

CHAPTER 9

THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

We are now ready to study the sixth dispensation which began after the death and resurrection of Christ and which will continue until Christ comes the second time. In previous chapters we studied *past* dispensations but now we will consider the *present* dispensation which is called the DISPENSATION OF GRACE. It is this dispensation in which we are living right now. Please MATCH the right person with the right dispensation:

The Dispensation of...

1. _____ Innocence	A. Abraham
2. _____ Conscience	B. Noah (<i>after</i> the flood)
3. _____ Human Government	C. You and your family
4. _____ Promise	D. Adam (<i>before</i> the fall)
5. _____ Law	E. Cain & Abel
6. _____ Grace	F. David & Daniel

Paul referred to this present *dispensation* (stewardship) in Ephesians 3:2– "if ye have heard of the _____ of the _____ of God which is given me to youward [toward you]." The Apostle Peter also mentions this important stewardship in 1 Peter 4:10 –"As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good _____ of the manifold _____ of God."

God gave to Abraham special promises and God gave to Moses His holy law. Today the Lord has given to believers a special understanding of the GRACE OF GOD. God is making known His grace in a very special way in this present dispensation. God has always been a GRACIOUS GOD. God was gracious to Adam and Eve when He provided them with coats of skins (Genesis 3:21). God was gracious to Noah (Genesis 6:8) and God was gracious to the whole earth when He promised never again to bring a world-wide flood (Genesis 9:11). God was gracious to Abraham and Moses and David and John the Baptist. But God's grace is most clearly seen today. In past ages God's grace was like a stream. The stream was always there and it was always flowing and the water of God's grace could be seen in every age. Today, however, the stream of God's grace has become a mighty river and has FLOODED its banks. God's grace is seen in a way that it was never seen before. Today God's grace is not only flowing but it is OVERFLOWING. God's grace not only abounds but it SUPER-ABOUNDS! Today the grace of our Lord is "E _____ A _____" (1 Timothy 1:14).

Often when we see a stream or a brook we do not think too much about it. When the stream or brook floods and overflows its banks, then we can't help but think about it. Today the stream of God's grace has overflowed its banks and God wants people to think about how very gracious He is. During the past 2000 years (approximately) God has been showing off His grace.

The living God delights in making Himself known. This is God's purpose in any and in every age. Again and again in the book of Ezekiel we read these words: "AND THEY SHALL _____ THAT I AM THE _____" (see Ezekiel 28:22,23,24,26,etc.). God loves to demonstrate and manifest WHO HE IS! History is the story of God making Himself known at various times and in various ways.

Let's think of some examples:

In the days of Noah God demonstrated that He is a **God of judgment** who hates sin (HE SENT THE FLOOD!).

In the days of Abraham God showed that He is a **faithful God** whose promise cannot be broken.

In the days of Joseph God revealed Himself as a **sovereign God** who can work all things together for the good of His people (Genesis 50:20).

At the Red Sea God made known **His power** and deliverance.

God's holiness was seen in the giving of the law to Moses.

Throughout the pages of history God has been putting Himself on display and making known WHO HE IS.

Today it is still God's purpose to make Himself known to men and angels. The New Testament reveals that today God is especially concerned with making known the riches and "the glory of HIS _____" (Ephesians 1:6). The living God wants to show off His wonderful GRACE. God has been letting the stream of grace overflow and He wants men to notice!

What is GRACE?

GRACE is an important word and we need to understand what it means. The GRACE of God means "the favor of God." It is often defined as God's "UNMERITED FAVOR" (God's favor towards man which man did not merit or earn or work for in any way). The word GRACE is also defined as "UNDESERVED KINDNESS" (God's amazing love and kindness towards those who do not deserve it at all).

The Bible gives two simple definitions of GRACE:

1. EPHESIANS 2:7

(notice that the context is talking about God's grace—see verses 7 and 8)

Grace is GOD'S "K _____ towards _____ through _____ " (EPHESIANS 2:7)

Because of Jesus Christ, God is able to be kind even to those who were DEAD in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2: 1-3)!

2. TITUS 3:4

(notice that the context is talking about God's grace—Titus 2: 11; 3:7)

Grace is "the _____ and _____ of God our _____ toward _____ "

God is kind TOWARD MAN (even the kind of man who is described in Titus 3:3)! How gracious God is to those who deserve no kindness at all!

The GRACE OF GOD is also beautifully illustrated in the story of King David and crippled Mephibosheth. We read about this in 2 Samuel chapter 9. Was David KIND towards Mephibosheth (verses 7 and 13)? _____ Did Mephibosheth feel that he deserved such kindness (verse 8)? _____ Was David kind to him because of Mephibosheth or was he kind to him because of someone else (verse 7)?

_____ In the same way, God is kind to us NOT BECAUSE OF US but because of Jesus Christ (compare Ephesians 4:32--God has graciously forgiven us "for _____ sake").

God's GRACE has also been defined in this way:

God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense!

God's Riches At Christ's Expense!

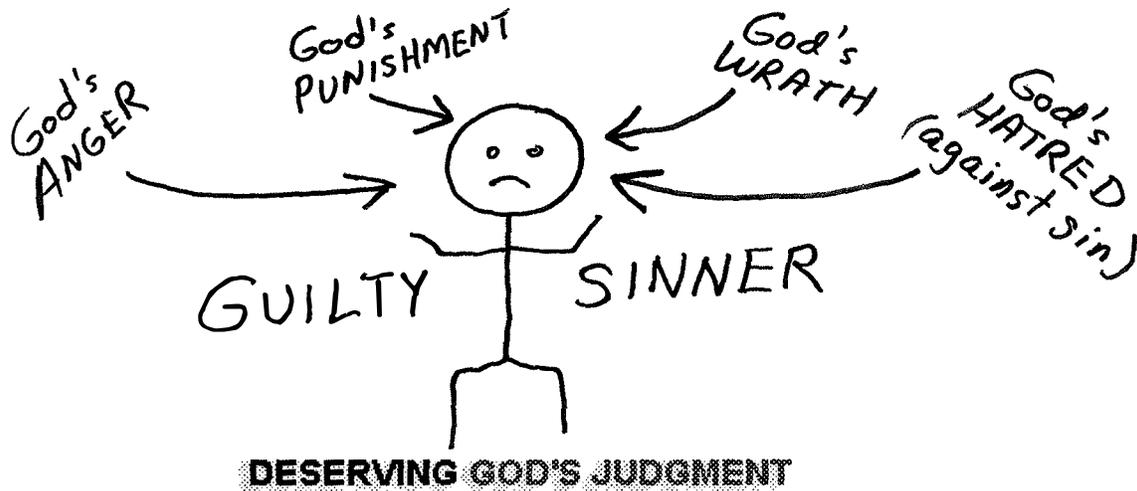
This is best seen in 2 Corinthians 8:9 – "For ye know the _____ of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was _____, yet for your sakes he became _____, that ye through his poverty might be _____"

GOD'S RICHES ("that ye might be rich")

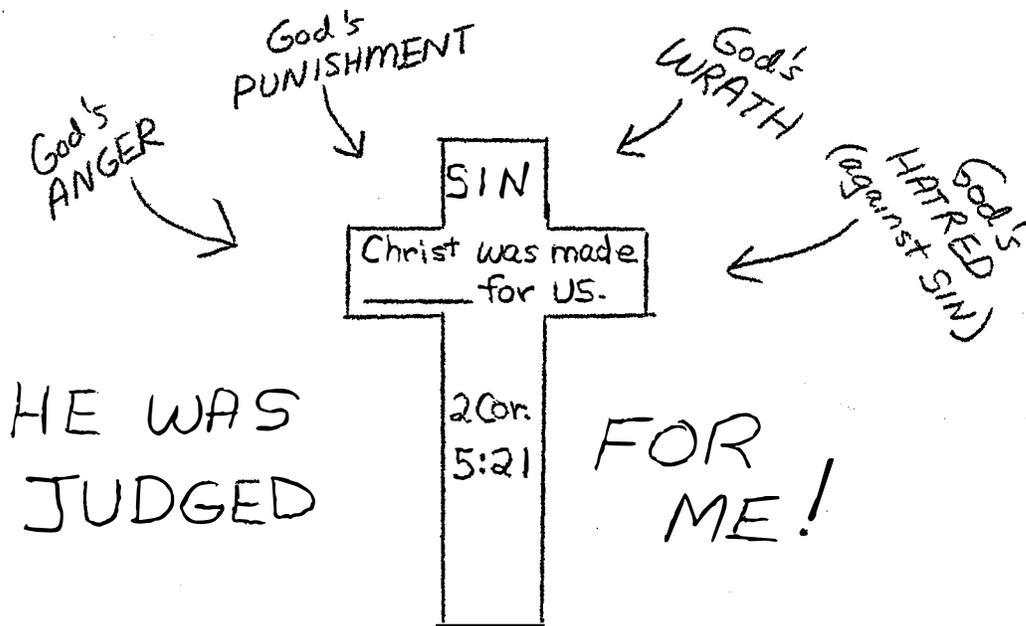
AT CHRIST'S EXPENSE ("He became poor" and died on the cross for us).

Only Calvary's cross could open up the fountain of God's grace. Because Christ died on the cross the overflowing grace of God is able to pour out to sinners. If Christ had not died on the cross then God would not be able to be kind and gracious towards us. Instead God would need to JUDGE US FOR OUR SINS and condemn each of us to hell. The good news is that Jesus died for us and God is completely satisfied that the penalty for sin has been paid in full. Therefore God is free to pour out His grace and kindness and love towards those who believe on His Son.

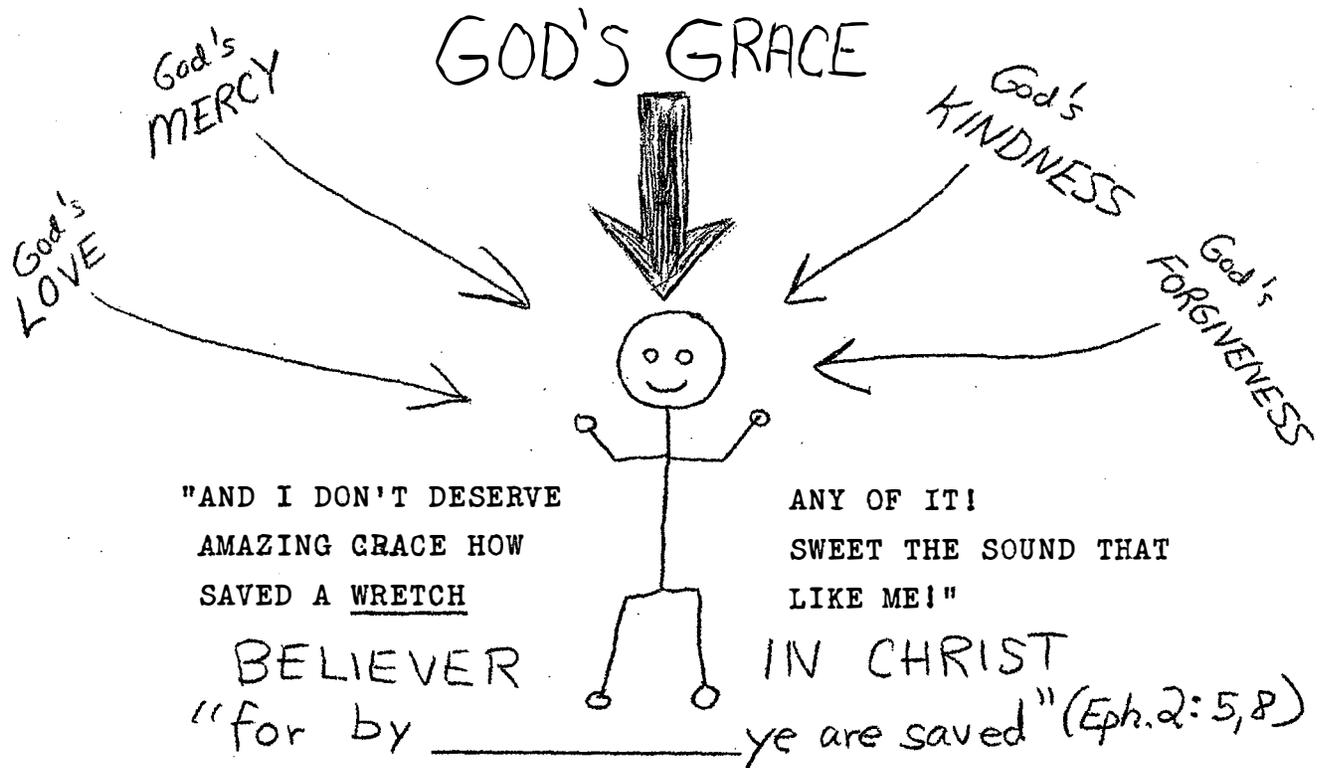
This is what I deserve:



This is what Jesus Christ did for me (HE TOOK MY JUDGMENT UPON HIMSELF AND HE TOOK MY PLACE):



Because of what Christ did on the cross, God is now FREE to pour out His favor and grace upon me:



1. MAN'S STATE AT THE BEGINNING.

At the beginning of the dispensation of grace we see SIN AT ITS WORST. For the most part, the Jewish nation had rejected their Saviour and Messiah: "He came unto His own, and *His own* (the Jewish people) received Him _____" (John 1:11). They were blinded by their own unbelief and sin and finally they shouted "CRUCIFY HIM!" Man had reached the depths of sin and the night of sin could hardly become any darker. Man proved that his WICKEDNESS was *very great* but God took this opportunity to prove that His GRACE is *even greater!*

God's grace is far greater than man's sin. We see this in Romans 5:20- "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might _____." This means that the law makes sin look even worse. The law is like a magnifying glass that let's us see sin more and more as it really is. We learned about this when we studied THE LAW (Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 of these notes). The law is the mirror that shows men how sinful and dirty they really are. Now look at the last part of Romans 5:20-"But where _____ abounded, _____ did much more abound"(sin abounded but grace SUPER ABOUNDED!). Man's sin gave God a wonderful opportunity to show how gracious He really is.

Think of a precious diamond or gem. The right kind of background needs to be chosen if you really want to see this precious stone in its beauty and color. Some backgrounds will help you to see the stone clearly and other backgrounds will not. God has chosen to use the black background of sin to bring out the brilliant colors of His grace. God wants to show off His grace and He wants to demonstrate that His grace is GREATER than man's sin! We are GREAT SINNERS but we have a GREATER SAVIOUR! When sin was greatest God began to show the "much more" of His grace (Romans 5:20).

After the Jewish nation crucified their own Messiah, what did God do? When sin really showed itself as something terrible and ugly (as men refused to receive God's Son and God's salvation), what did God do? Did He destroy the world? Did He judge everyone? No, God did something very amazing. God began to reach out to ALL MEN EVERYWHERE. Most of the Jews did not want to come to the Saviour, so God reached out to all men and said, "WHOSOEVER WILL, LET HIM TAKE THE _____ OF _____ FREELY" (Revelation 22:17). The world was darkened by sin so God decided to flood the world with GRACE. "For the _____ of God that bringeth _____ hath appeared to _____" (Titus 2.11). God was reaching out to all !

God's wonderful supply of grace is also seen in John 1:16-17: "And of His (Jesus Christ's) fullness have all we received, and _____ for _____." "Grace for grace" means "grace upon grace," just like at the shore of the ocean you have **wave upon wave** [one wave following by another wave, followed by another wave, etc.]. God's grace is like the waves of the sea. His supply of grace never ends as wave upon wave of GRACE comes splashing in: "For the law was given by _____ but _____ and truth came by _____" (John 1:17). Moses was the **LAWGIVER**; Jesus Christ is the **GRACEGIVER**! God does not just give us *grace*, He gives us "ABUNDANCE OF _____" (Romans 5:17)! God offers this grace to all men, whether they are Jews or Gentiles!

Man's State Before A Holy God

Today men need to see themselves in their true state before God. They need to see themselves as God sees them. Do the following MATCHING problem:

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. _____ Luke 19:10 | A. Guilty before God |
| 2. _____ Romans 3:10 | B. Child of Disobedience |
| 3. _____ Romans 3:12 | C. Child of wrath |
| 4. _____ Romans 3:19 | D. Lost |
| 5. _____ Romans 3:23 | E. Dead in Sins |
| 6. _____ Ephesians 2:1 | F. Not good |
| 7. _____ Ephesians 2:2 | G. Not righteous |
| 8. _____ Ephesians 2:3 | H. A sinner! |

Can God be gracious to people who are in such a state? He surely can! Jesus Christ came into the world to _____ sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Christ died for sinners and God wants to be gracious to sinners. God has a free gift which He wants to give to ALL MEN! What is this gift (Romans 6:23 and compare Romans 5:15,16,17,18)?

_____ Is this gift something that man must earn or pay for or is it FREE (Romans 5:15)? _____

2. MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

The Responsibility of the Unsaved

If a billionaire had \$750,000.00 in his hand and reached out his hand to *give* you this money, what would you do? Would you take it? Would you accept this gift? Or would you refuse to accept the money and walk away? God has a gift which is much more valuable than \$750,000.00. "The gift of God is _____ through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). This is the gift of God's grace and God offers this gift to all men. The hymn writer says it this way: "Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace, Freely bestowed on all who believe; You that are longing to see His face, Will you this moment His grace receive?" (Julia Johnston)

God does not force His gift on anyone. Those who refuse to take this gift do not have it. God offers it to all but not all receive it.

There is only one way to receive God's gift of eternal life. A person must receive Jesus Christ as Saviour by believing on His Name (John 1:12). According to John 3:16,18,36, what is man's responsibility today? _____ What command does God give to unsaved people (the first part of 1 John 3:23)?

_____ Have you obeyed this command? _____ Have you received God's free gift? _____ Have you discovered how gracious God can be toward sinners? _____

The Responsibility of the Saved

The living God wants to show off His wonderful grace! God wants men and angels to see how gracious He is. Where can a person look to see God's grace in action? at a mountain? at the stars in the sky? at the ocean? No, to see God's grace in action a person must look at SINNERS SAVED BY GRACE!

Every believer is a "SHOWCASE" of God's grace! If you go to a museum you see many SHOWCASES where you can look and see different things on display. Believers are not locked up in some museum, but they are in the world as walking showcases of God's grace. This is true not only now but in the eternal ages to come: "that in the _____ to come He (God) might show the exceeding riches of His _____ in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). It is our privilege to be trophies of God's grace, not only now, but throughout the ages of eternity.

God also used believers to teach the angels about His grace. We learn about this in Ephesians 3:10 ("principalities and powers" refers to angels). This verse teaches us the following:

The universe is the schoolroom.

God is the teacher

The angels are the students

The wisdom and grace of God comprise the subject matter.

The object lesson that God points to in order to teach the angels about His wonderful wisdom and grace is THE C _____ (believers)--see Ephesians 3:10).

The angels are amazed that God can be so gracious to sinners such as you and me!

The Apostle Paul knew much about the grace of God in his own life (1 Cor. 15:10). Was Paul a great sinner (1 Timothy 1:13-15)? _____ Did Paul have a greater Saviour (1 Timothy 1:15)? _____ God was very longsuffering (long before getting angry) and gracious to Paul (see 1 Timothy 1:16). In 1 Timothy 1:16 Paul was saying something like this: "God is showing forth His grace and longsuffering *IN ME*. I am a trophy of God's longsuffering. The same God who has been gracious and longsuffering to me is the same God who is willing to be gracious and longsuffering to you!"

Every believer should be able to say the same thing that Paul did! Our message to the unsaved is this: "If God could be gracious to me then God can be gracious to you! If God could save a sinner like me then God can certainly save a sinner like you! I am a living and walking proof that God is gracious and is able to save sinners!"

What is my responsibility as a believer? **Here are four things I must do:**

1) I must C _____ in God's grace (Acts 13:43).

God saved me by His grace when I put my trust in His Son. I must continue to live by grace (realizing that God is everything and I am nothing). I must continue to trust God's Son all through my Christian life. "Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!" I was not only saved by grace, but I must live the Christian life by grace.

2) I must make known the Gospel of _____ (Acts 20:24).

I need to tell others that there is a gracious God who can save them, just as He saved me. Are you able to clearly present the way of salvation to another person? Are you able to explain what it means to be **SAVED BY GRACE**?

3) I must G _____ in grace (2 Peter 3:18).

When I was saved I tasted that the Lord is _____ (1 Peter 2:3). Think of food. When you taste something that is good, you want to have more and more. Just one taste will not do! The same is true of the Christian life. We want to learn more and more about God's grace. We want to grow and be built up by the "word of His _____" (Acts 20:32). We want to please the God who has saved us by His grace.

4) I must *not* C _____ in sin (Romans 6:1-2).

Someone might say, "Why don't you sin and live any way that you want to live so that people can see how gracious God can be to His wicked and disobedient child! The more you sin the more God will show His grace." Is this something that a true believer should say (Romans 6:1-2)? _____

Answer TRUE or FALSE (but first read Titus 2:11-12): The grace of God that bringeth salvation teaches us that since we are saved and going to heaven we can live any way we please.

The more a person appreciates and understands God's grace the more he will want to live to please the God who has been so gracious.

3. MAN'S FAILURE.

The Failure of Unsaved People

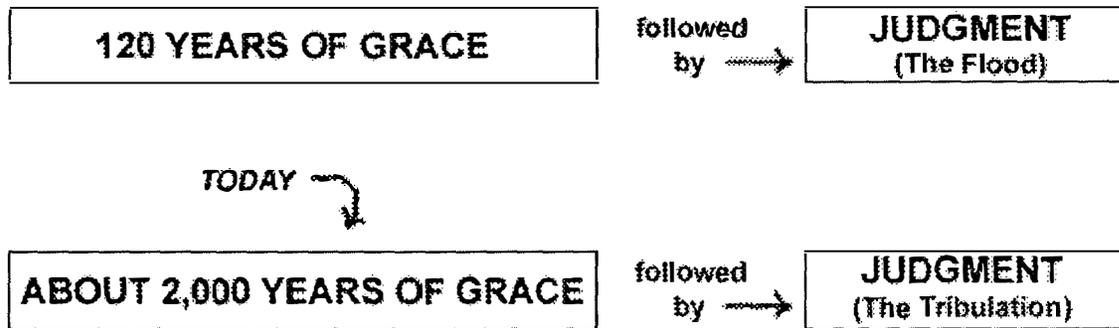
Even though God has graciously offered men His free gift of salvation, only a very *few* have believed on Christ and received this gift (compare Matthew 7:13-14). The great majority of people have refused to receive God's gift and have refused to have Christ reign over them as King and as Lord (Luke 19:12-14).

During this age of grace God patiently waits for men to be saved. God does not judge men and strike men dead every time they commit a serious sin. God is very longsuffering (He waits a long time before judging).

The atheist, Robert Ingersoll, after delivering one of his addresses, pulled his watch from his pocket and said, "According to the Bible, God has struck men to death for blasphemy. I will blaspheme Him and give Him five minutes to strike me dead and damn my soul." There followed a period of perfect silence as the minutes ticked away. The atmosphere was extremely tense. People began to get nervous and a woman fainted. At five minutes, Ingersoll snapped shut his watch, put it in his pocket, and said, "You see, there is no God, or He would have taken me at my word."

Did Ingersoll really prove that there is no God? Actually this unbeliever proved something else. He proved that we are living in a day of grace and that God is very longsuffering even to those who blaspheme His Name. [As one observer of that day said, "Did that fine gentleman think that he could exhaust the patience of God in five minutes?"] As it says in Isaiah 30:18 "And therefore will the LORD _____, that He may be _____ unto YOU."

God's day of grace will not last forever. The day finally came when God did strike Ingersoll dead (this man died!). When men refuse God's grace then they must face God's judgment. In the days before the Genesis Flood there was a time of grace which lasted for 120 years (Genesis 6:3). During this time God waited to be gracious to men. During this time Noah built the ark and God gave people the opportunity to believe His Word. But finally after these 120 years the day of grace ended and the door of the ark closed (Genesis 7:16). Those that had refused God's grace had to face God's judgment: "and the flood came and _____ them all" (Luke 17:27).



The Failure of Saved People

Believers have often failed to make known the grace of God as they should. For example, in the "dark ages" the churches were no longer teaching the grace of God. Instead they taught people that salvation was something that had to be earned and worked for. They no longer taught that salvation was a free gift. They taught that salvation depended upon man's performance rather than upon God's kindness towards undeserving sinners. The churches should have been making known the "gospel of grace" but they were not doing this. As a result there was spiritual darkness everywhere.

Sad to say, this is true even today. Most churches and most religious groups today teach that salvation is something that man must work for and earn by his own good works. Very few churches teach that man is "saved by grace." Many have turned away from the truth and are teaching ERROR.

4. GOD'S JUDGMENT.

As we have seen already, the day of God's grace and longsuffering does not last forever. Romans 2:4 describes those people who despise the goodness and longsuffering of God. Will these people escape the judgment of God (Romans 2:3,5)? _____ The day is coming when God's judgment will fall on this unbelieving world and upon the *apostate church* (those religious people who once knew the truth but who have turned away from the truth--see 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:5; 4:3-4).

The 120 years of grace in the days of Noah finally came to an end and God judged the world with a flood. This longer day of grace that we are living in now (nearly 2000 years) will also come to an end and God will again judge the world. The time of **greatest grace** (this present age of grace) will be followed by the time of **greatest judgment** (the time of GREAT TRIBULATION). Has there ever or will there ever be a time as difficult as the great tribulation (Matthew 24:21)? _____ In Chapter 11 of these notes (entitled, **The Time of TRIBULATION**) we will study the Tribulation Period in more detail.

It is a dangerous thing to reject the grace of God. It is a very serious thing for a person to reject the Person and work of Jesus Christ and to refuse God's free gift of salvation. Are you a sinner saved by grace? Are you pointing others to the Saviour who is so gracious to sinners who deserve nothing but His wrath?