

The Four

Dissertations

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Introduction.

A large portion of the most eminent professors of Christianity seem to have no knowledge nor any idea of the increasing requirements of ^{in each succeeding dispensation,} the laws of God to man, or of any future dispensations of the gospel, beyond what is to be effected by missionary labors among the different nations of the earth. They seem to suppose the requirements of God, whether present, past or future, ^{in substance} to be ^{as to practical life} of the same description, and ever to remain so. We shall therefore endeavor, by the prophetic figures of scripture, to illustrate this subject and set it in its true light, to the clear understanding of every reader.

A brief Illustration of the
Four general Dispensations
of Divine Providence and Grace
to man, as pointed out ^{by} Ezekiel's
Vision of the holy Waters.

For beginning see page 27 - 28
In the progressive increase of the
work of God from the beginning, it is
worthy of particular remark that four
general Dispensations of Divine Prov-
idence and grace have succeeded each
other in regular order. Each of these
Dispensations has fulfilled a particu-
lar period of time, and been marked
by particular events and a gradual
increase. And each succeeding one

has been distinguished by its remarkable increase beyond that which preceded it.

These four Dispensations were evidently pointed out to the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision of the waters that issued out from under the threshold of the house of the Lord. These waters increased from one measure to another ~~to another~~ till the fourth measure, when they became an impassable river.

"And when the man that had the line in his hand, went forth eastward, he measured a thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the waters were to the ankles. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through the waters; the waters were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and brought me through; the waters were

to the loins. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass over: for the waters were risen; waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over."

These measures pointed out the order of time for each Dispensation; and the increasing rise of the waters showed the progressive increase of spiritual light and life in each, and how greatly each succeeding dispensation excelled that which preceded it.

The first measure of these waters, which represented the first general Dispensation of the Providence and grace of God to man, commenced with promise of God that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, and closed with the bondage of the children of Israel in

Egypt. In this measure of the waters to the ancles, is represented the Dispensation of the law of nature, which afforded sufficient light and life to direct and support the feet of man, while, as yet, he walked upon the earth; that is, he was but an earthly man, living wholly in a state of nature. Nor was he able to rise to any higher state without a further manifestation of light and power. Yet, while he kept that small measure which was given as waters to the ancles, and directed his steps in obedience to it, he was justified before God, nothing more being required of him.

Under this Dispensation was the call of God to Abraham, whose posterity, in the line of the promise, were selected and chosen as a peculiar people, to main-

tain the belief and worship of the living and true God, and to be his true witnesses, to bear testimony of his work to the rest of mankind. And to this chosen generation was given the only institution which, under that Dispensation enjoined a figurative cross upon the carnal nature of man. This was contained in the law of circumcision, and this law distinguished the seed of Abraham as the peculiar people of God above all other nations, and was figurative of the final cross of Christ; that is, the cutting off all the carnal works of the flesh.

The second measure of the waters represented the second general Dispensation of the work of God to man, which was as waters to the knees, manifesting a further degree of light and life to direct and support the steps of man while living in the order

and works of nature. This Dispensation commenced with the deliverance of the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt, and closed with the mission of John the Baptist.

Under this Dispensation was given the law of Moses, which enjoined a greater cross upon the fallen nature of the flesh, & in which greater and more important duties were required of man, for his justification. Yet these duties were but figurative representations of the spiritual work of God, which was to be made manifest thro' Christ, in succeeding Dispensations. "For the law made nothing perfect; but the bringing in of a better hope did, by which we draw nigh unto God." Heb vii. 19.

For altho' this dispensation was as waters to the knees; yet man still walked upon the earth, being wholly in a natural

or earthly state. Nor were they required under that Dispensation, to take up any further cross against a fallen nature than what the law required; and that was sufficient to regulate their conduct in the order of nature during its continuance.

Hence, tho' they were still in a state of nature; yet they could find justification by keeping the law; and in their obedience were still kept under the protection of God, which was like ^{holding} their knees in the holy waters, ^{of life} while they still walked upon the earth. Thus their steps were directed in such a manner as to become figurative of a future and more spiritual work. But this figurative work ended under the law, and the substance began to appear.

The third general Dispensation of the grace and providence of God to man began

with the first appearing of Christ, and extended to his second appearing. This was the 3^d measure, which was as waters to the loins. — This was a spiritual Dispensation; and tho' it did not prevent the people of God from still walking upon the earth, in the midst of the waters, if they chose it; yet the waters of light and life had now risen to the very center of man's carnal pleasures & affections, where is found the very ^{root} of a fallen nature, and the seat of the serpent's influence in man, from whence proceeds the lust of concupiscence.

Thus the rising of the waters to the loins, showed that the spiritual work of God had risen to such a height as to point out the dividing line between the flesh and the Spirit; between the work of nature and the work of grace. There was plainly indicated

ted the final destruction of the flesh, and all the foundations of an earthly nature, when the waters should rise to perfection; When man could no longer cleave to the earth & swim in the waters of life at the same time.

This was plainly manifested in the spiritual life of Jesus Christ, who was not begotten by the will of the flesh, after the order of a carnal commandment; but by the will of God. Here was the first true pattern of that spiritual work, of which all former manifestations of the work of God were but types and shadows.

As a man can swim in ^{waters} which are to the loins, clear of the earth, or he can still walk upon the earth in the midst of such waters; so it was in this dispensation. Many denied themselves, and took up a full cross against all the works

of a fallen, earthly nature; against the ^{lust} of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life;" and rejected that foundation which had a tendency to bind them to the earthly Kingdom of this world.

These, agreeable to the figure, swam in the holy waters, clear of the earth; while a far greater portion of professing Christians, who were called to be of the spiritual house of Israel, still walked upon the earth, wading in the waters to the loins; that is, they still lived in the order of nature, while surrounded with the spirit of grace, which is as the waters of life to the soul. Such were blessed in their faith and obedience, according to the measure of the light they had received; but could not enjoy that spiritual light & purity which attended those who wholly renounced the works of a carnal nature.

But such were still under the vail of the flesh, ^{as much were the Jews} and had their whole travail in spiritual regeneration to accomplish after the vail should be taken away, in a future Dispensation, ^{when the work should turn to the Lord's appearing} in the second appearing of Christ, when the work of God shall be perfected. (See 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10.) & (2 Cor. iii. 13 to the end)

The fourth Dispensation, which is the great and last display of God's grace to a lost world, was prefigured by the fourth measure of the holy waters, which were now represented as having risen to an impassable river, "waters to swim in," a river that could not be passed over," saith the prophet.

This points to the second coming of Christ, in which the waters of life and the divine light of the everlasting gospel enable souls to rise above the corruptions of an earthly

nature. Here souls must, in a spiritual sense,
 swim clear of the earth, by taking up a full
 and final cross against all the base propensi-
 ties of an earthly, fallen nature, or be lost:
 for they can now no longer be justified in those
 things which once bound them to the earth.

This great and last dispensation will
 decide the final fate of all men: for certain
 it is, that they never can obtain eternal
 life, without coming into these waters
 of life; nor can they swim in these waters
 without diverting themselves of every
 thing which has a tendency to sink their
 souls to the earth. As a man, in attempt-
 ing to swim thro' a deep river, must ~~be~~
 throw off all that inclines to sink to the
 bottom, or he will be borne down by it,
 and be drowned in the deep.

Just so it is with souls who would come.

into the river of life, they must leave every weight behind them, or perish with it. And as it is impossible for any man to pass a deep and large river, by walking through it, on the earth, at the bottom; so no soul in this day, can ever partake of the waters of life, and pass through the river of life, and inherit the glorious crown of everlasting life, while living in the indulgence of an earthly, carnal nature. He must first forsake all things which belong to the life of this lost world.

But those who honestly divest ~~the~~ themselves of every evil, and carefully deny themselves of all ungodliness and every worldly lust, and come fairly into this river, will be cleansed from all impurity, and receive everlasting life. It is thus that these waters, which are,

in reality, the life and graces of the gospel, will finally prove "a savor of life unto life," or of "death unto death," to all the children of men.

For if they do not come into these waters, they never can have eternal life; and if they do come into ^{them} and still cleave to the earth, they must drown & perish. For every thing that hath life and motion, ^[clear of the earth] whithersoever these waters come shall live. And there shall be a very great multitude of fish. These are the souls of ^{men} which are healed by these waters of life, and caught by the gospel net.

These four dispensations were represent^{also} ed in a vision to St. John, under the similitude of "four living creatures," or rather, four living spirits; (erroneously called in our translation, four beasts;) These were the living

* See Rev. ~~iv.~~ ^{iv.} & see ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~iv.~~ ^{iv.}

spirits of the four Dispensations, "in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, full of eyes before and behind." These eyes typified the clear ^{light of their} manifestations of the work of God, as displayed to man, thro' these living spirits, in each of the four Dispensations.

When these Dispensations were bro't to perfection and united in one, by the fourth and last, which is represent by a flying eagle, and alludes to the second appearing of Christ, in which the everlasting gospel is to be preached, as represent ed in another vision, by an Angel flying in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to all nations (See Rev. XIV. 6.) "Then shall the end come," agreeable to the testimony of Jesus Christ. The circumstance of these four

living spirits being seen "in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne," giving glory to God, and followed by the four and twenty Elders, in giving praises and acknowledgments to God and the Lamb, was designed to show that the work of God proceeded thro' them to the Elders who stood next to them, before all other beings of the natural creation.

This clearly represents the spirits of of the four Dispensations, thro' which the whole work of God in Heaven and earth proceeded, and which will be brought to perfection, by the preaching of the everlasting gospel, in the fourth and last Dispensation. Their being called living creatures ^{or spirits} was designed to show that the life of God was in them; and thro' them that life is transmitted to man.

The lion is represented as first, because he was the first in dignity and power. Among all the beasts in this world, there is none like the lion, able to subdue, tare and destroy all others. This dignity and power is preeminently in man, above all other things in this world; therefore he is represented by the lion.

This dignity and power was first perfected in Jesus Christ, who is called the lion of the tribe of Judah, in whom the true spiritual work of God first began to raise man to his true dignity, as the son of God, and in whom also, sufficient power was first manifested to rend and overthrow the kingdom of Satan and the heart, representing the power of fallen nature.

Yet it was not so proper to represent
 the dispensation in which he first
 appeared as a sacrifice for sin, and
 to begin the work of redemption by the
 lion as by ^{the} Lamb, and by the face of a
man.

As to their peculiar appearance
 in their order, the first was like a lion.
 The first Dispensation of God's grace
 and providence displayed ^{was like a lion} on earth,
 It was the dispensation of man, and
 exhibited man as the superior and
 lord of all creatures in this world; man
 as natural man, able to subdue and
 reign over all other animals; man
 possessing an intelligent spirit, shown
 by divers operations of the work, to be the
 only principle in the natural creation
 that ever would be able to rise above

all the powers and elements of nature,
and subdue and reign over it.

In the first dispensation, little else
was displayed of the work of God than
the exhibition of man as the superior
object and agent of all the operations
in the natural world. And thus he
stood as the Sion of this lower world.
Jesus Christ, who was call^{ed} ~~the~~ Sion
of the tribe of Judah, was the proper
heir of man; because thro' the line
of Judah, he received the superior and
most noble intelligent power & faculties
of man's nature, and in him was
~~manifest~~ ^{manifest} that ~~the~~ ^{the} intelligent nature of
^{man} was capable of rising into the elements
of Divine Power, and thence became
the lion that prevailed above all
~~the human race~~ ^{the human race}
~~created beings~~; so that he was able
to unseal the mysteries of ~~God's~~ Divine Wisdom.

The second living creature or spirit
 was like a calf. This was the second Dis-
 pensation, the life and order of which
 stood most ^{by} in sacrifices and offerings
 of beasts, particularly the calf or ox
 kind, which was the most serviceable
 beast to man. This peculiarly showed
 what natural man was, namely, first
 in this world an animal, that must
 be sacrificed and perish, second, the
 use and destiny of his nature, that
 is to be useful and serviceable, like the
 ox, to the soul in its terrestrial state,
 But which must, finally, in the real
 work of God, in the gospel, be slain
 and sacrificed to God, by the fire of the
 Holy Spirit, thro' the flames of which
 the soul will be sanctified & purified
 to God, & ascend to the superior & heavenly
 order in Christ.

The Third had the face of a man. This was the life and order of the third dispensation. For the Jesus Christ the great Lion was revealed in that dispensation. And tho' he who was the proper heir of true man, and hence preeminently the Son of man, ushered in that day; y^t the perfection of that work which was to raise man from under the power of an animal nature, to be a real man, according to the capacity of his nature, was not revealed in its fulness; but only showed, as it were, the face of a man, looking towards the full manifestation of man, as the Son, ^{of God} completely risen from the animal nature, ^{where the rational soul began to} looking forward, out of that nature, and ^{was revealed} showing Jesus Christ, who was the first

whose face was set looking higher than that nature, and who first saw the heavenly road that leads to a higher order than the Kingdom of the beast, for whatever light any had had before that dispensation, still they all remained in the nature of the beast; nor did the work in their day, ever exhibit any lead out of it.

The fourth was like a flying eagle. This was designed to represent the fourth and last Dispensation, which, like the flying eagle, will fly above all birds in the natural heavens, which represents every principle in this world, capable of rising heaven ward; But the life of this perfect Dispensation, will rise into Heaven itself, and fly to the ends of the earth, and like the keen sighted eagle, discern its

prey from afar, and like the eagle, more powerful and swift than any bird, - dart upon and catch its prey, and no bird can hinder.

This is the same as represented by the Angel's flying in the midst of Heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, and tongue, and people." Thus this eagle, by the gospel, which is its talons and power, will in its progress, catch every intelligent being; and like the eagle, tare and rend every thing of the animal, fallen nature, and only feed upon that which is meat for the heavenly body; but will take all that is fit to be incorporated with that body. But like the real eagle, will not feed upon nor take any thing of the putrid body

of Antichrist. And tho it will tare the wicked in pieces, and those who resist it; yet it will incorporate with its own body nothing that cleaves to the body of Antichrist. For in that day, agreeable to the prediction of Jesus Christ, "Where the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together?" And thus the final ^{state} fate of all souls will be decided. These are the children of the new and spiritual creation, who are risen and fly above the earthly nature, in the heavenly air or elements of life.

It is evident that those living creatures could not mean, in reality, any particular beings[†]; because they were in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, an improper representation for any being; but very -
 * yet there must be first agents in each dispensation

proper to represent from whence that life proceeded, and what was its work and order, thro' which the work of God was manifested in all dispensations.

The Lamb also was seen in the midst of the throne, and of the living creatures (Beasts) and Elders and all acknowledged him before the Book could be unsealed. This did not allude to Jesus only; but to that divine anointing which is very Christ, that comes thro' the sacrifices and manifestations of the Lamb of God that joins the whole work of God, in all dispensations together in one, and by which all the mysteries of God are revealed.

The vision of these four living creatures or rather, living spirits, must certainly

have a very important meaning, relative
 to the work of God. In this vision they
 were seen in their appearance, which,
 according to their numerical order
 prefigured the dispensations which
 they represented. Here they are rep-
 resented all united in one spirit,
 ascribing, holiness, glory, honor,
 praise and thanksgiving to the
 Lord God Almighty. "Who was and
is and is to come," which plainly mani-
 fests the union and perfection of
 the work of God in all dispensations,
 in the displays of his providence and
 grace in the fourth & perfect dispen-
 sation.

We know of no figures that could
 be taken to represent the nature &
 order of the work of God in each dispen-

sation more appropriate than those seen in this vision.

It is worthy of remark, that the order of divine manifestations, has been frequently seen in prophetic visions in the similitude of the number four. (See Ezek chap I & II) Zechariah vi. 1 to 7.) "These are the spirits ^{of which go forth from standing before the Lord} of the heavens, which go forth in the earth; therefore, let all who desire to find the work of God, consider well the order of the fourth dispensation, and see if all others are not past and are now united in one, in the perfect dispensation of Christ's second appearing, lest unhappily they seek in vain & lose the day of their salvation.

1 # see page 26-