

Dispensationalism

What is 'the dispensation of the fullness of times' in Ephesians 1:10? (pt 3)

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Part three of a series. Read [part two](#).

In the original Greek, this passage tells us that God will "re-gather together in one all things in Christ."

In this series we have been answering our reader's question by examining four points from Ephesians 1:7-10:

- What does Paul under divine inspiration mean when he speaks of a "dispensation"?
- What does he mean by "the fullness of the times"?
- What does it mean to "gather together in one"?
- What does he mean by "all things"?

In our first two articles, we have seen that at the decisive moment in God's all-wise and eternal plan - "in the dispensation of the fullness of the times" - Christ will come again. But we also said that the Apostle Paul does not leave us there. Under divine inspiration, he tells us what will happen in God's plan when Christ returns. He will "gather together in one all things in Christ."

Re-Gather Together

This brings us to the third question: What does it mean to "gather together in one"? What will happen when He comes? What is the end goal of God's plan that will come to fulfillment at that decisive moment? Paul says that God the Father will "gather

together in one all things in Christ". The great plan is being carried out in Christ, and through Christ. And here in this little phrase we have the central point of the entire plan.

The word that is translated "gather together" in most English Bibles is actually a compound word in the Greek. It means, not simply to "gather together" - but to "gather together *again*". Not to gather together for the first time, but to *re-gather* that which has been disunited. The sense is that all the things that were once under the headship of Christ will be under His headship once again.

The Original Condition: Perfection and Harmony

What does that imply? It implies - and Scripture makes it clear - that all things were once in a perfect condition under the headship of Christ. They are not now in that original condition, but that God will make it so once again.

What was that original condition? We read of it in Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse 15:

He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

This was creation's original condition - perfect, and under the headship of Christ. "All things were created through Him, and for Him." That's the way things were when God made man in His own image and placed him in the garden of Eden to walk with Him and to have dominion over this world. All was in subjection to Christ, and under His authority man was given the stewardship of this earth. Adam walked with God, and there was perfect harmony in the universe.

The Present Condition: Rebellion and Ruin

But we know from Scripture that this original state of perfection did not continue. The Bible tells us that first of all there was war in heaven itself. Satan, who was created by God as an exalted angel, rebelled against his Creator and fell into sin. A large number of the angels joined that rebellion and fell with him. We read of this in Isaiah 12:14ff, Jude 6, and elsewhere. Many commentators believe that Revelation 12:7-10 recapitulates this great battle of the past even as it speaks of future warfare in Heaven:

...war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Satan, after he was originally cast down from heaven, came in the form of a serpent and tempted our first parents to rebel and disobey God. And when they sinned, they unleashed all the effects of sin that we see in our present world. The pride, hatred, murder, warfare, disease, death, decay - all the evils we see around us, and the evil that is in our own hearts - all of it is the result of that rebellion.

Human beings were not the only ones affected by sin. In Romans 8:16 Paul tells us that the creation itself suffered the effects of the curse, and that it groans and travails in birth-pangs, awaiting its deliverance. The earthquakes, weather upheavals, plagues, and other natural disasters that we see around us - the death and decay that we see every day in the material world - all are a result of that curse upon the earth, and upon the entire universe, brought about by sin.

The Future Restoration

The original harmony of the universe under the headship of Christ is gone - but not forever. It is only as we see the ruin of this universe and of our own selves from God's perspective that we can understand the mystery of God's will, the great truth of Ephesians 1:10. God is going to re-gather all things under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how we can truly understand in all its fullness what Paul means when he tells us, in 2 Corinthians 5:19, that at the cross "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."

This is how we can also understand, as Paul tells us in the same chapter, why we ourselves also groan within in ourselves. We want heaven. We are aliens in this sin-cursed world. We know in the depth of our souls that ultimately we do not belong here, because we have been redeemed.

This leaves one question yet to be addressed, and we'll take it up in our next article.

Next: What is meant by "all things"?

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