior in the Philistine army. Through faith in God, David volunteered to fight this giant, and he killed Goliath. The people of Israel fell in love with David, and Saul became jealous of David's success. For the next thirteen years, Saul tried to kill David, until Saul himself died battling the Philistines.

David became king in 1011 BC, reigned for forty years, and successfully led Israel in many battles. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to the city of David, Jerusalem. He loved God, loved God's Word, and wanted to build God a temple as a permanent dwelling place for God among His people. God did not allow David to build the temple, because he was a man of war, but God said that David's son Solomon would build the temple, and that God would build David an everlasting house—a king who would sit on his throne forever. David spent the rest of his life collecting materials to build the temple.

When God gave Moses the Law, four hundred years earlier, God instructed the people on the behavior of a king. The king could not go back to Egypt for horses to build himself an army, the king could not be a foreigner, could not take multiple wives, and could not amass wealth for himself. The king also had to write a copy of the Book of the Law in his own hand and read the law every day of his life. David loved the Law of God, meditated on it, and wrote many psalms (songs) about God.

Although David loved the LORD and His Word, he took a vacation from God and sinned grievously by committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his mighty men. He then staged the man's death and married Bathsheba. God confronted David through his prophet, Nathan, and David repented in deep brokenness. The first son of their adulterous relationship died but their second son, Solomon, succeeded his father to the throne of Israel.

Solomon recognized early on that being Israel's king required the manifest wisdom of God; when God appeared to him and offered him whatever he wanted, Solomon requested wisdom. God honored his request, and God's wisdom upon Solomon's life distinguished him among all the kings of the earth. The books of Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes are records of Solomon's great wisdom. Solomon fulfilled his father's wish and built a temple for the Living God. Solomon, however, did not follow the regulation given for kings regarding the taking of

many wives. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines and as a result, his heart turned away from God.

What does the Kingdom Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

Hundreds of years earlier God promised that His people would cast off His rule and desire kings like those around them.

Hundreds of years earlier God spoke to Israel about placing His Name permanently in their midst.

Before Israel ever had a king, God had already given instruction as to the behavior of the king of His people.

God spoke to the kings through His law and His prophets.

God Acts

God develops the man that He will establish on the throne of Israel in the sheepfolds of obscurity and the campfires of running from King Saul.

God emboldens and empowers the one who trusts in Him completely.

God forgives the grievous sins of the broken and contrite.

God Reveals

God and man differ on the qualities necessary to lead His people.

Hardness of heart and rebellion rob men of leadership effectiveness.

God fulfills promises made to individuals in the past by raising up people to lead in the present.

God's promise to David that he would be king of Israel depended on God's activity.

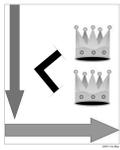
Spiritual declension occurs in the lives of those who neglect their God-given responsibilities and God's Word.

Even those who walk with God are capable of doing the most heinous acts. Their response, when confronted over their sin, reveals their true attitude toward God.

Leaders need the wisdom of God upon their lives to carry out their tasks.

When man disregards God's righteous standards, he always suffers from the consequences.

The Divided Kingdom Era



2 Kings, 2 Chronicles 10-36; Obadiah; Joel; Micah; Isaiah; Jonah; Amos; Hosea; Nahum; Zephaniah; Jeremiah; Habakkuk

(Israel - 209 years; Judah - 345 years)

When Solomon became king in 971 BC, he spent the first seven years of his reign building God's temple. Afterwards, he married foreign women, amassed wealth, built an army, and began to follow his wives' idols instead of the living God. He violated the regulations regarding a king's character that God had given Israel through Moses in the wilderness (Deut. 17). At the end of his reign, Jeroboam, one of Solomon's generals, led a rebellion and then fled to Egypt. Solomon's son, Rehoboam, became king. When the people asked him to reduce their taxes, he listened to the advice of his peers instead of the counsel of the old men. His threat to add to their burden created a mutinous situation. Jeroboam came back from Egypt and took advantage of the people's anger, and ten tribes broke away from Rehoboam to follow him instead, dividing the kingdom into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah.

To keep control of his ten tribes, Jeroboam established a new religion, based on the worship of idols he had brought from Egypt. He mixed idol worship with the worship of the true God. Using the feast days and sacrifices of Israel to worship idols, he established two places to worship these idols, and he established a priesthood not based on God's law. Because Jeroboam led the people to worship idols, he fell under God's curse, and his whole family died. Forever after, he was known as "Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who made Israel sin," and his name became a mark of shame. Some families from each of the 10 tribes returned to the southern kingdom to worship the true God.

Nineteen kings ruled after Jeroboam in the Northern Kingdom of Israel; each king acted wickedly and worshiped idols. God sent the northern kingdom prophet after prophet (Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Jonah, and Amos), who performed miracles and called people to turn from idols back to the living God. The people never returned to God; thus, God raised up the Assyrians against Israel and sent them into captivity away from their land in 722 BC. This captivity fulfilled the promises that God had made Israel in the Blessings and Cursings.

In the Southern kingdom of Judah, the people followed God as long as they had a king who followed God and loved His Word. One of the kings of Judah, however, married a wicked princess from Israel, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the most wicked king and queen from the north. This princess influenced the king and his people to follow idols, and God sent prophet after prophet (Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, Habakkuk) to call His people back to Him. These prophets prophesied of a righteous king from David's line who would rule His people in righteousness and save His people from their sins. The prophet Jeremiah further prophesied that the nation of Judah's sins would send them into captivity for seventy years, that the temple would be destroyed, and that they would serve their enemies. Instead of turning away from idols and to God, the people listened to the false prophets and continued in their sin. Jeremiah also prophesied of a time when God would write His law on people's hearts, not just in the Books of the Law. Isaiah also prophesied of a coming Messiah.

What does the Divided-Kingdom Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God warns Israel about the ramifications of idolatry and disobedience through the Blessings and Curses given through Moses hundreds of years before they fall into sin.

Major prophets speak for God in this era.

God Acts

God withholds rain, destroys prophets of Baal, provides miraculously for Elijah, and does great miracles through Elisha as a rebuke to rebellious Israel.

God raises up nations to oppress Israel.

God sends prophets to call His people to repentance.

God Reveals

Rulers use idol worship to bind people's hearts to themselves.

Good kings lead Israel to worship the true God, while evil kings lead Israel's hearts away from God.

God continues to pursue a relationship with Israel by sending prophets to urge His people to repent and turn to Him.

The Captivity Era



Lamentations; Ezekiel; Daniel

(70 years)

In 586 BC, the king of Babylon invaded Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom of Judah for the third and final time, and took many of the Jews captive to his capitol city of Babylon. In the midst of this turmoil, God raised up and spoke by prophets to lead His people. Among the captives of Babylon, Ezekiel prophesied about God's return to His people. In the royal courts of Babylon, Daniel prophesied about the Son of Man who would rule in Heaven. In Judah, Jeremiah prophesied about God's promise to return his people to their land after 70 years. He called the people to trust God and not to run away back to Egypt. Jeremiah told the people that God had plans of peace for them rather than calamity, to give them a future and a hope (Jer. 29:11).

What does the Captivity Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God promises to bless those who surrender to the Babylonians and to bring them back to Judah after seventy years.

God Acts

God raises up prophets who faithfully warn Israel of imminent judgment.

God raises up a fierce nation to besiege and destroy Jerusalem and to take her people into captivity.

God Reveals

God keeps His promises of judgment.

God shows mercy to His people even in the midst of judgment.

God does not forget His people; rather, He sends prophets to speak to them and give them comfort.

Out of the darkest days of Israel's history come some of the brightest promises of redemption.

The Return Era



Esther; Ezra; Nehemiah; Haggai; Zechariah; Malachi

(Approximately 85 years)

At the end of the 70-year period, God raised up a king named Cyrus (prophesied by Isaiah). He sent the first wave of exiles back to Jerusalem—just as God had said—to rebuild the city and the temple. He sent with them the vessels of gold and silver that Nebuchadnezzar had taken when he captured the city. When the people grew weary of the work, God spoke through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to call them to finish the temple. Jewish captives living in Persia were threatened by a powerful person in King Ahasuerus' government, so God raised up a Jewish girl, Esther, as the queen of the Persians, to save her people from certain death. God also raised up Ezra, a faithful priest, to return His people to the land He had promised Abraham. Ezra, along with the godly governor Nehemiah, led the people to observe the Book of the Law, to worship God, to rebuild the wall and the city, and God protected them from their enemies by His power. The hold of idols on the people was broken. For the rest of Israel's history, they never again turned to images made by man; however, the prophet Amos (prophesying to Israel) had warned the people that there would be a famine of the hearing of the Word of God (Amos 8:11). The last prophet of this period, Malachi, called the priests to honor God with their sacrifices and called the people to honor God with their tithes

What does the Return Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God raises up prophets who faithfully warn Israel of judgment and to prophesy of future events.

God Acts

God raises up leaders who bear His heart for His people.

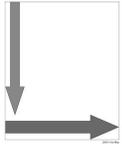
God accomplishes His purposes in the geo-political realm.

God Reveals

God revives the hearts of His people when their leaders teach His Word and they obey His word.

God places people in strategic places to advocate on behalf of His people.

The Silent Era



(The Inter-testament period)

(Approximately 400 years)

The last era before the coming of the Messiah claims the title, “Silent Era,” because the Hebrew canon closed after the writing and preaching of the prophet Malachi. For over 400 years, God did not speak to His people, either through the prophets or through other Scriptures; yet His silence did not equal inactivity. God provisionally worked to prepare the way for the King through various empires that ruled even as He fulfilled the words of Amos 8:11.

History of the Silent Years (430 B.C.-4 B.C.)

Just as Daniel predicted (Daniel 2, 7), four major empires rose and fell. Nebuchadnezzar conquered the known world during Daniel’s day, but his empire lasted only about a century (626-539 b.c.) before it fell to the “Medes and the Persians” (Dan 5:28). The Persian Empire spread from Egypt to India and northward toward Greece; this empire survived for about two centuries, but eventually Alexander the Great defeated the Persians as he extended the third kingdom of Daniel—the Greek empire—into the world. His early death brought about a division of his territory, but not before the process of Hellenization influenced the known world. The universal use of the Greek language, the Greek standards of weight and measurement, and Greek coinage affected even Israel.

The Seleucids, successors of Alexander who eventually ruled Israel, succeeded in alienating the Jewish people, especially when the Syrian Antiochus IV Epiphanes offered a pig to the Olympian god Zeus in the Holy of Holies. His actions ignited the Maccabean revolt that resulted in a period of independence. This freedom survived until Rome—the fourth empire—sent her armies to capture Jerusalem and to establish Roman rule through governors granted power by the Emperor.

Trends of the Silent Years

Judaism changed dramatically during the silent years. The former idolatries that had driven the nation into exile were no longer tolerated. Chasidim (“separate ones”) began to demand purity and a return to God’s Word; they may have been the precursors of the Pharisees. Synagogues became the mainstay of spiritual life in the villages, though the Temple held priority in Jerusalem. Courts called Sanhedrin consisting of 23 wise men (an uneven number to guard against a tie) adjudicated in the smaller towns, and the great Sanhedrin (council of 70 plus the high priest) ruled over the nation in Jerusalem. The Jewish historian Josephus noted that the Sadducees and the Pharisees had existed since the time of the Maccabees.

The Pharisees devoted themselves to the Law, led in the synagogues, and seemed to have the support of the majority of the nation. They believed in angels (in fact, angelology—the study of angels and the resultant belief in their mediatorial work—became a major characteristic of Judaism), resurrection, and the coming Messiah. The Sadducees allied themselves with the governing powers, ruled the Temple, accepted only the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures, believed in neither angels nor spirits, and denied a future resurrection. The controversy between these two groups occasionally spilled out into the open, but always existed as a subtext for all that transpired in the nation. The Herodians were a Jewish political party allied with the family of Herod (four generations ruled in the land), usually siding with the Sadducees to protect Rome’s interests and to preserve Rome’s peace (and their position of authority).

The Mishna and the Talmud began to develop during this era as an extended commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures. These books increased the actual commands to which the people were subject; each interpreter added his accretions to the whole, and the resultant weight of the laws burdened the people with over 600 regulations for daily conduct.

Importance of the Silent Years

This tenth era prepared the way for the coming Messiah in several ways. After the Babylonian captivity, the Jews began to speak Aramaic; Hellenization brought a common language for the world, and the Jews of the Diaspora (those scattered throughout the world) spoke Greek. These linguistic changes relaxed the Jewish attitude toward the Scripture and necessitated the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into the Septuagint (LXX). The Septuagint (“Seventy”) supposedly was translated by 70 scholars in 70 days, hence the name.

Rome paved the way by building the Roman road system and establishing the Pax Romana, the Roman peace. Apostles and missionaries could travel unimpeded swiftly throughout the empire, preaching the good news in a language (Greek) that the common people could understand.

Judaism produced a “vast bulk of intertestamental literature,” but “divine guidance kept the right books within the compass of Scripture. Eventually and gradually, Judaism manifested itself in the ‘Three Pillars of Judaism’: the tripartite OT canon of Law, Prophets, and Writings; the synagogue, with its new, liturgical, and entirely nonsacrificial worship; and Rabbinism, which culminated in the Talmud and Midrash.” The religious minutiae of the law created an unbearable burden that convinced men of their failure but offered no hope for true freedom. The temple became a place of corruption and the synagogue became a place of condemnation.

These religious trends and cultural changes came not as accidents but rather under the providential hand of God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. It is no wonder that Paul could write to the Galatians that Christ was born “in the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4).

(This section on the Silent Years was written by Stan May, PhD)

What does the Silent Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God spoke about the time when Israel would experience a period of famine of hearing from God (Amos 8:11).

God Acts

God is instrumental in the rise and fall of empires and nations.

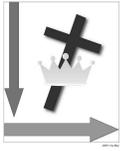
God always has a faithful remnant who trust in Him.

God Reveals

Though God is silent, He is not inactive.

God works in the political realm, elevating and demoting people for His redemptive purposes.

The Gospel Era



Matthew; Mark; Luke; John

(Approximately 33 years)

The Silent Era concluded when an angel of God appeared to an old priest and told him that he and his barren wife would have a child “who would turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God,” as the prophet Isaiah had prophesied 700 years ago. When this priest’s wife was several months pregnant, the angel of God appeared to a young virgin engaged to a godly man named Joseph, and promised this girl, Mary, that she would have a child by the Holy Spirit who would save His people from their sins. His name would be Jesus. Mary believed God and gave birth to a son whom she named Jesus.

Jesus lived a sinless life for thirty years as a carpenter. When Jesus was about thirty, his cousin, John the Baptist, the son of the priest, began preaching in the wilderness about the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world and establish the kingdom of God. Jesus came to John and asked John to baptize Him into the Jordan to fulfill all righteousness; when Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit came upon Him as a dove, and God Himself spoke from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

After Jesus was tempted for forty days in the wilderness and resisted the devil, He began to do miracles. As Isaiah had prophesied, Jesus gave hearing to the deaf, sight to the blind, freedom to the captives, and preached the good news to the poor. Jesus healed thousands, fed thousands, forgave sins, cast out demons, and proclaimed the kingdom of God. He did everything that pleased God, His Father, and He committed no sin, making Him the perfect, innocent Lamb of God, spotless just like the lamb sacrificed at the Exodus.

Jesus called twelve men to Himself and trained them to make followers and to teach them everything He had commanded. Part of Jesus’ preparation for His disciples was to prepare them for his death for sinners. Commoners and sinners loved Jesus, but the religious crowd (the Pharisees and Sadducees) rejected Him. After three years of threats and accusations, these religious leaders arrested, falsely accused, and tried Jesus as a criminal. They delivered to the Roman governor who mocked, shamed, and beat Him, and then crucified Him on a cross between two thieves. Though He had never sinned, He died on the cross as a sin offering, as Isaiah prophesied, “We all like sheep have gone astray, we have turned each of us to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (53:6). Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, just as He had promised.

Jesus, who knew no sin, became sin for us that we might become God’s righteousness. The perfect Lamb of God died and took away the sins of the world. He defeated the devil by His death; Jesus crushed the head of the serpent!

Jesus, Legalists, Sinners, and Women

Jesus Christ reached out to both men and women who were condemned and rejected by the religious establishment. Harlots experienced His forgiveness, demon-possessed men and women were set free, sick men and women were healed, and widows experienced His care. Jesus’ relationship with sinners fulfilled his mission “to seek and to save that which is lost.” Their response to His extravagant love was demonstrated on numerous occasions, such as when women washed his feet and dried them with their hair or when they poured expensive perfume upon His feet. Women were the first ‘evangelists’ carrying the good news of His resurrection to his disciples.

Jesus reached out to the ‘sinners’ of His day. While Solomon had said, “There is not a just man on the earth who does not sin,” the Jews considered certain occupations (such as tax-collectors) and certain types of people (lepers, harlots) to be sinners. Jesus reached out to these people, ministered to them, preached the good news of salvation to them, and even ate

with them. When the religious crowd criticized Him for these acts, He responded, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

At the same time, He regularly scolded those who believed that they were righteous through their works or that they did not need a Savior because of their status. These legalists (people who believe that they can achieve or maintain righteousness through works) received Jesus' most fearsome condemnation because they saw themselves as better than others. When Jesus healed the man born blind, He rejoiced that those who are blind see, but sorrowed that those who think they see are blind. The legalists who heard Him asked, "Are we blind also?" He responded, "If you would say you were blind, you would see; but because you say, 'we see,' your sin remains" (John 9:41).

Jesus invested much of his last eighteen months preparing his disciples for his death and resurrection. He commissioned them to take the good news of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the world.

What does the Gospel Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

Every promise and picture of redemption given by God throughout the Old Testament is completely fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

God Acts

Jesus heals people of their diseases, delivers them from demons, forgives their sin, and fulfills every Messianic promise.

Jesus by His death seeks and saves all that was lost in Adam's fall.

God permits those in authority to crucify Jesus Christ and He raises Him from the dead.

God Reveals

God may take a long time to fulfill His promises, but He always keeps them.

God demands a payment for sin, but He also provides the payment that He demands.

God uses the wickedness of man to accomplish His redemptive purposes.

Legalists refuse to come to God His way. Theirs is a works-based righteousness.

Sinners who recognize their need of redemption come to Jesus and find forgiveness in Him and new life in Him.

The Church Era



The Book of Acts; the Epistles; Hebrews

(Began at Pentecost and continues today)

During the time when Jesus taught His disciples He foretold of the day when He would form His disciples into communities called churches. These communities would be built on the confession that Jesus is the Christ. When Peter confessed Jesus as Christ, Jesus responded with the words, “And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Churches are composed of believers who confess that Jesus is the Christ.

Pentecost ushered in the Church age. The band of disciples met in the upper room for prayer and the Holy Spirit of God came upon them empowering them to boldly proclaim Christ as risen from the dead, repentance toward God and faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

These new believers spoke so often about Jesus that they were called Christians. Just as Jesus had promised, they met together in communities called churches. These churches were not buildings but rather baptized believers in Jesus who united for the specific purposes of worshiping Jesus as Lord, teaching and training His followers in His Word, fellowshiping together in this new life, and proclaiming His message to their neighbors and the nations. God gives believers spiritual gifts so that they can serve Him in the church—all the gifts build up the church.

God gifted certain men as Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip His new people as they grew in grace. These gifted leaders taught the Word to the followers, guarded the new churches from false teaching, and proclaimed Christ’s message to those who knew Him not. God raised special servants, James, Peter, John, Paul and Jude, who wrote letters to these new churches and their leaders. These letters helped the new believers understand God’s purposes, dealt with error, explained spiritual warfare, the role of women, etc., in the new churches, and taught clear truths about the person and work of Jesus. Paul pictured these new churches as a temple where God dwells, as a field where God works, as His body with many members but one Head, and as His bride.

The earliest stories about Jesus passed orally from one believer to the next. They remembered accurately the life, the teachings, the death and the resurrection of Jesus. Eventually God the Holy Spirit guided certain Apostles or the companion of Apostles to preserve these Gospels in written form. Matthew wrote to the Jews of Jesus the Messiah and King of the Jews, Mark wrote to the common people of Jesus the Servant, Luke wrote to the cultured Gentiles of Jesus the Son of Man, and John wrote of the Savior of the world, the Son of God.

What does the Church Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God promised Abraham that through Him all the families of the earth would be blessed; believers in Jesus are the heirs of that promise (Gal. 3:14).

God promised the coming of a new covenant that would change people’s hearts.

God promised the advent of the Holy Spirit.

God Acts

God poured out His Spirit at Pentecost.

God opened up the hearts of people to respond to the good news of His Son Jesus.

God established His dominion in the world through His church.

God Reveals

Redeemed men and women are empowered by the Holy Spirit to manifest Christ in their individual lives and in their corporate lives to a lost world.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for salvation to anyone who will believe.

The church exists as Christ's body on earth.

The church functions by worshiping God through Jesus, equipping God's people to live for Jesus, and reaching to unbelievers to make known to them the love of Jesus.

Individual members submit to the work of Christ in His body for the mutual good of the church; they use their gifts and talents for Him in the body.

Churches who fulfill Jesus' purposes glorify God as a working body, a beautiful temple, and a lovely bride—all image-bearers of Christ.

The Missions Era



The Book of Acts; the Epistles; Hebrews

(Stephen's martyrdom begins the persecution and dispersion of the church. The Missions Era will continue until the end of time)

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He issued one final instruction to His followers: "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all things I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He also gave one final promise, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Forty days after His ascension, as the believers were meeting together, the Holy Spirit came on them in power, giving them the ability to speak boldly about Jesus. They spoke about Jesus to Israelites from many nations, people of other nationalities, religious leaders, kings, governors, and even the government of the empire. God fulfilled His promise He had spoken through the prophet Jeremiah to put His law in believers' minds and to write it on their hearts. Jesus' followers took His message to Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth in their day. His followers went to the whole known world proclaiming the good news of His death for sinners and His resurrection with power that proved His defeat of sin and death.

Peter and some of His other followers took His good news to the Jews. Philip, an early follower, shared the good news of Jesus with a man from Africa, who then took the good news to his own people. Thomas, another follower, went east with the good news, eventually establishing a church in India. Paul, an apostle chosen out of time, met Jesus on the road to Damascus as he was traveling to arrest Jesus' followers and became one of Jesus' greatest workers, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ and planting churches throughout Asia Minor (Southern Europe) and the rest of the Roman Empire.

The Mission Era continues to this today and the Great Commission still stands to be obeyed by all followers of Jesus Christ. Churches that are not actively seeking to fulfill the Great Commission are already dying.

What does the Missions Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

The proclamation of the Gospel message convicts men of their need of Christ and His forgiveness.

The proclamation of the name of Jesus fulfills the promise of Abraham that in His seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

God Acts

God raises up men and women to take the Gospel message to people who have never heard.

God loves the world so much that He sent His Son and continues to send His servants to all the world so that they may know Him.

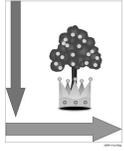
God Reveals

The Holy Spirit enables and emboldens men and women to follow Jesus Christ and to take His Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed people turn from their sin and trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Persecution frequently follows Gospel proclamation.

The End Times Era



The Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ

(The end of time and the new beginning)

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, suffered a great deal of persecution because of the good news of Jesus. In his last years, he received a vision from God. This vision, the Revelation, revealed Jesus in His glory and told of the new heavens and new earth, the judgment to come, the fulfillment of His promises regarding the people of Israel, the return and eternal kingdom of Christ, the salvation of the church, and the complete victory over the evil one—the crushing of the head of the serpent.

John's final vision in Revelation 21 reveals the New Jerusalem where there is no more temple—God is the Temple; no more Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—Jesus is the Tree of Life; no more darkness—Jesus is the Light.

What does the End Times Era reveal about God?

God Speaks

God reveals the judgment of God poured out on unredeemed sinners and the wicked one. He also welcomes the church—those whose robes have been washed white in the Lamb's blood to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

God Acts

God will destroy the world and cast sinners and the host of wickedness into the lake of fire. All things are made new.

God Reveals

The judgment of God upon sin, sinners, Satan, demons, and the world as we know it should motivate believers to live joyful, sacrificial, and holy lives.

Confidence in Christ's ultimate victory gives hope to believers when they face persecution during hard times.