



T h e G a t h e r i n g

In the Dispensation of the Fullness of the Times

By

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The Apostle Paul shares some very interesting and often hard to understand spiritual concepts in his letters. Even Peter commented about that in his second letter – “as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.” (2 Peter 3:16-17) One of those spiritual concepts is what I think of as “The Gathering.”

The Gathering is when God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.” (Ephesians 1:10) God will do this “in the dispensation of the fullness of the times.”

Paul and his protege Luke are the only New Testament writers to use the Greek word *oikonomia*. It means “house law” and speaks about the management of a household and household affairs. It is an administration of managerial responsibilities. Even though a dispensation occurs during time, it is more about **what** is done than **when** it is done. Luke uses the word in Luke 16 where Jesus told His disciples about the rich man who had a steward (*oikonomon*) – the man who managed the household for him. He called on him to give an account of his stewardship (*oikonomia*) – the way he managed the household, the methods he used to oversee the property that belonged to the rich man. Jesus used the story to teach His disciples about the importance of faithful service to God. Paul used the word *oikonomia* in 1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10 and 3:2, 9; and

Colossians 1:25. Several versions of the Bible, including the King James and New King James Versions, use the word “dispensation” to translate *oikonomia* in Ephesians 1:10. Other English translations of the Bible use words like “administration,” “right time,” and “plan.”

God has been managing His household – overseeing what He owns – for thousands of years. He is both the Creator and Overseer of the heavens and the earth. God has called many people through the ages to be part of His management team – people who helped oversee and administer God’s Plan under His direction – including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Peter, James, John, Paul and many others. It’s important to understand that God determines what happens in His household. He decides what happens and when it happens. God gave specific rules for each “faith household” to the managers He selected to oversee them. He started with Adam and continued all the way through Paul. If Adam had not disobeyed God, his job would have been to oversee and manage the human race and everything on the earth forever. God was teaching Adam how to manage the earth when Satan intervened and tempted Adam to disobey God. Adam did just that and plunged the world and everyone and everything in it into a series of new “household laws” (dispensations).

One of those dispensations is called “of the fullness of the times.” The Greek words are *tou pleromatos ton kairon*. The word “fullness” (*pleromatos*) simply means that something is full – there is no more room for anything else because it is filled. It carries the idea of

completion, being finished with something. The same word is used in Romans 11 for the mystery that God was blinding Israel until the “fullness of the Gentiles” came in. What happens after that? All Israel will be saved when Jesus, “the Great Deliverer,” will come out of Zion and take away their sins (Romans 11:25-27). The “fullness of the Gentiles” means that the number of Gentiles who will be saved through the mystery Paul writes about in detail in Ephesians is filled up full – no room for any more Gentiles within the special offer known as the “dispensation of the grace of God” (Ephesians 3:2) . The “fullness of the Gentiles” is when God will take the next step in His management of the household of Israel and finish what He began thousands of years ago in the life of His elect nation.

So, when is this fullness of “the times?” Let’s take a look at the word “times.” The three primary Greek words used for “times” are *kairos*, *chronos* and *hora*. The word *kairos* means “due measure, due proportion, a season.” It deals more with how time is marked by certain features and events and the **quality** of those events.” *Chronos* denotes “a space of time or succession of time.” The duration of time can be short or long. It deals with the **quantity** of time. *Hora* means “hour” and can mean “now,” a literal 60 minutes or a period of time, as in a season. All of the words are sometimes translated into English with the word “season.”

An example of how the words can affect the understanding of a similar phrase is to look at Ephesians 1:10 and Galatians 4:4 – notice the similarities:

“... that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.” Ephesians 1:10

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Galatians 4:4-5

The phrase “dispensation of the fullness of the times” in Ephesians 1:10 is *oikonomian tou pleromatos ton kairon*. The phrase “when the fullness of the time had come” in Galatians 4:4 is *ote de elthen to pleroma tou chronou*.” Knowing which Greek word is used for “time” helps us understand that the “dispensation of the fullness of times” is part of a series of events, while “fullness of the time had come” treats the time before Christ’s first coming as a single unit. The idea of “dispensation of the fullness of the times” is that God is going to manage a future event that will be about “fullness.” It is the culmination of God’s administration. He is going to “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.”

So, what is **The Gathering** that’s going to happen “in the dispensation of the fullness of the times”? Here’s what I wrote about that in the previous study:

The words “gather together” are a translation of the Greek word *anakephalaioo* – “to bring back to and gather round the main point.” The idea here is of a “gathering again,” pointing back to a previous condition before there was a separation. When was that time? In the beginning, before sin entered and separated humans from God. This is our long-promised “restoration” with the God of Heaven. God is going to gather together all things into “one” in Christ. We will be as it was – in perfect unity and fellowship with God!

We all know that things here on earth are terribly wrong. Everything is backward, upside down, inside out. Nothing makes sense if we don't have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ His Son. Even those who do have a personal relationship with God through Christ want to leave this physical presence on earth and be with Christ – “But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” (Philippians 1:22-23) We groan in our flesh for that time when we will be gathered together with Christ: “For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?” (Romans 8:22-24)

I believe the “fullness of the Gentiles” Paul wrote about in Romans 11 is the beginning of the “dispensation of the fullness of the times.” The Gathering begins when Jesus Christ calls all Christians to be with Him forever. Paul gives us an amazing picture of that beginning in his first letter to the Corinthians and first letter to the Thessalonians.

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’” 1 Corinthians 15:51-55

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will

descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17

Key words for the beginning of the “dispensation of the fullness of the times” are “changed,” “moment,” “raised,” and “caught up together.” First, Paul says this is a “mystery” (*musterion*) – something that is known to the initiated (*mustes*). This is a truth God reveals to His children through supernatural means – His Word. It’s not something that can be discovered through natural processes. The mystery is that we shall not all “sleep” (*koimethesometha*) – which is used metaphorically here for death – but we will all be “changed” (*allagesometha*) – which means to make something other than it is, transformed. Think about that – we are going to become something other than what we are right now. Paul teaches that there is a time coming – “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” – that Christians who are alive at that moment will be “caught up together” with Christians who had physically died prior to that moment. The word “moment” is the Greek *atomo* and means “indivisible” – something that cannot be cut into a smaller size (atom). The word “twinkling” is *rhipe* and means “to hurl.” It was used for any rapid movement and here refers to a rapid movement of the eye.

I am somewhat familiar with rapid eye movement because of working with film and video for almost 50 years. The film frame I worked with in television was 1/24th of a second (24 frames per second). A standard frame of video is 1/30th of a second (30 frames per second). If you splice (film) or edit (video) one frame of black, white or another color or another scene into a movie sequence, the human brain knows something happened but is hard pressed to describe it with any detail. Higher speed video cameras have even more frames per second.

So, how fast is the “twinkling of an eye?” Many aspects of rapid eye movement have been studied by scientists. Three of them are the **wink**, **blink** and **twink** of an eye. Winking is a controlled movement, so the length of time for a wink can vary, but half a second is thought to be average (500 milliseconds). Blinking is a reflexive action of the eye and has been measured between 300 and 400 milliseconds – a little faster than a wink. Twinking is a reflected particle of light seen in the eye, so it travels at the speed of light (983,571,056 feet per second). That means “in the twinkling of an eye” is almost a nano-second (0.000001 milliseconds). Anyone looking straight into the eyes of a Christian at the “moment” of the “change” would see only a “twinkle” in their eyes – then the Christian will be gone. The person left behind would not be able to explain what they saw. Even though a Christian will experience great joy in being “caught up” to be with their Savior forever, no one on earth will know it since it takes the human brain 200 milliseconds to recognize emotion in facial expressions. We will disappear too fast for anyone to see our joy. The

only impression left on their brain will be a “twinkle” in our eyes.

Christians who are alive at the “moment” of the “change” will be “caught up together” with Christians who had died. In fact, Christians who have already died will “rise first,” then those who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them “in the clouds.” The words “caught up” come from the Greek word *harpagesometha* and means “seize, snatch, carry off.” The Latin word used to translate the Greek word is *rapio* and gave rise to the term “rapture” when describing this “catching up” of Christians to be with Christ. Christians who died before this great event would be “raised,” while those who are alive at the event will be “changed.” The word “raised” is *egerthesontai* and means “to awaken from sleep” – in this case the sleep of death (*nekroi egerthesontai*). All of it – raising the dead in Christ and changing the living in Christ – occurs in the “twinkling of an eye.” The great words of encouragement for Christians are these – “And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” That’s the purpose of The Gathering. God created humans to be “with” Him – and “with Him” is where we’re headed.

Something else important to note is what Paul says to the Corinthians: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” The Kingdom of God Paul wrote about is something that flesh and blood cannot inherit – it’s spiritual in nature. Also, corruption cannot inherit incorruption. That seems like a major roadblock for Christians since we are made of human flesh and blood and therefore burdened with corruption. Something has to change in order for us to be able to

stand before God and live with Him forever. That's what Paul means when he says we will be "changed" – "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." That's what happens at the "moment" we are "caught up" to be with the Lord forever! The Spirit of God changes our basic nature and we become incorrupt and immortal.

This "catching away" of Christians from the earth in the "twinkling" of an eye to "be with the Lord forever" is the beginning of a new way God will manage His household – it is not the end. He will finish dealing with Israel and the Gentile nations on earth – including Christ's thousand-year reign on earth (Revelation 20:1-6). He'll finish dealing with Satan (Revelation 20:7-10), then will bring all the dead before Christ to be judged (Revelation 20:11-15). Everyone who has ever lived will bow before Christ and confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God (Philippians 2:9-11). Then we come to the culmination of The Gathering – when all things are restored to that which God created us to have with Him.

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They

need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.” Revelation 22:1-5

These words should raise the hair on the back of every Christian’s neck and bring tears to their eyes! Our future is our past – the Tree of Life. That is where it all started – and where it will begin again. The leaves of the Tree are for the healing of the nations. There will be no more curse – we will serve God forever – we will see His face and His Name will be on our foreheads – Jesus is on the Throne of Heaven and will be our Light – we will reign with Him forever and ever!

This is a beautiful truth and encourages our hearts during difficult times – The Gathering is close at hand. We will be with Him – soon!

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” Revelation 22:20-21

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