



Three Rivers Fellowship

The Clock of Dispensations

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1. Abstract

The working out of the dispensations of Scripture - the righteous of the Gentiles, elect Israel, and the Body of Christ - comprise the great master clock of all Scripture and God's dealings with all His Elects. When correlated with the preceding clocks, important information is generated: the Body of Christ and its program is precisely the gap between Israel's Second and Third Generations; and the Body of Christ will oversee the angelic restoration of elect Israel to the Land and the establishment of her future empire. It will be seen that this clock, particularly the Body dispensation, reveals and completes all of God's decrees concerning His Elects.

2. Importance of the Dispensational Clock

When discussing the Clock of Dispensations, it should be remembered that a Dispensation is NOT a time period, but rather each dispensation works itself out in time. The Clock of Dispensations addresses the issue of how the Dispensations are *related* to time or *how they work themselves out* in time. As we briefly show below, a "dispensation" is a salvation economy.

If the Clock of Generations is a keystone in God's great prophetic calendar, then the Clock of Dispensations is its capstone. The importance of the Clock of Dispensations is seen in that it is the culmination of God's dealings with His Elects, and provides the missing information for Israel's program. The prophets had wondered about the time between the Second and Third Generation; it is the Clock of Dispensations (in particular the Body Dispensation) that reveals this wonderful nugget. Notice that all the preceding clocks stopped in time (before or at the end of the Second Generation), but the Clock of Dispensations "just keeps on ticking" - it is the Theological Timex Clock! This fact reveals that it is this Clock that provides a complete chronology of God's dealing with His Elects providing the missing element in Israel's program as mentioned above and proved below.

3. Definitions

The Greek word for *dispensation* is the compound word οἰκονομία from οἶκος, meaning *house* (or *household*) and νόμος, meaning *law* or *management*. Thus, οἰκονομία means *house law* or *household management*. A complete concordance follows: Luke 16:2-4; 1 Cor 9:17; Eph 1:10; 3:2; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 1:4.

οἰκονομία is the very Greek word we get our English word *economy* or *economics*. In this regard, and more to the point, since the context is God's salvation plan, when we talk of "dispensationalism" we are talking about God's *Salvation Economies* designed to manage the affairs of His Elects (Gentile, Jew, and Body of Christ).

Thus, a dispensation is much more than a time period, in fact it is an entire economic structure for each of God's elect. A dispensation as we will briefly discuss below includes an entire "eternal hope" and "law" that each member of a given dispensation is compelled by regeneration to obediently seek. The notion that there is no law today for

the Body of Christ is to misunderstand passages such as Rom 10:4 and to hold to the heretical doctrine of Antinomianism.

Since we are briefly describing the Clock of Dispensations, we shall simplify the initial presentation of the dispensations of Scripture and set forth a set of Propositions to begin the discussion.

4. Propositions

To simplify the process of identifying and defining the Dispensations of Scripture, we have set up a series of propositions to quickly get us into the discussion. Other outlines discuss the Biblical Dispensations in detail.

To begin discussing the Clock of Dispensations, we must first identify the Biblical Dispensations and to do that we have to examine the method by which we identify and define the Dispensations that are a fundamental part of Scriptures' Theological Framework.

Not only are the Covenants of God part of His eternal plan and thinking, but so are the Dispensations that make up God's Covenant of Grace. In this way we are attempting to "think God's thoughts after Him".

Proposition 1

There is one redemptive Covenant of Sovereign Grace. In this one covenant there are three dispensations:

1. The Body Dispensation
2. The Jewish Dispensation
3. The Gentile Dispensation

In each of the dispensations is all the fullness of the one covenant. Graphically, you may wish to think of this covenant to dispensation relationship as seen below.

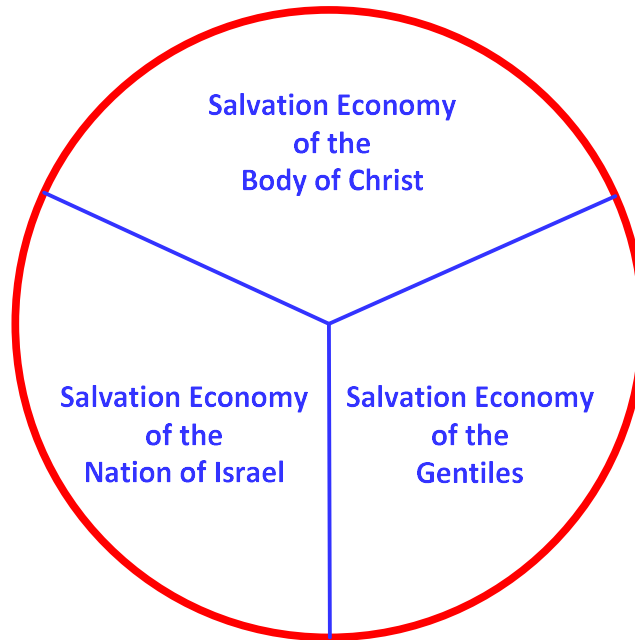


Figure 1. The One Covenant of Sovereign Grace Comprising Three Dispensations

As can be graphically seen the One Covenant of Sovereign Grace comprises the three Redemptive Dispensations, each of which exemplify the fullness of the One Covenant.¹

Proposition 2

The objects of the one covenant comprise the one redeemed elect. In this elect are three households:

1. The Body of Christ
2. The Elect Nation of Israel
3. The Righteous Gentile Nations

God's Sovereign Grace is manifested in each of these Households of God's Redeemed Elect (Gentile Nations, Israel, Body of Christ).

The one redeemed elect comprises three households, where each household displays the grace of God. In this fundamental construction the Trinity is again reflected by the very makeup and relationship shared between the one Elect and three Households of God. Thus, God's Elect is a "many and a one", displaying both the unity of the elect and the diversity of the households.

¹ By properly defining the Dispensations of Scripture we saved both Covenantalism from a Unitarian-Like, monolithic eschatology, and Dispensationalism from an Arminian and arbitrary eschatology. For an overview, see Robert Walsh, *Dispensationalism: A Straightforward Approach*, TRF, Pittsburgh, PA, TRF Web Site, 2020.

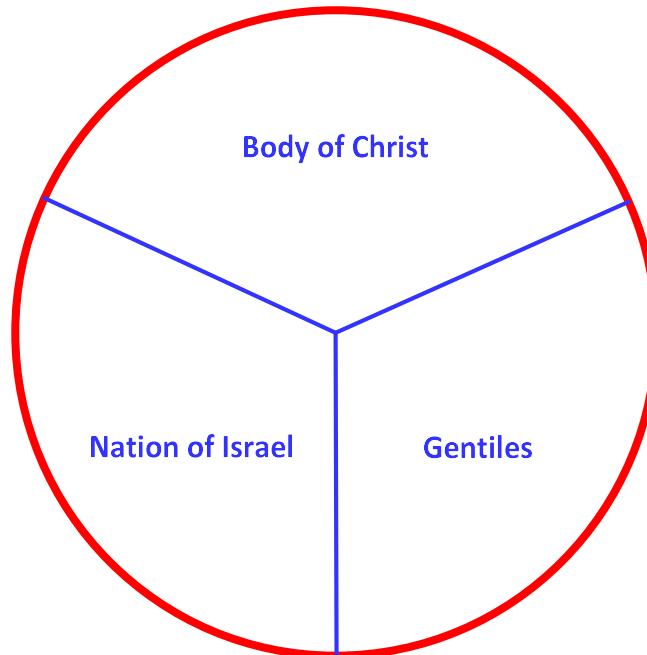


Figure 2. The Households of God within the One Redeemed Elect of God

Proposition 3

To determine a dispensation, first determine its household.

This proposition simply states that the dispensation an individual is in is a function of the household to which he/she belongs.

Put in the form of an equation:

$$\text{Dispensation} = \text{Function (Household)}$$

Determine the household, you immediately get the dispensation to which the individual belongs.

Proposition 4

To determine a household, first identify its hope.

This proposition simply states that the household to which the individual belongs is a function of the hope to which he/she is saved.

Put in the form of an equation:

$$\text{Household} = \text{Function (Hope)}$$

Determine one's eternal hope and you immediately get the household to which one belongs.

Proposition 5

To determine the history of a given dispensation, determine God's administration of that household.

Each household not only has its specific eternal hope, but each household has its specific law in which each member of that household is compelled by regeneration to obey. Though not often found in theological discussions, each dispensation comprises both a hope and a law. Gentile Law (sometimes referred to as Noahide Law, Jewish Law as expressed by Moses and the Prophets and later strengthened by Israel's Messiah, and finally what might be called Pauline Law (referred to as the Law of Christ (Gal 6:2)).

When we consider both the hope and the law of an individual saint, we find we get the entire dispensation or household management (included in the word οἰκονομία = household management).

Thus, we can summarize the unity and diversity of the Covenant of Sovereign Grace as a Unified Collection of Dispensations:

$$\text{Dispensation} = \text{Function} (\text{Household} = \text{Function} (\text{Hope}))$$

Note the functional embedding of the hope. It can also be shown that the Hope infers the Law to which one owns, and the Law infers the Hope to which one is called. Thus, we have a bijective relationship between the hope of the individual and their law.

$$\text{Hope} \Leftrightarrow \text{Law}$$

If we consider the relationship of the Dispensations to Hope and Household, we get the following transitive relationship.

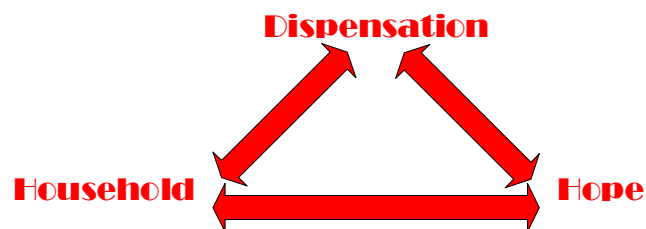


Figure 3. The Bijectivity of the Dispensations of the One Covenant

Thus, no matter where we jump into the equations, we can always get the whole picture. This is the DNA of God's Salvation Plan: Given the DNA one can construct the entire plan. There is much more that can be said on this score, especially when we bring "faith" into the picture, since one's specific faith can be shown to be a function of the individual's "hope". And then we can bring in "love" and complete the glorious plan and foundation of God's Trinitarian Love for His Elects.

The sections below briefly examine each dispensation of the Inscripturated text.

5. Gentile Dispensation

The Righteous Gentile Nations are identified by the Father's Decree with the Son as their Perfect Man, the Last Adam. The Righteous Gentiles inherit the entire earth and manage its remarkable environment as they are interceded for by the elect nation of Israel.

5.1. The Hope of the Righteous Gentiles

The Elect Gentiles identified by the Father's Decree with the Son as the Perfect Man and as the Last Adam - their hope is to fill the earth and live in righteousness under the administrative/priestly authority of righteous Israel.

Gen 1:26; 9:1; Job 19:25,26; Isa 2:1-3; 19:23-25; Zech 10:23; Rev 21:24-26

5.2. The Working Out of the Gentile Dispensation

The Gentile Dispensation (i.e., Gentile Household Management) was first revealed in Gen 1:26. Its first recorded member was righteous Abel (Gen 4:2,4,8; Heb 11:4) and included such Antediluvians as: Seth, Enoch, and Noah.

The Gentile Dispensation continued through the Old Testament period with example members such as:

- Job - Job 19:25,26
- Gibeonites – Josh 9
- King Hiram of Tyre - 1 Kings 5:1-8
- Ninevites - Jonah 1:2; 3:1-10; 4:11

The Gentile Dispensation continued through the New Testament with such member examples as:

- The Centurion - Mat 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
- The Canaanite (Syrophenician) Woman - Mat 15:21-28; Mk 7:25-30
- The Ethiopian Eunuch - Acts 8:26-39
- Cornelius the Italian - Acts 10:1-48

The Gentile Dispensation comes to an end in Acts 28 with the Pauline Decree - Acts 28:15-31.cp. Rom 11:25. See below under the Jewish Dispensation.

The Gentile Dispensation resumes after the Rapture of the Body of Christ and continues for ever - Rev 21:24-26.

6. Jewish Dispensation

Elect Israel identified by the Father's Decree with the Son as Messianic Lord of all of the Earth - their hope is to live in the Land promised to Abraham and govern and bless the righteous Gentiles. Israel does this under the righteous authority of the elect angels.

6.1. The Hope of Israel

1. To Bless the Gentile Nations (a channel of blessing to the Gentiles) - Heb 7:7
2. To be the supreme political nation - Amos 9:9-12; Isa 60:1-16; 19:23-25; Joel 3:1
3. To be the prophetic / priestly nation on behalf of the Gentiles - Gen 12:3; Ex 19:5,6 (1 Pet 2:5,9); Isa 2:1-3; Zech 8:3,13,22,23; 14:16-19
4. To be under the righteous authority of the Elect angels - Psalm 8:5; 104:4; 136:3; Eze 1:21-2:2; Dan 10:16,17,19; 12:8; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19.

6.2. The Working Out of Israel's Dispensation

1. The Jewish Dispensation was revealed to and begins with Abraham - Gen 12:3.
2. The Jewish Dispensation continues throughout the Old Testament - David, Solomon, the Prophets, Elijah, Elisha, etc.
3. The Jewish Dispensation continues throughout the non-Pauline New Testament - Christ as Israel's Messiah (Mat 15:24 context); Temple worship - Acts 3:1; Apostolic authority - Acts 5:1-5 (Ananias & Sapphira); James 1:1 & 1 Pet 1:1 (Acts 8 Diaspora).
4. The Second Generation is the Generation of the non-Pauline New Testament. This Generation saw the announcement of Zacharias; the virgin conception of Jesus; the Messianic ministry; the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ; and the Apostolic ministry. It also saw the temporary decline of Israel (Acts).
5. The Jewish Dispensation comes to an end in Acts 28 with the Pauline Decree - Acts 28:15-31 .cp. Rom 11:25. See also Peter's commentary on Paul's ministry (2 Pet 3:10-16 .cp. Acts 1:6-8)

The Jewish Dispensation resumes after the Rapture of the Body of Christ and continues for ever - the parable of the Wheat and Tares (Mat 13), Daniel's 70th week (Dan 9:27), the Millennial and Eternal kingdoms are set up (Rev 20-22).

7. Body Dispensation

The Body of Christ identified by the Father's Decree with the Son as Lord-Head, their hope is to spend eternity in the third heaven, sitting upon the Father's throne with Christ, sharing in His glory and righteousness, abiding within the unapproachable light, and ruling the entire created order.

7.1. The Hope of the Body of Christ

The Hope of the Body of Christ is the personal and eternal union and identification with Christ, both in His holy state and his exaltation over the angelic powers. In its administrative position over all God's eternal created order, the Body of Christ is the direct, personal, and full expression of Christ's administrative position over God's eternal, created order. The Body of Christ is the full extension of Christ's righteous non-incarnate humanity. In this regard, the Body of Christ is the Fullness of Christ's Humanity (Eph 1:23).

7.2. The Working Out of the Body of Christ

The Body dispensation was first revealed to Paul secretly in Acts 9 - 2 Cor 12:1-13; see also Rom 2:16 (my gospel) .cp. 16:25; Eph 1:9; 3:1-12.

The Body of Christ is revealed ONLY through the writings of Paul. As Moses is the chief architect of Israel and the Law, Paul is the chief architect of the Body of Christ - 1 Cor 3:10.

Examples of Body members are Paul, Sosthenes (1 Cor 1:1); Silas (1 Thes 1:1); Timothy (1 & 2 Tim); Titus (Titus 1), etc.

The Body Dispensation comes to its earthly end with its Rapture (Harpadzo) - 1 Cor 15:51-53; 1 Thes 4:13-5:11 (Especially, 1 Thes 5:1-11).

8. How the Clock of Dispensations is Related to Time

As mentioned in Section 3, a Dispensation is not equivalent to a period of time. Though the Biblical Dispensations work themselves out in time, they are in fact, an entire salvation economy, including a people saved into that household and an attendant law, but which the members of the household are compelled by regeneration to follow, thus manifesting themselves as the righteous of that salvation economy (Dispensation).

The following graphic illustrates how each Dispensation works out in time and how each is related to the others.

How the Dispensations (Salvation Economies) Work Out in Time

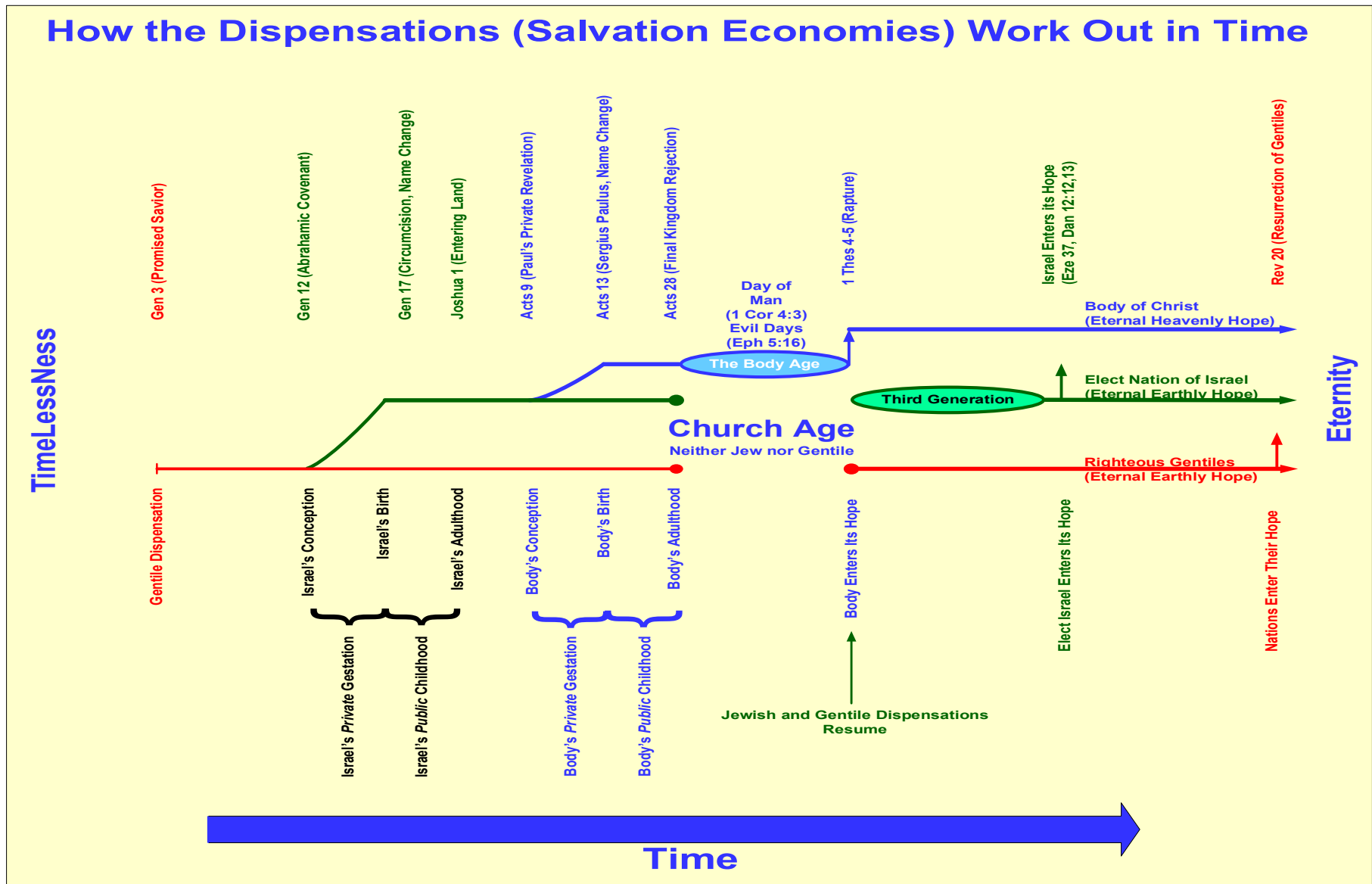


Figure 4. How Dispensations Work Themselves Out in Time

9. Correlating the Body Dispensation to Israel's 2nd and 3rd Generation

The prophets understood that there was a distinction between the 1st advent of Christ as Israel's Messiah (the suffering servant) and the 2nd advent of Christ as the Glorious King in shekinah (1 Pet 1:10-12). Intentionally, God did not reveal sufficient information regarding Israel's program to make a complete assessment as to the chronological relationship of these two great Messianic events.

Peter well knew the prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27 - Messiah was to announce His Kingship ending the 69th week (Mark 11 Palm Sabbath), then die BEFORE the 70th week began. Thus, the 69th and 70th weeks were KNOWN not to be continuous, and this produced a great wonderment in the mind of the Elect Jew as Peter states above.

Moreover, Joel 2:28,29 as indicated by Peter in Acts 2:14-21, was fulfilled in Acts 2-8 and this was to be part of the ushering in of the Messianic kingdom. Notice that Peter PRIOR to the feast of Pentecost and the coming of the pneuma hagon (holy spirit=divine power)² asked Christ when He would setup the promised kingdom (Acts 1:6-8). This question was NOT from Peter's ignorance, as much as it was from his correct and proper understanding of the Old Testament prophets as stated above. Jesus' answer was that Peter was not yet to know. Indeed, Peter did not know even by 1 Peter 1:10-12 (Greek text).

The intervening management between Israel's Second and Third Generation is precisely the Dispensation of the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ was not seen in the Old or New Testaments (outside of Paul), and was ordained of God BEFORE creation (Eph 1:3-10). Paul states that blindness in part has happened to Israel for the sake of the Body of Christ (Rom 11:25,26), and Peter finally states that if the remaining Elect of Israel desire to know why the Kingdom has been delayed SEE PAUL (2 Pet 3:12-16).

² Note the Greek text and the Anarthrous construction of πνεῦμα ἅγιον. This construction occurs 52 times in the New Testament and is never a reference to the Person of the Holy Spirit, but refers to divine power as given by the Third Person.

Thus, the Body of Christ is precisely that program between Israel's Second and Third Generations. When the Body age ends Israel's program immediately begins.

There is no need for a "transitional period" at the end of the Body age because:

1. The Body of Christ (an administratively higher Dispensation than Israel) is being "replaced" by Israel. Thus, in order to respect the Body's authority it MUST be taken out of the way.
2. 1 Thes 5 explicitly states that the Day of the Lord can NOT take place until the Body is taken out of the way.

The following figure illustrates the relationship between the Clocks of Dispensations (in particular the Body Dispensation) and Generations.

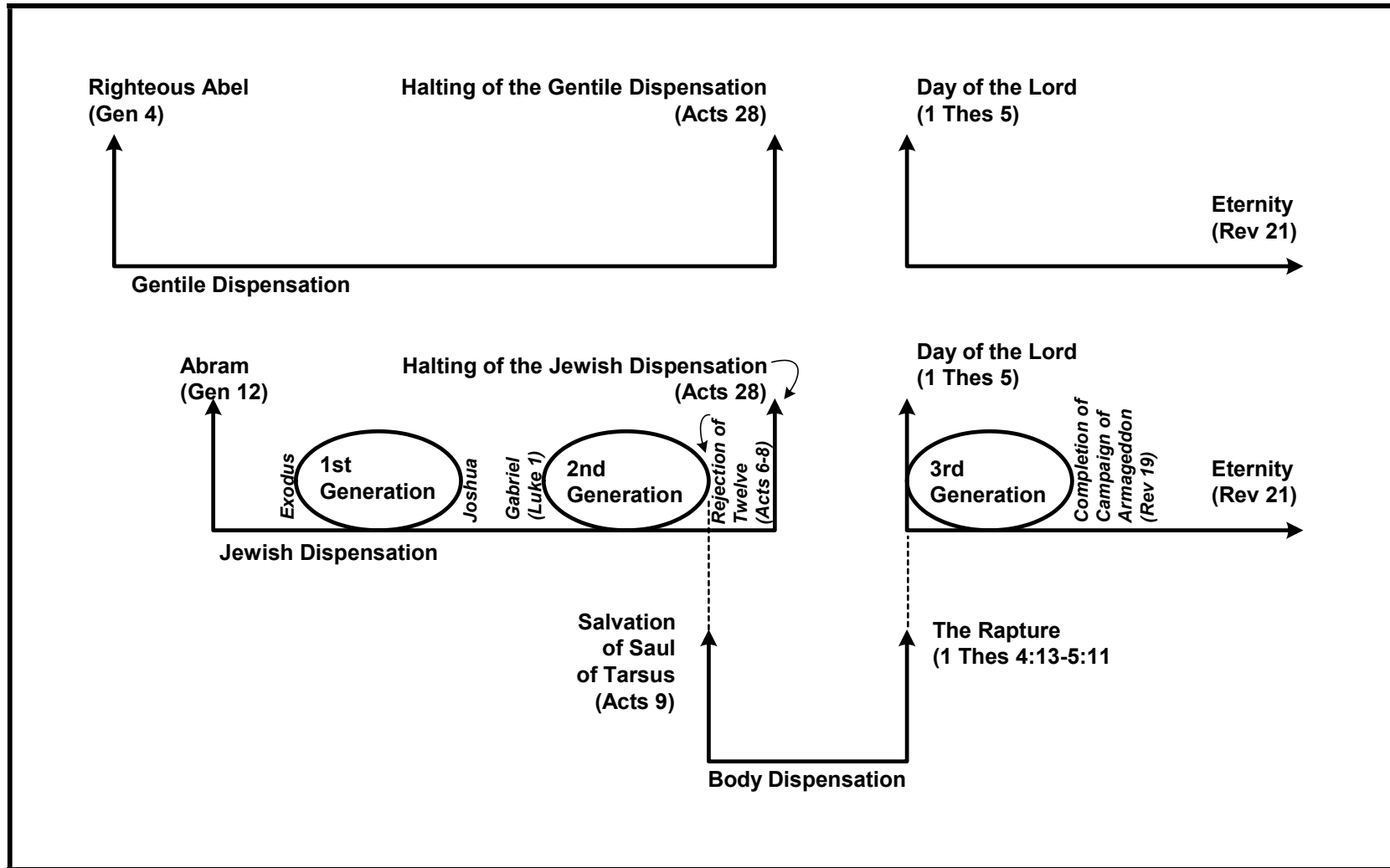


Figure 5. A Correlation of the Clocks of Dispensations and Generations

Notice that Figure 5 above clearly implies the need of a transitional period (perhaps we need a better phrase) between the end of the Second Generation and the halting of the Gentile and Jewish Dispensations. The reason for this is for the sake of the Earthly Kingdom saints, so that they may KNOW specifically WHY the Kingdom has been delayed (Acts 1:6 .cp. 2 Pet 3:12-16). Peter expressly teaches Israel that it is Paul's Ministry that contains the information why the Kingdom has been delayed. Thus, because the Body program is in greater administrative authority than that of Israel, it requires of Paul to have a dual ministry during this time, one to Israel and one to the Body. Because the Body is in greater authority than Israel, Paul MUST be the one to expound the reason for the delay - because the Body of Christ IS the delay. Once Acts 28 is reached Paul's ministry to Israel ceases and we (the Body) know the "whole" and so does remaining Israel (Peter, John, James, etc.).