

The Author's Choice

Of His Own Writings



by C. R. STAM

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by

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PREFACE

This is another "Book Between," i.e. *between two commentaries*, which take longer to write.

This "Book Between" contains Bible study messages from the 14 booklets and "old" *Searchlight* articles which the writer would most deeply desire to keep in print. They are indeed "*The Author's Choice.*"

For example: Our booklets, *Simple as Can Be* and *Unanswered Prayer* are in their 24th and 23rd printings respectively. This means that they have brought spiritual blessing to many thousands of readers. But small booklets are so apt to go out of print and vanish away. Now you have both of these preserved more permanently in a library volume.

As to the articles from back issues of the *Searchlight*, some of these were written so long ago that in all probability *you*, the reader of this Preface, have never read them. Yet these are some of our best, and many requests were received at the time to provide them in booklet form. Now you have them also preserved in a library volume.

We trust that every one of these Bible studies will bring as much light and blessing to the reader as they did to this writer. That will make the effort supremely worthwhile.

--CORNELIUS R. STAM

Chicago, Illinois
October 1, 1990

Simple As Can Be

Have you ever heard some preacher say, "*There are many things in the Bible which are hard to understand but, thank God, the plan of salvation is as simple as can be?*"

Well, it is simple IF...

For the rest you will have to read this article.

Yes, the plan of salvation *is* simple IF the Scriptures are rightly divided. Otherwise it is far from simple. Hence the grave responsibility upon those engaged in the work of the Lord to obey II Timothy 2:15:

"STUDY TO SHOW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH."

Let us illustrate:

Here in the heart of Indianapolis, let us say, stands a man who has been convicted of his sin. He is miserable as, at last, he sees himself as he really is--a guilty, condemned sinner.

As he stands there brooding, *Mr. Average Fundamentalist* comes walking down the street. In his lapel he has a button which reads "*Jesus Saves.*" Seeing this our unsaved friend thinks, "Here is the man for me," and approaching him says, "I wonder if you can help me. I'm in trouble. What must I do to be saved?"

"Why!" exclaims Mr. Average Fundamentalist, "I'm so glad you ask me. There are some things in the Bible which are hard to understand but, thank God, the way of salvation is as simple as can be.

"Look here in my New Testament at Acts 16:30,31. When the Philippian jailor asked the same question, Paul answered "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.*" Isn't that simple! That's all you need to do. Just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and salvation is yours. And here are a few more Scriptures along the same line:

"John 3:36: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.'

"Rom. 4:5: 'But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.'"

"Eph. 2:8,9: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. '"

But while Mr. Average Fundamentalist has been showing our friend the simple plan of salvation a *Roman Catholic* has been listening to the conversation. At last he can contain himself no longer. Stepping up to Mr. Fundamentalist he says, "Pardon me for interrupting, Sir, but you are leading this man astray. Don't you know that James 2:20 says that 'FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD!' And I *dare* you to read James 2:24 to this man."

Turning to the passage Mr. Fundamentalist reads:

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

"Could anything be plainer than that?" asks the Roman Catholic; and with this he begins to outline all those works which he considers necessary to salvation.

Just then a *"Campbellite"* steps up and says, "I've been listening to you gentlemen and if you will pardon me I think Mr. Fundamentalist is making salvation too easy while our Catholic friend here is making it too hard. It shouldn't be difficult to determine what is required for salvation, for our Lord Himself made it very plain when He commissioned His apostles to preach the gospel. Look here in Mark 16:15,16 we have it as simple as can be:

"And He said unto them, go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.'

"Isn't that plain? If this Scripture means anything, then those who believe and are baptized, and those alone, are saved, And notice how carefully Peter carried out this commission at Pentecost. When his hearers were convicted of their guilt and began to ask what they must do to be saved, what did he say to them?

"Acts 2:38: 'Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.'

"It seems to me that anyone who really wants to know the truth should see that - it's so simple."

But now a *Pentecostalist* steps into the circle, almost exploding: "Why didn't you read those next verses in Mark, Mr. Campbellite? Why did you stop right in the middle of the passage? The rest is plain too, only you won't receive it. See what it says here:

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast out devils. They shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. '

"Isn't that perfectly plain?"

"So according to the same 'Great Commission,' if you do not have miraculous powers you are not a true believer. You can't make it mean anything else, for it distinctly says *'these signs shall follow them that believe.'*

"None of you can deny that under the 'Great Commission,' which practically all Christians claim to follow, faith and water baptism are the *requirements* for salvation while miraculous powers are the *evidences* of salvation."

Finally one more person joins the company, saying, "Haven't you men *all* forgotten something?" "What?" they all ask.

"Why, apparently you have forgotten that there is an Old Testament in the Bible! *And the Old Testament is three times as large as the New!*"

The speaker is a *Seventh Day Adventist*, and he presses his point home:

"Don't you know the terms of God's holy Law? Let's turn to Exodus 19:5 and see what it says:

"Now therefore if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine:' "

With Scripture after Scripture the Seventh Day Adventist seeks to prove that the observance of the ten commandments is essential to acceptance with God. Especially does he stress sabbath observance as the very sign of relationship to God. To prove this he quotes Ex. 31:13 and 17:

"Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, verily My sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; *that* ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you."

"It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever:..."

Poor, unsaved man!

All this began with his simple *question: "What must I do to be saved?"*

Mr. Fundamentalist's plan had seemed so simple until the others had begun challenging him--and each other. And strangely each of the others seemed to think his particular view was "so simple" too!

But our poor unsaved friend! What can he make of all this as he stands there, guilty and condemned? Surely the way to peace doesn't seem very simple to him now.

And no man had better say the plan of salvation is simple if he does not "*rightly divide the Word of truth.*"

No man had better say it is simple who claims to be working under the so-called "Great Commission."

No man had better say it is simple who teaches that Pentecost marked the beginning of the Body of Christ, the Church of this dispensation.

No man had better say it is simple who denies the *distinctive* ministry of the Apostle Paul.

The way of salvation for sinners today can only be simple when we recognize our place in history and acknowledge that to Paul, by special revelation, God made known His message for the world *today* and His program for the Church *today*.

It should surely seem significant to the careful student of Scripture that after our Lord had given the "Great Commission" to His apostles, *another* apostle--Paul--should dare to say:

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:" (Rom. 11:13).

Did God then raise up Paul because the twelve were unfaithful in carrying out the "Great Commission?"

Indeed not. It was Israel's rejection of the kingdom message and God's infinite grace to a lost world that brought about the conversion and commission of Paul.

See Paul's own words to the Jews at **Antioch** in **Pisidia**, some years later:

"... it was necessary that the Word of God should *first* have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles." (Acts 13:46).

We have but to read Galatians 2 to learn that it was by the will of God and under the direction of the Holy Spirit that the leaders of the twelve finally handed over their Gentile ministry to Paul who went forth to pro-claim another message, - "That *gospel which I preach among the Gentiles,*"—"The gospel of the grace of God." (Read carefully [Gal. 2:1-10](#)).

We must not forget that when Israel rejected the glorified King and His Kingdom, the last and only nation which still had a relationship to God was alienated from Him. The very channel of God's blessing to the nations ([Gen. 22:17,18](#)) was stopped up, as it were.

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

In the crisis God acted to make known His eternal purpose in Christ, raising up Paul to proclaim the glorious news that in response to Israel's rebellion He would dispense grace to a world of lost sinners.

Salvation to the Gentiles through the fall of Israel! What grace! The favored nation cast out that *individuals everywhere*, both Jews and Gentiles, might find peace with God through the blood of the cross. See what Paul writes to the Gentiles in Rom. 11:30-33:

"For as ye [Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [Israel's] unbelief:

"Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out!"

God is showing mercy to all today and *reconciling* both Jews and Gentiles unto Himself in *one body* by the cross (**Eph. 2:16**).

Salvation has come to the Gentiles, then, not through Israel's *instrumentality* but through her *obstinacy* - *not* according to any *covenant* but by *grace* - not through the ministry of the *twelve*, who were (and are) to be Israel's rulers (**Mt. 19:28**), but through the ministry of *Paul*, the rebel who "obtained mercy."

And so it is that in the eleventh chapter of Romans Paul emphasizes his commission as the apostle of the Gentiles. Read it again, and remember that it is not merely *Paul's* word. It is *God's* Word through Paul:

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office" (Ver. 13).

If this does not satisfy the reader as to Paul's distinctive ministry to the Gentiles and his God-given authority as the apostle of grace, surely no more should be needed than the opening verses of Ephesians 3:

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

"How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery "

So important is this matter that even before the sentence of judgment was pronounced upon Israel and the kingdom hopes of that generation were fully withdrawn, Paul, with double emphasis, pronounced a curse upon any who dared to proclaim anything to the Gentiles but "the gospel of the grace of God."

Gal. 1:8,9: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

"As we said before, so say I now again, if any men preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

How these words should cause every sincere man of God to tremble and to make sure that his message conforms with that which the Lord of glory, from His throne in heaven, revealed to Paul!

Observe this and the plan of salvation *is simple!*

Do you ever find Paul proclaiming salvation by works? Does he ever command sabbath keeping, circumcision or water baptism? Not once. True, he *practiced* all of these during his early ministry, but that is *what he came out of - what he emerged from*. Paul lived in a transition period. He was saved under the Jewish economy but raised up to bring in a new dispensation – "*the dispensation of the grace of God*."

And, note well, Paul was raised up to make known the very "secret of the gospel" (**Eph. 6:19**). When all mankind had demonstrated its utter sinfulness, God saved Saul of Tarsus, making known through him the riches of His grace - *showing how it was that anyone ever had been saved!* Now it was revealed that it had not been the blood of beasts, the waters of baptism or any other physical ceremony that had saved the saints of ages past (though these were required under the Law) but the infinite grace of a loving God.

Read Paul's majestic words to the Romans:

"But now the righteousness of God *without the law* is manifested...even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ . . . whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past... to declare I say, at this time, His righteousness: *that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*. Where is boasting then? It is excluded . . . *therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*" (Rom. 3:21-28).

Yes, see this and the plan *is* sublimely simple. Today NO works are required for salvation. Indeed salvation is offered to those who will *stop* working to get it, for today God wants men to see and acknowledge their utter ruin and His infinite grace.

"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5).

"Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared.

"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. 3:4,5).

"For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

"Not of works lest any man should boast.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10).

"To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us *accepted in the Beloved*.

"In whom we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:6,7).

"For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and ye are complete in Him..." (Col. 2:9, 10).

Unanswered Prayer

"Do you believe in prayer?"

The writer was asked this question some time ago by a woman who had prayed in vain for the recovery of her sick husband.

"No," I replied, "I do not believe in prayer. But I do believe in a God who hears and answers prayer."

The woman's question reminded me of my childhood days.

One day at school a playmate showed me a beautiful fountain pen.

"Where did you get it?" I asked.

"Lucky stone," he replied simply, and taking me to a hill nearby he found a smooth brown pebble and showed me how to use it.

Closing his eyes he threw it into the air over his head and said solemnly, *"Lucky stone, lucky stone, bring me luck."*

"Is that all you did?" I asked.

"Sure, I tried it yesterday, and this morning I found this pen. Eddie showed me how. He found a quarter the same way."

Needless to say, I found a good many "lucky stones" that afternoon and went through the ceremony again and again.

But, I didn't find a thing! even though I walked about with my eyes almost glued to the ground!

The next day I found my friend, and Eddie too, and asked them: Had I done it the right way? Had I used the right kind of stone? How long are you supposed to wait before you find something?

It was not long before I had completely lost faith in "lucky stones." When the boys kept inquiring about my luck I scoffed, "G'wan, I don't believe in that stuff!"

This incident came back to me when I was asked *"Do you believe in prayer?"*

Millions of people, saved as well as lost, are positively superstitious about prayer. They try it. If their requests are granted they say, *"I believe in prayer, I have found that it works."* But if their requests are not granted they begin to doubt - as though prayer in itself ever had any power or efficacy.

Of course, not all Christians are superstitious, but this only adds to the difficulty.

Many sincere and thoughtful believers have trusted and claimed certain written promises from the Word, only to find these promises unfulfilled in their lives. As a result they have found themselves struggling against the feeling that God is not faithful. This is a far more serious difficulty.

To these, and to all believers who have been tempted to doubt God because of unanswered prayer we offer God's wonderful solution to the problem.

PRAYER PROMISES

Matt. 21:22: "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Matt. 18:19: "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Wonderful promises! Meditate upon them for a few moments. "All THINGS--WHATSOEVER ye shall ask in prayer, believing!" "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching ANYTHING THAT THEY SHALL ASK!"

Wonderful promises, indeed! yet who can deny that they have proved more discouraging than encouraging to many sincere Christians?

Reading these verses, many of God's children have been encouraged to ask for physical healing, daily employment, deliverance from temptation and many other things in prayer, believing, but have been deeply disappointed to find their requests ungranted. Such experiences have often left deeper scars on the lives of believers than their fellowmen observe.

Before seeking the explanation to this fact let us first be wholly honest and acknowledge it to *be* a fact.

There was a time when my own faith was rudely shaken by this vexing problem.

We had been holding open air meetings for many weeks without seeing any encouraging results. How we longed to see precious souls saved! Before going out one day my co-worker asked, "*Do you believe Matt. 18:19, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven*"?

I said, "God knows I want to believe it." So we got down on our knees to ask for souls, claiming this promise. As we prayed I could not forget that the Lord had graciously helped one who had cried "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

We arose from prayer that day with peculiar confidence. We knew before we had even begun to preach, that God would give us souls. *But - He didn't!*

Few people stood around and there was no indication that anyone was at all impressed by our words. We agreed, of course, that we shouldn't expect to see fruit immediately. Perhaps we would find out later that God had answered our prayer.

But we did *not* find out that God had answered our prayer and I, for one, felt it deeply. This had happened before, too often, and now I found myself struggling against doubt and rebellion.

Thank God, Phil. 1:6 is blessedly true: "... **He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it....** "

If Phil. 1:6 were *not* true this might have been the end of my Christian testimony, but as it was I was only driven to my knees again and - *finally to my Bible!*

Is it not strange that we generally place more importance upon prayer than upon Bible study! How often the question has been asked from the pulpit: "How many of you have spent half an hour in prayer today?" Yet rarely does the preacher ask: "How many have spent half an hour with the Word today?" Is prayer then more important than the study of the Word? Surely what God says to us is infinitely more important than anything we may have to say to Him.

As this dawned upon me I went once more to the Word. I realized that I had simply taken verses here and there and had claimed their fulfillment without any regard to the context: without even inquiring whether those promises had been made to *me!*

I had not obeyed II Tim. 2:15, and I was supposed to be one of God's workmen! I had ignored the very verse in which He Himself had told me how I might be "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed":

II Tim. 2:15: "Study to show thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth."

Now it was not long before I knew I had the answer to my heart's problem. My difficulties vanished as I began to *practice* II Tim. 2:15. And not only did they vanish, but I came into the possession of the greatest blessing of my Christian life, the key to so many problems - the knowledge of the "mystery" of God's

purpose and grace. This, and this alone, is the answer to the problem we have been considering. But before we go into this let us consider briefly some.

POPULAR EXPLANATIONS

Some time after I had come into the knowledge of "the mystery," a special meeting was called by one who, though he had been saved for many years, had found his faith sorely tried by the same perplexing problem.

He invited a popular preacher to address a group of Christian workers on the question of *unanswered prayer*. I was one of those invited.

The preacher went through the same familiar explanations I had heard so often - explanations which certainly never satisfied *my* heart.

He said that there may be a *divine factor* in unanswered prayer. That is, God may, *for His own good reasons*, deem it best not to grant some request, as in the case of Job.

Then too, he went on, there are human factors to take into consideration, such as sin *harbored* in the heart ([Psa. 66:18](#)), selfishness ([Jas. 4:3](#)) and a spirit of unbelief ([Jas. 1:6,7](#)), all of which, he said, would result in unanswered prayer.

Then he came to the climax of his message. How could we be *sure* our prayers would be answered?

He asked us to turn to Mark 11:22-24:

"And Jesus answering saith unto them, have faith in God.

"For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea: and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass: he shall have whatsoever he saith.

"Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

From these verses he urged us to put away all known sin and selfishness and reap the blessed results of *believing* prayer.

But I felt like asking, "What about the 'divine factor'? Suppose I pray in true faith, and God, 'For His own good reasons, deems it best *not* to grant my requests as in the case of Job!?"

How I longed, that day, to breathe into his ear and into the ears of all those present, the solution to the problem - the mystery! But he had already turned a deaf ear to that glorious message.

THE SOLUTION

We agree, of course, that harbored sin will hinder prayer and that selfish requests *should* remain unanswered, but these present no difficulty. The problem is why sincere believers, seeking honestly to live for Christ and praying in humble faith should so often find their prayers unanswered.

Granting that human failure enters into the question of unanswered prayer, is it not a fact that many, living in conscious fellowship with God, eager to do His will and confidently believing their requests would be granted have been discouraged, not to say disillusioned by unanswered prayer? They had rested in the promise that whatsoever they asked in prayer, believing, they would receive. They asked, believing, and did *not* receive.

The answer to this problem, as to so many problems, is a *dispensational one*.

Have you ever noticed *where* the "whatsoever" promises are found? They are found only in *one small portion of the Bible* - *that* dealing with our Lord's earthly ministry (though they are *referred* to in the Hebrew Christian epistles).

Never in the Old Testament, nor in the Pauline epistles do we find that "*all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*"

Why is this? Simply because these promises had to do with the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. These are the conditions which will prevail during His reign and He proclaimed them as part of "*the gospel of the kingdom.*"

We do find in Isa. 65:24,

"And it shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer: and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

This is a wonderful promise, indeed, but it has not been used very intelligently by Christians in general.

How many sincere Christians have quoted this passage *after receiving some blessing without even asking for it!* They have said, "How true God's Word is! Didn't He say '*Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear?*'"

However, few quote this verse when they have struggled long in prayer without receiving an answer from the Lord!

But suppose that through some strange circumstances we should see a wolf and a lamb feeding together and I should quote the *next* verse, and say, "How true God's Word is! Didn't He say, *"The wolf and lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock!"* Would I be using the Word of God intelligently? Of course not. You would say, "Yes, the Word of *God is* true, but Isa. 65:25 does not apply to *this*. It speaks of the kingdom reign of Christ when this shall be the *rule*, when wolves and lambs, lions and bullocks, as well as men shall get along together." And you would be right. That whole portion of Isaiah 65 speaks clearly of Messiah's reign. It is concerning this period of time that we read,

"And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear."

It is not strange, then, that we should find "whatsoever" promises in connection with *"the gospel of the kingdom."*

Certainly it is not the *rule* today, among God's people, to receive the answers to our requests before we even make them, nor even while we are presenting them. Far more often we have the experience of David who cried, *"How long, O Lord, How long?"* And surely we need David's advice, *"Wait patiently for Him,"* for God does not generally answer before we call.

But when our Lord reigns things will be vastly different. He will have control over man's three greatest enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil.

The world? - will then be a *good* world, *Christ's* world rather than Satan's.

Rev. 11:15: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ."

The flesh? – Man's physical strength and longevity will be restored.

Isa. 65:20: "The child shall die a hundred years old."

That is, he that dies at one hundred years old shall be considered a child.

The Devil? - will be bound in the abyss, and harmless.

Rev. 20:2,3: "And He laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit "

What a changed scene! *"The times of refreshing!"* In those days the Lord will no longer hide His face, but heaven will be opened to the earth.

It was all this that our Lord had in view when He preached "*The gospel of the kingdom.*"

It was this that Peter had in view when He cried, after Christ had gone to heaven,

"Repent ye therefore, and ... the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord and He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you" (Acts 3:19, 20).

But the kingdom was rejected. God did *not* send Jesus and the times of refreshing did *not* come, indeed have not *yet* come.

The age in which we live is, to a superlative degree, an "*evil age.*" Paul calls it, "*this present evil age*" (Gal. 1:4). It is the age of the rejection of the Son of God. It is the age when the world has been given up to the wrath and judgment of God.

It is only because of "the exceeding riches of God's grace," that the bowls of His wrath have not yet been poured out upon this rebellious race, for "the rulers of the darkness of this age" hold sway and "the god of this age hath blinded the minds of them that believe not" (Eph. 6:12, II Cor. 4:4).

Our blessed Lord cast out Satan, the oppressor of this fallen world and offered man deliverance, but lo, man did not want to be delivered. Satan is the *god* of this age. Today Satan still reigns by the will of man and the sufferance of God (See John 12:31; 16:11; II Cor. 4:4).

But God overrules. He "*worketh all things after the counsel of His own will*" (Eph. 1:11).

This present evil age is also the age of grace.

Some years after Pentecost Paul wrote these wonderful words:

"Where sin abounded *grace did much more abound.*

"That as sin hath reigned unto death, *even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rom. 5:20,21).

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32).

"And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:16).

Neither man nor Satan knew it, but this was God's eternal purpose in Christ. It was a *"mystery," "kept secret since the world began"* (Rom. 16:25). *"in other ages not made known"* (Eph. 3:5), *"hid in God"* (Eph. 3:9) *"hid from ages and from generations"* (Col. 1:26), *"The unsearchable riches of Christ"* (Eph. 3:8), *"God's Eternal purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began"* (II Tim. 1:9).

Still God waits in mercy, while His ambassadors go forth with the message of reconciliation, God's offer of grace to a lost and ruined world. (See II Cor. 5:16-21 and read carefully).

And what about prayer in this age of abounding sin and over-abounding grace? Does God promise to grant whatsoever we ask in prayer believing? He does not. Even Paul had to learn this. (See II Cor. 12:8-10). He offers us *something better* and more perfectly suited to our circumstances.

GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR PRAYER LIFE

What Christian cannot freely quote Rom. 8:28!

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

But how *few* Christians can quote Rom. 8:26! Yet Rom. 8:28 cannot be fully understood or appreciated except against the background of Rom. 8:26.

Rom. 8:28 tells us what "WE KNOW." Rom. 8:26 tells us what "WE KNOW NOT."

Now let us consider them together:

"... WE KNOW NOT *what we should pray for as we ought...*"

"... WE KNOW *that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*"

How wonderfully this fits our present circumstances!

In the darkness of this age it would be calamitous if we received whatever we asked in prayer, believing. Indeed, a large proportion of the time, "we know not what we should pray for." We must get down on our knees and say, "Lord, the way is dark. I cannot see one step before me. I do not even know what to ask."

But though "we know not what we should pray for as we ought," "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities;" He "maketh intercession for us," and God works "all things together for good" to us.

The highest expression of faith is found in Paul's words in Phil. 4:6,7:

"Be careful [anxious] for nothing!

"But in everything,

"By prayer and supplication,

"With thanksgiving,

"Let your requests be made known unto God

"And..."

"And" what?

And ***"Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive ?"***

NO!!

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [Lit., garrison] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Here is ample proof that God is not deaf to the cries of His children in this dispensation. He wants them to pour out all their hearts before Him. There is nothing He does not wish to hear about. He says, "Tell me *everything* and be anxious about *nothing* for I'll work it *all* out for your good." He who loves us is working out our future!

How foolish then to say "What's the use of praying if we do not receive what we ask for?" It is because of the very darkness of this age that we must be willing to leave the outcome with Him.

He is the Head of the Body and, remember, the head always does the thinking.

Learn this lesson and *"the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

"For we walk by faith not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7).

We walk (or should walk) by faith even though we see no public demonstrations as were seen at Pentecost. We walk by faith even though our particular requests may not be granted. We walk by faith even though things *seem* to go against us for WE KNOW He is working all things out for our good: not for our present, apparent good, perhaps, but certainly for our eventual, eternal good.

Does this satisfy you, Christian friend? If not, let us ask one simple question in closing.

WHICH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

If you were offered either a \$1.00 bill or a \$10.00 bill as a gift, which would you choose?

If, in this age of darkness and sin, God should offer you either "*whatsoever ye ask in prayer, believing,*" or "*exceeding abundantly above*" all you could possibly "*ask, or think,*" which would you choose?

Eph. 3:20,21: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.

"Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

The Promise God Made To Himself

Did God actually make a promise to *Himself*? Certainly. Why not? Haven't you ever made a promise to yourself? Of course you have, and probably your whole spirit, soul and body entered into it. By faith in God's Word and with all the determination in your soul, you clenched your fist and said to yourself: "By God's grace I will do--or will not do--this or that."

Now the Triune God too made a promise to Himself far back in eternity past, and this promise concerned our eternal destiny.

THE PROMISE

In Tit. 1:2,3 we read these words from the pen of the Apostle Paul:

"In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world [Lit., ages] began:

"But hath in due times manifested His Word through preaching which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior."

Mark well: this promise was made by God *"before the ages began."* Obviously, then, He did not make this promise to any man, nor is there any evidence in Scripture that He made this promise to any angels. There *is* evidence, however, that this promise was made by God to Himself, in the eternal counsels of the Trinity.

In Eph. 1 we read that "He [the Father] hath CHOSEN US in Him [the Son] before the foundation of the world. Having PREDESTINATED US unto the adoption of children [Gr., *hvios*, placing as *sons*] by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL ...Having made known unto us THE MYSTERY [SECRET] OF HIS WILL, according to HIS GOOD PLEASURE WHICH HE HATH PURPOSED IN HIMSELF In whom also we have obtained an inheritance ... according to THE PURPOSE OF HIM WHO WORKETH ALL THINGS AFTER THE COUNSEL OF HIS OWN WILL" (Vers. 4,5,9,11).

Again, in Eph. 3:11 we learn that the Church, the Body of Christ, has been formed and used by God, "according to THE ETERNAL PURPOSE WHICH HE PURPOSED IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD."

There are many passages in Paul's epistles dealing with the counsels of the Triune God in eternity past and His divine purpose to bring these counsels to

fulfillment. One of the most striking, however, is found in II Tim. 1:9, where the apostle speaks of God.

"Who hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to HIS OWN PURPOSE AND GRACE, WHICH WAS GIVEN US IN CHRIST JESUS BEFORE THE WORLD [AGES] BEGAN ."

OUR SURE HOPE

In using the words "in hope of eternal life" the apostle does not mean that now we merely *hope* for eternal life. Far from it. The word "hope" here and elsewhere in Paul's epistles is the opposite of despair. It is one of the brightest, most cheerful words of Scripture, indicating an eager anticipation of blessings to come. In Chapter 3, Verse 7, the apostle again refers to the "hope of eternal life." Here he declares that "*being justified by God's grace,*" believers are made His heirs "*according to the hope of eternal life.*"

Indeed, in Heb. 6:19, referring to "the hope set before us," he says:

"Which hope we have as AN ANCHOR OF THE SOUL, BOTH SURE AND STEADFAST ... "

And here we remind our readers that according to our text we have this hope of eternal life because "*God, who cannot lie, promised [it] before the world [ages] began.*"

How could this promise be more certain of fulfillment? It was made by the greatest Person of all (God Himself) *to* the greatest Person of all (God Himself).

Thus the humblest believer in Christ can now look back and rejoice to see that his destiny was, in God's purpose and grace, already secure in ages past. Thus instructed, how can he fear that God will *now* cast him out?

THE REVELATION OF THE PROMISE

It must not be supposed, however, that God revealed this promise, or purpose, in Old Testament times, nor even immediately after the death and resurrection of Christ. The Word of God clearly indicates that He had a very special person in mind through whom this sacred secret was to be made known: *Paul, the chief of sinners, saved by grace.* The inspired apostle is careful, throughout his writings, to make this very clear:

Tit. 1:2,3: ". . . God, that cannot lie, promised before the world [ages] began:

"But hath IN DUE TIMES MANIFESTED HIS WORD THROUGH PREACHING WHICH IS COMMITTED UNTO ME ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OUR SAVIOR."

II Tim. 1:9-11: "... given us in Christ Jesus before the world [ages] began,

"But . . . NOW MADE MANIFEST by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ . . . WHEREUNTO I AM APPOINTED A PREACHER, AND AN APOSTLE, AND A TEACHER OF THE GENTILES."

In Eph. 3:7-9, referring to God's "promise in Christ," he says:

"WHEREOF I WAS MADE A MINISTER, ACCORDING TO THE GIFT OF THE GRACE OF GOD

"UNTO ME, WHO AM LESS THAN THE LEAST OF ALL SAINTS, IS THIS GRACE GIVEN, THAT I SHOULD PREACH AMONG THE GENTILES THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST;

"AND TO MAKE ALL MEN SEE WHAT IS THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MYSTERY, WHICH FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD HATH BEEN HID IN GOD, WHO CREATED ALL THINGS BY JESUS CHRIST."

This is the glorious message which we have proclaimed through the *Berean Searchlight* and which, by the grace of God, we will continue to proclaim, praying unceasingly that by His Holy Spirit He will open eyes and hearts to receive these riches of glory and grace in Christ, that Christ may be glorified and saints united and strengthened to go out and win the precious souls for whom He shed His blood.

Methuselah and Paul

THE WRATH AND LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

"And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died."

-- Gen. 5:27

Do you believe that?

Do you believe that Methuselah actually lived to become *nine hundred and sixty-nine years old*?

A prominent Modernist minister gave his answer to this question, some years ago, in a weekly religious column run by the *New York Herald Tribune*.

Said the learned doctor: "Of course we know that no human being *could* actually live to become nine hundred and sixty-nine years old. That would be impossible." And he went on to explain that it is "more rational" to assume that the "years" of Genesis 5 refer to lunar cycles rather than solar cycles. In other words, it was his opinion that Methuselah probably lived 969 *moons* or *months* rather than 969 *suns* or *years*. He recalled the fact that various heathen tribes and even our American Indians reckoned by moons rather than by the sun and pointed out that according to this reckoning Methuselah reached the respectable age of about 80 years.

Simple, isn't it!

BUT, -

The doctor made a *great mistake*, which no true Berean could miss.

If the "years" of Genesis 5 are really months instead of years, then in the same chapter we have *fathers of five years old and grandfathers of eleven!*

And that is not all, for if this is the reckoning which is used in the book of Genesis we have nearly *everybody dying at childhood after the flood, and women bearing children one, two and three months apart!*

It may be argued by superficial observers that a different method of reckoning could have been used before the flood from that used after. But a comparison of Gen. 7:11, 8:13 and 9:29 answers that argument. From these verses it is clear that the writer of Genesis, at least, employs the same reckoning throughout. A year is a *year* - not a month.

Strange, is it not, how those who find it so difficult to believe simple statements of Scripture always seem to end up with something far more difficult to believe!

Thousands of the worldly wise find it a strain on their credulity to be asked to believe that *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* so they ask *us* to believe that somehow this vast universe just happened into existence! - that the great heavenly bodies have continued to travel in their orbits for millions of years after having flown, like chips, from some great central mass of matter which came from who knows where!

Man created by God in His image! They would not *be* so childish as to believe *that*, - so they ask *us* to believe that it all began with a poor, lonely bit of protoplasm, drifting out on the boundless sea, which finally "decided" that it ought to knuckle down and get somewhere in life!

And the fall! Why, nonsense! Man has been climbing upward ever since he emerged from the slime-pit to ascend through the ape family! He can make living more intricate and involved now! He is capable of committing greater crimes! He can wage greater wars - can wipe out whole cities at a time!

Little wonder we read in I Cor. 3:19 that *"the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."*

But which is worse, a godless unbeliever or a religious unbeliever?

Surely those who openly deny the truth are no worse than those who *"change the truth of God into a lie"* - who brazenly alter the Word of God to make it fit their "more rational" views--who try to make God tell their lies for them!

If it is folly to *reject* the testimony of God it is far greater folly to *tamper* with it, and those who do so invariably burn their fingers.

The learned doctor who scorned the idea that Methuselah could possibly have lived to become nine hundred and sixty-nine years of age not only got himself into an embarrassing position with his "more rational" view; he missed the precious lesson which Methuselah's age was meant to teach, for there was a very particular reason why God allowed Methuselah to become the oldest man of all history.

THE DAYS OF NOAH

In I Pet. 3:20 we read that *"the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah."*

In seeking for the meaning of this statement we should remember first of all that when our Lord would point out that period of history which was most notoriously wicked, He designated "*the days of Noah*" ([Matt. 24:37](#)).

The Genesis record has this to say about that depraved generation:

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

"And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart."

"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence."

"And God said unto Noah, *The end of all flesh is come before me: for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth*" (Gen. 6:5, 6, 11,13).

These were dark days indeed. Revelry, immorality and violence were the order of the day. "*They did not like to retain God in their knowledge*" and God was gradually giving them up to wrath and judgment.

And yet there was a ray of hope.

THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD

God did not deal hastily with the antediluvian world. He did not immediately pour out His wrath upon them.

"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy" (Psa. 103:8).

This is why we read in that same awful account of the days of Noah:

"And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: *Yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years*" (Gen. 6:3).

This one hundred and twenty years is generally taken to be the period "*while the ark was a preparing,*" while Noah, the "*preacher of righteousness,*" in the very building of the ark, warned the world of the judgment to come.

And thus it is that Peter tells us that "*The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah*" (I Pet. 3:20).

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

But the longevity of Methuselah affords additional evidence of the longsuffering of God in those awful days.

In Jude 14 we find that Enoch, Methuselah's father, was a prophet. Among other things he prophesied of the judgment which was to come upon the ungodly world about him.

When Enoch was sixty-five years old he begat a son whom he named *Methuselah*. That Enoch named his son prophetically seems evident for three reasons which gather force progressively.

1. Hebrew scholars tell us that the name *Methuselah* means, "*When he is dead it shall be sent.*" *What* it was that should be sent seems obvious, for the coming judgment was the very theme of Enoch's prophetic message.
2. Everybody knows that "Enoch walked with God," but most people overlook the fact that "Enoch walked with God *after he begat Methuselah* three hundred years..." (Gen. 5:22). This is important. There was apparently some deep, impelling reason for walking with God *from now on* - some reason greater than the birth of a child into the home. Was it that the life of this child was bound up with the coming judgment - that God had revealed to Enoch that the flood would come at the death of his son and that, as a solemn announcement from the Lord, he called the babe *Methuselah*? We believe it was, for
3. The flood DID come at the death of Methuselah. This is easy to determine from the record.

Let us see - and to simplify matters we will use figures instead of words in quoting the ages of those involved.

Gen. 5:25: "And Methuselah lived 187 years and begot Lamech:"

Gen. 5:28, "And Lamech lived 182 years, and begat a son: And he called his name Noah.. ."

187 plus 182 equals 369.

At Noah's birth, then, Methuselah was 369 years old.

Gen. 7:11: "in the 600th year of Noah's life . . . were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened."

369 plus 600 equals 969!

Methuselah, then, was 969 years old when the flood came.

Gen. 5:27, "And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died."

So Methuselah died the year of the flood.

There is even a hint that the prophecy was fulfilled to the very day, for Gen. 7:11 reads:

"In the sixth hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day, were all the fountains of the great deep broken up..."

We can see no reason for this careful notation of the exact time except to emphasize God's fulfillment of the prophecy exactly on time.

All this throws a flood of light upon Peter's inspired statement that "*the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah.*" It manifests the love and mercy of God and explains why God allowed *Methuselah* to live of all men the longest.

Surely the members of Noah's family could and should have said, "*How longsuffering God is! We thought that He would have cut Methuselah off and judged this vile world long ere this, but the prophet's son has lived to be hundreds of years old.*"

600--700--800--900--and still he lives on! He is 930 years old now - that is the age at which Adam died. Will he outlive Adam? Yes, still the years add up. Still the longsuffering of God waits! He will not pour out His wrath yet.

Not until *Methuselah* has become 969 years old - the oldest man of all history - is he taken away and the flood sent.

Now we see why God allowed him to live so long!

And the learned doctor who could not believe such nonsense - who, instead of openly rejecting God's Word, tried to make it mean something else - missed all this.

But what, you say, has *Methuselah* to do with *Paul*? Let us see.

First of all, we must realize that once again the world has been given up to judgment.

THE WORLD AGAIN GIVEN UP

Our days are very much like "the days of Noah." Surely no honest person, after reading either the history of the past 1900 years or the newspapers of today will be inclined to take issue with Paul for his appraisal of *"this present evil age."*

As long as 4,000 years ago God "gave up" and "scattered" the Gentiles for their open rebellion at the Tower of Babel, and chose *Abram*, saying *"I will make of thee a great nation... and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* (See [Gen. 11:8,9](#); [Gen. 12:1-3](#) and [Rom. 1](#)).

Some 2,000 years later this "great nation" joined the Gentiles in their rebellion and they likewise were given up and scattered. (See [Luke 21:24](#) and [Rom. 11](#)).

It is now more than 1,900 years since the whole world was condemned to wrath and judgment for the second time.

Not only had God's chosen people crucified His Son, but even after God raised Him from the dead they stood by their act - threatening, beating and imprisoning those who dared to say He was alive.

Not satisfied with the brutal murders of John the Baptist, Christ and Stephen they went even farther:

"... And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1).

Jerusalem, the very center of divine religion in the world, had turned against God and His Christ.

What God's answer will be is clearly foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Psa. 2:1-5: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people¹ imagine a vain thing?

"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed, saying,

"Let us break their bands assunder, and cast away their cords from us.

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

¹ "The people of Israel," according to Acts 4:25-28.

"Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure."

Psa. 110:1: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."

According to these two Psalms alone, God will reply to man's rebellion by judging him and making him Christ's footstool. And so it is that once again this wicked world awaits the wrath and judgment of God.

PENTECOST AND THE TRIBULATION

While on earth our Lord predicted that *"As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be"* ([Matt. 24:37](#)).

At Pentecost, a few years later, it must have seemed that the coming of the Son of man was already very near, for there Peter, pointing to the signs, declared that the "last days" had actually begun ([Acts 2:15-20](#)).

This is not strange when we realize that according to both type and prophecy the great tribulation was to follow Pentecost.

In Leviticus 23 the *Feast of Trumpets* follows the *Feast of Pentecost*. Since the trumpet in Scripture speaks of [war \(I Cor. 14:8\)](#), this arrangement seems to indicate clearly that after Pentecost, the next number on God's program was to be the great tribulation - God's declaration of war on a Christ-rejecting world.

Also in Joel's prophecy concerning the "last days," the pouring out of the Spirit is followed by the terrors which usher in the "day of the Lord" (See [Joel 2:28-31](#)). Little wonder that Joel 2 contains such phrases as "BLOW YE THE TRUMPET" and "SOUND THE ALARM!"

It was Israel's response to Pentecost which was to bring about the fulfillment of the next number on God's prophetic program - the blowing of trumpets and God's declaration of WAR.

But that was 1900 years ago, and still the judgment has not fallen.

THE JUDGMENT DELAYED

The Apostle Peter, who has so much to say about the return of Christ to judge and reign, also has something to say about the *delay* in His return.

About 27 years after Pentecost Peter wrote these significant words:

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

"And saying, *Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation*" (II Pet. 3:3,4).

Mark well that these are not the children of God crying "How long!" but *scoffers*, to whom the promise of the Lord's return seems an empty threat. His long absence causes them to mock at the idea that He will return in judgment.

To this the apostle replies:

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:8).

Let us thank God that this is not the poor excuse of some modern preacher for the Lord's continued absence. This was written by Peter at the *dawn* of the age of grace.

This element of timelessness is important in the consideration of the delay in the Lord's return, but let us first consider the verse in its context.

SLACKNESS OR LONG-SUFFERING?

Has one day ever seemed like a thousand years to you?

We have heard people say, perhaps, that one day seemed like a month, but one day could scarcely seem like 1,000 years to any of us, for few of us have lived to be even 100 years old!

"But beloved . . . ONE DAY IS WITH THE LORD AS A THOUSAND YEARS..."

We are so careless about the passing of time. We take God's mercy for granted and allow the moments to fly by as if they meant nothing to Him - as if it made little difference to Him how long the rejection of Christ continued.

But God is not so indifferent about the passing of time. He sees the hatred, the greed, the oppression, the murder, the theft, the adultery - and He *hates* it. He knows the wickedness that has left millions lying dead on the battlefields of the world and other millions mourning and hopeless, sick and wounded, starving and homeless - and His holy nature burns with wrath against it.

God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and is keenly conscious of every moment that it continues.

Then why does He not send Christ to put a stop to it all?

The very facts we have been considering should prepare us for Peter's explanation of the delay.

"The Lord is *NOT SLACK* concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is *L-O-N-G-S-U-F-F-E-R-I-N-G* to usward, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (II Pet. 3:9).

The scoffers laugh at the idea that Christ will return, and declare that everything is the same as it always was. They *presume* that the delay in Christ's return indicates that He has *forgotten* or is *indifferent* or is *helpless* to do anything about world conditions - *or even that He is not even alive!*

But they are wrong, and the apostle, in preparing God's people for the delay, explains that He is not "slack" concerning His promise, but that the very opposite is the case. It is not slackness but *long-suffering*, not indifference but *self-control*, not weakness but *strength*.

When mother's Johnny finds it hard to be good - when he has an off day - which requires the greater strength of character on mother's part, to lose her temper and beat him thoughtlessly, or to exercise self-restraint and discipline him wisely?

Or let us put it this way:

Here, let us say, is a steam boiler containing hundreds of pounds of steam pressure. We increase the pressure. The pressure gauge goes up and up, until finally there is a terrific explosion.

When did the boiler show its strength, when it *held* the steam or when it *exploded*? When it *contained* it, of course.

True, it may have *seemed* stronger when it exploded. It may have sent pipes and fittings flying. It may have broken heavy beams and shattered doors and windows, but had the boiler been stronger it would not have exploded so soon. Indeed, it was some weakness in the boiler that caused it to explode at all.

Does God ever "explode?" *Certainly not!* His mighty power is always under control. Augustine has said that "God is *patient* because He is *eternal*." It is not slackness but sublime self-restraint that causes Him to postpone the day of wrath.

Those who complain about the silence of God and His seeming indifference to the world's distress, should reflect that when God sent the Prince of Peace into

the world they nailed Him to a tree, crying "Away with Him!" And they went farther than that, rejecting the glorified, risen Christ, as they had rejected the lowly Jesus.

God cannot speak again until He speaks in wrath. This is the next number on the prophetic program, but rather than speak in wrath hastily, He holds His peace and lingers in mercy over this wicked scene.

METHUSELAH AND PAUL

After telling us not to count the delay in Christ's return slackness, Peter advises us how we *should* account for it - and here is where Paul comes in.

II Pet. 3:9: "The Lord is *NOT SLACK* concerning His promise ... but is *LONG-SUFFERING...*"

II Pet. 3:15: "And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is *S-A-L-V-A-T-I-O-N*, even as *our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto Him hath written unto you.*"

Yes, the long-suffering of our Lord spells one big, blessed word -- S-A-L-V-A-T-I-O-N.

Now, while Peter's ministry at Pentecost had Israel's *acceptance* of Christ in view and anticipated His soon return to earth to reign on David's throne, Paul's subsequent ministry had the *rejection* of Christ in view and explained His continued *absence*.

We may long for the Lord Jesus to come and receive us to Himself, but let us never forget that as long as our Savior remains seated at the right hand of God the judgment of the nations cannot come.

In the meantime salvation is offered to sinners everywhere - not on the basis of any covenant², but by grace - not according to Old Testament prophecy, but according to the revelation of the mystery revealed to Paul; not in return for works of righteousness, but as a free gift of God.

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (II Tim. 1:9).

We must remember here, that Paul was not only the revelator, but also the supreme *demonstration* of God's grace.

² Except that which was made in the counsels of the Trinity in eternity past (Heb. 13:20).

As in the days of Noah there was one person to whom men could point as an example of God's long-suffering, so it is in this "present evil age."

In I Tim. 1:12-15 we find these words, written by Paul to his son in the faith:

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

"Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

"And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save SINNERS; OF WHOM I AM CHIEF."

We must be careful not to make this passage teach that Paul was the *worst* of sinners. It does not say that. It says *chief*, and "chief" does not mean *worst*, nor exactly *first*, but *foremost*. It has to do with *rank*. Hence we find Luke speaking of "*chief men of the city*," "*a chief city of... Macedonia*," "*chief women*" and "*the chief man of the island*" in [Acts 13:50](#); [16:12](#); [17:4](#) and [28:7](#).

As we think of the Gentiles in rebellion against God and the Jews joining the rebellion we must not forget Saul's place in this rebellion.

In Acts 8, where we read about the great persecution which arose against the followers of Christ, Saul of Tarsus is singled out as the greatest persecutor of all. It says of him and of him alone: "*as for Saul, he made havock of the church..*" And he himself writes to the Galatians: "*Ye have heard... how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it [laid it waste]*" ([Gal. 1:13](#)). Add to these two statements the many details which both Luke and he himself supply concerning his mad and relentless persecution of the believers and you will have some idea of the part he played as the *leader* of the rebellion against Christ.

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest,

"And desired of him letters to **Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" ([Acts 9: 1,2](#)).**

But on the way to **Damascus**, God opened the heavens, reached down and - saved him!

And notice, after calling himself the chief of sinners, in I Tim. 1:15, Paul tells us *why* God saved him:

I Tim. 1:16: "Howbeit *for this cause* I obtained mercy, that in me *first* Jesus Christ might show forth *all long-suffering, for a pattern* to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."

This was the man whom God was to send forth with the blessed "gospel of the grace of God,, and God was to use him as the living example of that grace. In this passage the word "first" is the very same word which is translated "chief" in I Tim. 1:15. Paul was the *foremost* example of God's infinite grace.

His conversion, of course, foreshadowed the conversion of Israel, who, like Saul of Tarsus, will turn to Christ when they behold Him in His glory. However, he has an *even closer* relationship to us.

In I Cor. 15:8 the apostle says that "*last of all He [Christ] was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*"

The phrase "out of due time," is more correctly rendered "before due time," and alludes to the fact that "*in due time*" Israel will be saved.

But let us ask a few questions here.

When is the due time for Israel to be saved?

You say, That has not yet come. It is still future according to Rom. 11:26.

And when is the due time for the Gentiles to be saved? You say, That too is future, for according to prophecy the Gentiles are to be saved *through* Israel.

Then are believers today being saved *in* or *out* of due time, as far as prophecy is concerned?

Like Paul, both Jews and Gentiles today are being saved "*out of due time*" - not according to the covenants but by grace - not in fulfillment of prophecy but according to God's secret, eternal purpose, *the mystery*.

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

"If ye have heard of *the dispensation of the grace of God* which is given me to you-ward:

"How *that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery...*" (Eph. 3:1-3).

So Paul was both the herald of the grace of God and the supreme demonstration of it.

As in Noah's day men could point to *Methuselah* as evidence of God's long-suffering, so today we can point to *Paul*. This, as we have seen, was one of the particular reasons why God saved *him* – “*that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering.*”

As *Methuselah* demonstrated the *length* of God's long-suffering, Paul demonstrates the *breadth* of it.

WHEN WILL IT END?

Once again we are living in a particularly *evil* age.

Once again the world has been given up to judgment.

Once again the long-suffering of God waits.

Once again a *person* symbolizes God's long-suffering.

Once again the Holy Spirit strives with men.

When will it end? When will the day of grace draw to a close and give way to the day of judgment?

Let us consider again II Pet. 3:8.

"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that *one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*"

Can you tell from this verse when the Lord will come? Surely not. According to the first part of this verse He could come very, very soon, but according to the latter phrase He could stay away for a long, long time. And this is just the attitude in which the Lord would have us - never setting dates, yet always watching and ready. This element of timelessness is one of the characteristics of the dispensation of grace. If God waits for another moment it is not because He promised to - it is *grace, pure grace*.

We cannot stress too often the bearing which this has upon both the saved and the lost.

To the lost God says,

"Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation." (II Cor. 6:2).

To the saved He says,

"See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, REDEEMING THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL" (Eph. 5:15,16).

A Simple Solution to A Puzzling Problem

THE PROBLEM OUTLINED

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Here the Apostle Paul appears to state unequivocally that all the promises made to Abraham regarding his "seed" referred, not to his multiplied seed, but to Christ alone.

How many theological battles have been fought over this passage, and with what negative results!

The basic problem is that the word "seed," in Hebrew and Greek, as in English, may refer to one seed or to many, to a single seed or to a bagfull. In the latter case the word is used as a collective noun, thus in *both* cases the singular form is used. If I had a barn filled with individual seeds, it would be correctly referred to as "a barn full of *seed*." The plural form would *never* be used in such a case, *unless* a variety of *kinds* of seed were referred to: e. g., "The store carries twenty-four different seeds." But even then it would be more customary to say: "The store carries twenty-four different *kinds* of *seed*." It is evident that the Apostle Paul, in Gal. 3: 16, is not referring to a *variety* of seeds, however, so the problem remains: Why does he argue that the Holy Spirit's use of the word "seed," in the promises made to Abraham and his progeny, proves that He was referring to only *one particular* seed: Christ?

Albert Barnes, meeting this problem head-on in his commentary on Galatians, rightly says:

"Now no one ever probably read this passage without feeling a difficulty, and without asking himself whether this argument is sound, and is worthy of a man of candor, and especially of an inspired man."

The difficulties increase as we go to the particular passages in which God made the promises referred to, for very clearly *not one* of them refers to one particular seed, but *all* very obviously refer to *multiplied* seed!

This makes it appear all the more that Paul, in Gal. 3:16, was seeking to win a point by the use of sophistry; by taking illegitimate advantage of the Holy Spirit's use of a word.

When this writer was still a young pastor and had barely begun to take a stand for "the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery," he received a striking letter from the president of a popular Christian College.

Said the president in effect: "I am an antidispenationalist, and you are generally considered an ultra-dispenationalist, but this I firmly believe: Either you are right or I am right, but the Bible teachers in between are certainly wrong." He referred to those who believed that the Body of Christ had its historical beginning with Peter and the eleven at Pentecost.

Very graciously he invited me and any of my friends to spend one or more evenings with him at the college to discuss the matter.

Several of us accepted his invitation, but our discussion centered almost exclusively around one verse: Galatians 3:16! We couldn't seem to get away from it.

This passage, he contended, was the Holy Spirit's own exegesis, or explanation, of the promises made to Abraham. He insisted that no matter how plainly the promises themselves seemed to refer to Abraham's *multiplied* seed, God *Himself* says in Gal. 3:16 that they referred to *one particular* Seed alone: Christ.

We, on the other hand, contended that if God made promises to Abraham which obviously referred to his *multiplied* seed, but actually meant them to apply to only *one particular* seed, He was not being honest with Abraham. This we both agreed could not be the case, but it shows how important it is that we understand Gal. 3:16 correctly for the veracity, the trustworthiness, of God Himself is involved.

Before examining the original promises referred to, may we make one important suggestion to our readers, and particularly to our younger pastors? When you are faced with what appears to be an insoluble problem in Scripture: some seeming contradiction, perhaps, do *not* strain or force the meaning of any Scripture passage so as to arrive at some solution which may seem acceptable to you. Rather, *wait, just wait and pray for further light.*

But must we then accept so apparent a contradiction as that outlined above? Is it possible that Gal. 3:16 is the divine exegesis, God's own interpretation, of the promises made to Abraham? Let us be Bereans and search the Scriptures to see whether this is so. Let us see whether these promises can be fairly interpreted to refer to one single Seed: Christ.

THE PROMISES TO ABRAHAM AND HIS SEED

The first promise made to Abraham (then still called Abram) is found in Gen. 12:1-3:

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from they kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee:

"AND I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

This promise was confirmed and enlarged upon several times, as we learn from the book of Genesis.

Gen 13:14-16: "And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward.

"For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

"AND I WILL MAKE THY SEED AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH: SO THAT IF A MAN CAN NUMBER THE DUST OF THE EARTH, THEN SHALL THY SEED ALSO BE NUMBERED."

Gen. 15:5: "And He brought him forth abroad, and said, LOOK NOW TOWARD HEAVEN, AND TELL [COUNT] THE STARS, IF THOU BE ABLE TO NUMBER THEM: AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, SO SHALL THY SEED BE."

Gen. 17:6-8: "AND I WILL MAKE THEE EXCEEDING FRUITFUL, AND I WILL MAKE NATIONS OF THEE, AND KINGS SHALL COME OUT OF THEE.

"And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in THEIR generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

"And I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be THEIR God."

Gen. 22:17,18: "That in blessing I will bless thee, and IN MULTIPLYING I WILL MULTIPLY THY SEED AS THE STARS OF THE HEAVEN, AND AS THE

SAND WHICH IS UPON THE SEA SHORE: and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice."

Who could read the passages above with unbiased mind and question that in all these promises God had the *multiplied* seed of Abraham in mind and that Abraham would surely understand them so?

Concerning the passage last cited above, Barnes remarks (in dealing with Gal. 3:16) that obviously it refers to Abraham's multiplied seed "without *any* particular reference to an individual," and adds: "Such would be the fair and natural interpretation should it be read by hundreds or thousands of persons who had never heard of the interpretation here put upon it by Paul."

But we are not yet through, for remember, the apostle says in Gal. 3:16: "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made." Not "of" or "concerning" (though this is also true), but "*to*," and we do indeed see these promises already confirmed to Isaac and Jacob in the very first book of the Bible, and then later to the children of Israel as a nation. And again Abraham's *multiplied* seed is unmistakably in view.

Note first the confirmation made to Isaac:

Gen. 26:4: "AND I WILL MAKE THY SEED TO MULTIPLY AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

And the further confirmation to Jacob is no less emphatic in its reference, not to one seed, but to many:

Gen. 28:14: "AND THY SEED SHALL BE AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH, AND THOU SHALT SPREAD ABROAD TO THE WEST, AND TO THE EAST, AND TO THE NORTH, AND TO THE SOUTH: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Perhaps the reader has noticed that already these promises in Genesis have been made to Abraham and *more* than "one" of his seed: Isaac *and* Jacob, but certainly these promises were made indirectly to more than these: to Abraham's greatly-multiplied seed.

It should be noted here that nowhere does God state that *all* of Abraham's seed are intended. Indeed the implication is clearly otherwise, for these promises were confirmed, not to Ishmael, but to Isaac; not to Esau, but to Jacob. That is, the multiplied seed through whom the world would some day be blessed would

come through Isaac and then Jacob, from whom the "children of Israel" sprang. And it was even a certain generation of these that God had in mind. But all this is perfectly consistent with the promises cited above, while it would scarcely be honest of God to make such promises if He did *not* plan to bless the world through Abraham's multiplied seed, but only through his single Seed: Christ.

MOSES AND THE PROPHETS

But there is still more to consider before we go to the solution of this problem.

It is clear that *Moses and the prophets* understood these promises to refer to Abraham's multiplied seed. Here we could quote scores, perhaps hundreds of passages in confirmation, but a few will have to suffice.

As Moses stood before the children of Israel at **Kadesh-Barnea**, just across Jordan from the land of Canaan, he proclaimed the divine challenge:

"Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land WHICH THE LORD SWARE UNTO YOUR FATHERS, ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB, TO GIVE UNTO THEM AND TO THEIR SEED AFTER THEM."

"THE LORD YOUR GOD HATH MULTIPLIED YOU, AND, BEHOLD, YE ARE THIS DAY AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN FOR MULTITUDE."

"Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up and possess it "(Deut. 1:8,10,21).

Isaiah surely understood God's promises as referring to Abraham's multiplied seed when he predicted concerning redeemed Israel:

"Arise and shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

"For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee.

"And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the *brightness* of thy rising" (Isa. 60:1-3).

Jeremiah surely understood it so when he declared:

"And I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; AND THEY SHALL BE FRUITFUL AND INCREASE."

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.

"In His days JUDAH SHALL BE SAVED, AND ISRAEL SHALL DWELL SAFELY "(Jer. 23:3,5,6).

To be sure, these blessings will come to Israel and Judah in the days of Messiah's reign, but it is still the *multiplied* seed to whom these blessings are promised.

Most certainly the prophet *Zechariah* too understood all these promises so:

"AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT AS YE WERE A CURSE AMONG THE NATIONS, O HOUSE OF JUDAH, AND HOUSE OF ISRAEL; SO WILL I SAVE YOU AND YE SHALL BE A BLESSING "

"THUS SAITH THE LORD OF HOSTS: IN THOSE DAYS IT SHALL COME TO PASS THAT TEN MEN SHALL TAKE HOLD, OUT OF ALL LANGUAGES OF THE NATIONS, EVEN SHALL TAKE HOLD OF THE SKIRT OF HIM THAT IS A JEW, SAYING, WE WILL GO WITH YOU; FOR WE HAVE HEARD THAT GOD IS WITH YOU" (Zech. 8:13, 23).

Surely this must refer to the multiplied seed of Abraham. It *could not* refer to Christ. Was Christ "a curse among the nations"? Did Christ have to be "saved" to become a blessing to them? These two verses from Zechariah 8 establish beyond the shadow of a doubt that it was God's plan - and it still is - to bless the nations through the *multiplied* seed of Abraham.

Does this all change when we come to the so-called "New Testament"? In no wise, for our Lord and His disciples went to none but "*unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" ([Matt. 10:5,6](#); [15:24](#)) simply *because* according to all covenant and prophecy Israel had to be saved before she could become a blessing to the Gentiles.

Did the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, then, bring about a change in this plan? No, for *after* Pentecost we find Peter declaring to an audience of Israelites:

"Ye are the children of the prophets, AND OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD MADE WITH OUR FATHERS, SAYING UNTO ABRAHAM, AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.

"UNTO YOU FIRST GOD, HAVING RAISED UP HIS SON JESUS, SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU IN TURNING AWAY EVERY ONE OF YOU FROM HIS INIQUITIES" (Acts 3:25,26; and cf. Vers. 19-21).

Our Reformed and Presbyterian brethren have long held that God is through with Israel, that the Church is spiritual Israel and Christ the King of the Church, now sitting on David's "spiritual" throne in heaven. But this is arbitrarily altering the plain Word of God and, indeed, is contrary to reason.

Finally, Paul himself declares to the Roman believers:

"I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits: that blindness in part is happened to Israel, UNTIL the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

"And so ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED, AS IT IS WRITTEN.. ." (Rom. 11:25,26).

With this present dispensation of the mystery and Gentile blessing through Israel's *fall* in view, the apostle says in the same chapter:

"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall *the receiving of them* be, but life from the dead?" (Ver. 15).

Now it is evident that the latter "them" in this passage must be the same "them" as the former "them." The latter cannot possibly refer to the Church, but to Israel, the nation which has been temporarily cast away. Verses 23 and 24 further confirm this.

What then is the explanation of Paul's words in Gal. 3:16: *"He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ"?*

We can well see how our covenant brethren came to the conclusion that the promises to Abraham and his physical seed must be "spiritualized," for Paul clearly stated to the rejecting Jews of **Pisidian Antioch**:

"... It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, BUT SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE, LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES" (Acts 13:46).

At first sight, and without the rest of Paul's epistles and the Word in general to guide us, it might well be gathered from this and similar passages that God was casting Israel aside forever.

Indeed, in Rom. 11:11 Paul himself declares that *now "through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles."*

But the so-called "spiritualization" of the Old Testament promises is really nothing less than an arbitrary altering of them by theologians so as to make them conform to their own systems of *doctrine* - *and we have no right to alter the written Word of God*. Moreover, Paul himself makes it crystal clear that the casting away of Israel is only temporary (See again [Rom. 11:12, 15,23-26](#)).

THE GLORIOUS SOLUTION

Why, then, does Paul say in Gal. 3:16:

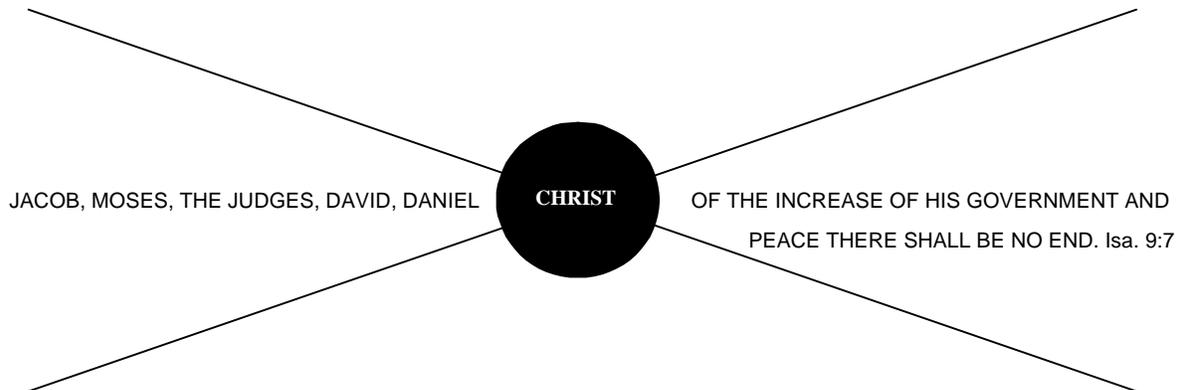
"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

In the light of the promises themselves and all their confirmations in the Book of Genesis; in the light of all the further confirmations in the law and the prophets; in the light of Peter's plain words in Acts 3:25,26, and in the light of Paul's own epistle to the Romans is it not crystal clear that God planned - and plans - to bless the Gentile nations through *Israel*, Abraham's *multiplied* seed? Would it not be foolish and wrong to conclude from one passage, Gal. 3:16, that all these promises referred to one single Seed: Christ? To such a view the words of the puzzled little girl to her mother are rightly applied. She asked: "Mother, if God didn't mean what He said, why didn't He say what He meant?!"

But God *did* mean exactly what He said, and the wonderful, satisfying solution to this problem, as to so many others, is to be found in the mystery revealed by the glorified Lord to and through Paul. As Pastor J. C. O'Hair has pointed out so beautifully in his book, *Daniel's Secret, Paul's Mystery, John's Revelation*, whenever it appears that God's prophetic program *cannot* be fulfilled, God reveals a secret that provides a glorious and satisfying answer.

Perhaps it will help at this point first to notice what the verse does *not* say. It does *not* say that God would *not* bless Abraham's multiplied seed, or through them the world. It does *not* say that God would bless *only* Christ, the single Seed, and make Him *alone* a blessing to the world, though *in a sense* this is true, for all blessing flows from Him. The Apostle simply states that in making the promises to Abraham and his progeny, God used the word "seed," which is singular in form, and that He did this because He had Christ in view. In other words, God specially avoided the use of plural words which might have been used, such as "in thy *children*," "in thy *descendants*," etc., for there was no generation of Abraham's offspring who, in themselves, could have proved a blessing to the world.

Perhaps the following diagram will help to explain the simple solution to the problem we have wrestled with.



Considering the above diagram in a general way as representing the history of Abraham's physical seed, through which generation of that seed could the world possibly have been blessed? Through Jacob and his generation? Jacob himself swindled his brother out of the birthright and blessing and his life from then on is a long story of human failure. Little wonder Psalm 146:5 declares: "Happy is he that hath the God of *Jacob* for his *help*, whose *hope* is in the Lord his God," for Jacob and his whole generation surely needed God's *help*.

Could the world have been blessed, then, through Moses' generation? Hardly, for under Moses Israel constantly murmured and complained and rebelled. He called them "a stiffnecked people" ([Ex. 33:3](#); *et al*), and indeed, Moses himself was not free from many human failures.

Could the world have been blessed through the generation of the Judges, then? Far from it, for Judges 17:6: "*Every man did that which was right in his own eyes,*" explains why the history of the Judges contains with wearying monotony the phrase: "*And Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord.*" How could they have been a blessing to the other nations?

Could David's generation have been the one to bring blessing to the world? How could they, when David himself, though a man after God's own heart, was guilty of adultery and murder, and when but recently Israel had rejected God and had cried for a king to reign over them "like the other nations"?

And as to Daniel's generation: by this time God's people had departed so far from Him that He had delivered them into the hand of the Babylonians.

Please glance now at the above chart and note how the possibility of blessing to the world through Israel's multiplied seed *diminishes steadily* until we get to one Person - just *one* of the seed of Abraham: the *Lord Jesus Christ*.

Does it follow, then, that God's promises concerning the multiplied seed will not be fulfilled because they forfeited the blessing through failure and unbelief, and that therefore the nations will be blessed through Christ alone?

Not exactly. Are we hedging when we answer the question in this way? No, for God will indeed bless the world through the *multiplied* seed of Abraham; this had been proven, not only by the unconditional promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but also by repeated prophetic confirmations both before and after Pentecost. However, Israel will never become the world's blesser until she becomes so *through Christ*; until she has been "saved" through Christ, her "Redeemer," for the blessing of the world is wrapped up in Him - in Him alone.

Note that Christ is the focal point in the above outline. All blessing is centered in Him and must be found in Him. God has been demonstrating this for the past nineteen hundred years. Hear some of Paul's Spirit-inspired statements on this subject:

II Cor. 5:17: "Therefore if any man be IN CHRIST, he is [or "there is"] a new creation "

II Cor. 5:21: "For God hath made Him to be sin for us, [Him] who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God IN HIM."

Gal. 2:20: "I am crucified WITH CHRIST; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God,³ who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Eph. 1:6: "To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted IN THE BELOVED [ONE]."

Eph. 1:7: "IN WHOM we have redemption, through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

Eph. 1: 11: "IN WHOM we also have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

Eph. 1:13: "IN WHOM ye also trusted ... IN WHOM ... ye were sealed ... "

Eph. 3:6: "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise IN CHRIST by the gospel"

Phil. 3:8,9: "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ,

³ Note carefully: "by *the faith of*," not my faith in. Faith is referred to here subjectively: our Lord's *worthiness* to be *believed*. See the author's booklet, *The Faith of Christ*.

"And be found IN HIM, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ,⁴ the righteousness which is of God by faith."

Col. 2:6,7: 'As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye IN HIM;

"Rooted and built up IN HIM . . . "

Col. 2:9,10: "For IN HIM dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

"And ye are complete IN HIM, who is the Head of all principality and power."

Col. 2:12: "Buried WITH HIM in baptism, wherein also ye are risen WITH HIM, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead."

Truly *"it pleased the Father that IN HIM should all fulness dwell"* (Col. 1:19). What do you want, unsaved friend, that is worth anything at all: forgiveness? peace? joy? assurance? They are to be found in Him and in Him alone. He is the Fount of every blessing, the Source of all supply. And what, dear Christian friend, do you have that is worthwhile that is of yourself? Nothing. All you have and are, you have and are *in Him*.

You have "redemption . . . the forgiveness of sins" *in Him*, because you were crucified *with Him*, and buried and raised *with Him*. You have been made "the righteousness of God" *in Him*, and God now "accepts" you *in Him*. You are "a new creation" *in Him* and have "obtained an inheritance," a most glorious one, *in Him*. God now sees you *in Him* and has pronounced you "complete *in Him*."

For nineteen hundred years God has been teaching this lesson, and not until Israel sees it and stops trying to "establish their own righteousness," humbly receiving Christ and the riches of His grace, will the blessing overflow to the other nations. *Then* all nations will be blessed through Israel, *through Christ!*

Thus Paul, in Gal. 3:16, does not imply that God will not fulfill the promises to Abraham's multiplied seed. He only points out that God used a *compound*, or *collective* noun in making these promises since He knew that the multiplied seed could not *in themselves* prove a blessing to the world. It is *redeemed Israel* that will bless the world ([Zech. 8:13](#); [Rom. 11:26](#)): *through Christ*.

Thus, even the word "seed," in Gal. 3:16, while singular in form ("Not many. . . but one"), is still plural in fact, for as we have said: we use the word "seed,"

⁴ See foregoing footnote.

whether of one single seed or of a bagfull. Moreover, any one seed *contains* much seed, potentially. This agrees with our Lord's words in John 12:24:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn [kernel] of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

One more thing: As the possibility of world blessing through Abraham's multiplied seed diminished until Christ's appearance and redemptive work, so it will grow and expand once the favored nation is "saved" and finds her place *in Christ*. You say, "Christ is Israel's *Messiah*, her *King*; she does not belong to His Body?" True, for the revelation about the Body of Christ is a high truth indeed. But morally and spiritually *every* man stands before God, either in Adam or in Christ. We can no more divorce ourselves from Adam than can the leaf from the twig or the twig from the branch or the branch from the bough, or the bough from the tree, *unless we are redeemed*: taken out of Adam, as it were, and given a position in *Christ*. This was so even of those who were saved before Paul was entrusted with "the revelation of the mystery," or was even converted to Christ, for in Rom. 16:7 he refers to some who were "*in Christ before me*."

Unsaved friend, will you learn the lesson God is teaching today, as He forms "the Church which is His [Christ's] Body"? The lesson is simply that there is no true blessing to be found anywhere but *in Christ* and that *you* cannot possibly be a true blessing to anyone else, except *in Christ*.

Our generation is constantly emphasizing relevancy. Well then, this is the most relevant truth of all. Accept it and not only will your life be filled with meaning and purpose, but the blessing will overflow to others.

Daniel's Seventy Weeks

AND THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

Every student of Scripture knows about Daniel's earnest prayer for his people toward the close of their captivity in Babylon, and how the angel Gabriel was sent to him to foretell the main events in the course of their experiences from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the enthronement of Christ in their midst as their Messiah King. The prophecy reads as follows:

"Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon the holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

"Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.

"And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for Himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.

"And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate [desolator]" (Dan. 9:24-27).

A POPULAR SUBJECT WE NEVER DISCUSSED PUBLICLY

Daniel's prophecy of the seventy "weeks" has been a popular subject among dispensational Bible teachers for several decades at least. Yet, in over thirty years of Bible teaching we never discussed this subject publicly, either orally or in writing. We maintained this silence because of a major problem involved, which was left unanswered by such studies as we had heard and read on the subject.

Not until 1961, when a young friend, Mike Singleton, wrote to take exception to a phrase we had used in the *Searchlight*, did the light dawn, so that we then felt free to write on the subject and pass the light on to you, our readers.

BASIC FACTS OF THE PROPHECY

There are several basic facts about this prophecy upon which most dispensationalists are doubtless agreed:

1. The Angel Gabriel came to inform Daniel that 70 "weeks" (of years)⁵ or 490 years, were "determined" for Israel, from the approaching command to rebuild Jerusalem to the anointing of Messiah as King (Ver. 24).

2. These 70 "weeks" were to be divided into 7 + 62 + 1 (Vers. 25-27).

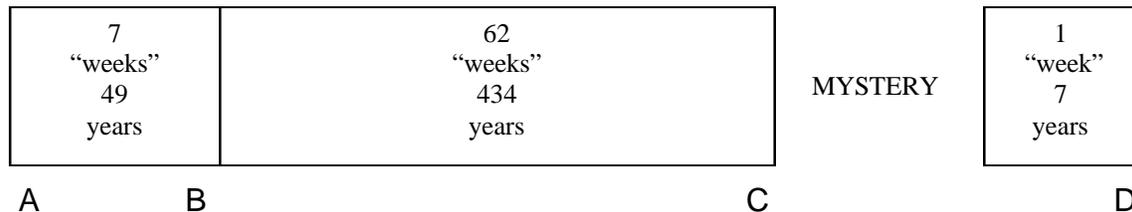
3. There were to be 7 "weeks" (49 years) from the command to rebuild Jerusalem to its completion (Ver. 25).

4. These 7 "weeks" were to be followed by 62 more "weeks" (434 years) until "Messiah the Prince" (Ver. 25).

5. Messiah would then be "cut off" and the 70th "week" (7 years) would follow. During this "week" the "great tribulation" would take place and after its close Messiah would be enthroned.

6. There has been a break, or interruption, in the prophetic program between the 69th "week" and the 70th, or final, "week," which is related, not to prophecy, but to the "mystery" of the present dispensation "kept secret" until revealed through the Apostle Paul. Our British friends used to call this the "gap" in prophecy. Dr. H. A. Ironside called it "the great parenthesis." This gap, or parenthesis, appears throughout the prophetic word, indicating that God had planned, though not prophesied, the present dispensation "before the world began."

Thus the entire plan would be outlined as follows:



⁵ The word *shubua*, in the original, means simply *seven*, not necessarily seven *days* and in this case is obviously used to designate sevens, or weeks, of *years*. The reader should bear this in mind as we continue to use the word "week" in this article by way of accommodation.

- A. The command to rebuild Jerusalem
- B. Jerusalem rebuilt and wall completed
- C. Messiah cut off
- D. Messiah anointed King

The problem which always troubled us, however, was that according to the popular interpretations of this passage several important prophetic events are actually *excluded* from this prophecy dealing with Israel's future from Daniel's time to the end. Mark well, these prophetic events are not merely *left* out; they are *put* out, or *excluded from* this prophetic period and are placed instead inside the parenthetical period, concerning which prophecy is supposed to have said nothing.

Verse 26 states clearly that "after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off." Granting that the word "after" may mean "at the close of," this still leaves the resurrection and ascension of Christ and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost *outside* the prophetic period.

But the interpretation of some commentators would even leave the crucifixion outside. Sir Robert Anderson, for example, went to great pains to prove that the 483 years (7 + 62 "weeks") of Daniel's prophecy take us only "unto Messiah the Prince," i.e., to "His public offer of Himself as King" when He entered Jerusalem on an ass's colt, and that this figures out to *the very day!*⁶ This, of course, would leave the cross outside the prophetic period, for the 70th "week" does not begin until the future.

HOW THIS PROBLEM HAS AFFECTED POPULAR EXPOSITIONS

Sir Robert Anderson wrote, with regard to this prophecy: "What then, was the length of the period intervening between the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and this public advent of Messiah the Prince?" and he answers: "EXACTLY . . . SEVEN TIMES SIXTY-NINE PROPHETIC YEARS OF 360 DAYS" (*Daniel In the Critics' Den*; Our emphasis). Since Sir Robert held that the 70th week still remains to be fulfilled, does this not leave the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost outside the prophetic period? And were not all these events included in God's prophetic program for Israel?

Dr. Arno C. Gaebelin wrote of Daniel's prophecy: "... it is a great apocalypse of THE ENTIRE FUTURE OF ISRAEL FROM THE END OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY TO THE TIME OF THE END..." (*The Prophet Daniel*, P. 129; Our

⁶ Much as we have always been impressed with Sir Robert Anderson as a Bible teacher, we have never been impressed with his explanation of this passage. For one thing, our Lord did not offer Himself as King at the so-called "Triumphal Entry." He well knew that His glory must "*follow*" His sufferings (I Pet. 1:11) and entered Jerusalem that day as a Lamb rather than as King--to die rather than to reign.

emphasis). Yet, he wrote with regard to this same passage: "Exactly 483 years (69 weeks) after the command to restore and build Jerusalem had been given, the Lord Jesus entered into Jerusalem to present Himself and His claims..." (*The Prophet Daniel*, P. 138). He had completed the above sentence with the words: "a few days *after* (the 69 weeks) he was nailed to the cross" and cites Sir Robert Anderson to prove that Christ's entry into Jerusalem on an ass's colt completed the 69 weeks to the very day. He thus left the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost *outside* of a prophecy which is supposed to foretell "*the entire future of Israel from the end of the Babylonian captivity to the time of the end.*"

Dr. H. A. Ironside held the same general view and left the same problem unanswered. In his *Lectures on Daniel* he wrote: "But in answer to his [Daniel's] prayer God makes known to him that in seventy weeks, or sevens of years, ALL PROPHECY IN CONNECTION WITH HIS PEOPLE WILL BE FULFILLED" (P. 167, our emphasis). Indeed, he went so far as to say, with reference to the crucifixion: "Up to this time, the great prophetic clock had been ticking out the years one after another in fulfillment of what we have in this chapter; but UPON THE CRUCIFIXION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST THE GREAT CLOCK STOPPED, AND THERE HAS NOT BEEN ANOTHER TICK FROM IT SINCE" (*Lectures on Daniel*, Pp. 166,167; Our emphasis). How emphatically he thus *excluded* the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost from prophecy!

Would Anderson, Gabelein and Ironside, then, have denied that the crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost were prophesied in connection with Israel? Of course not. All three have too emphatically stated that these events *were* prophesied in connection with Israel, but strangely this problem does not seem to have occurred to them in connection with this passage.

WAITING FOR LIGHT

For many years we studied and *restudied* this passage, and related passages of Scripture, without finding the solution to this problem. During these years we wrote to not a few well known Bible teachers about the matter, but still without results.

In 1953 we suggested to the GGF Executive Council that this subject might be discussed at the forthcoming Pastors' Retreat. They kindly agreed, and two of us were assigned to write papers on it. We did this and discussed the problem for several days, but still without finding a solution.

THE LIGHT DAWNS

Finally, in April, 1961, our dear brother, Mike Singleton, of Mobile, Alabama, wrote to inquire why we had used the phrase "cut off" in connection with the crucifixion of Christ. If we were referring to the passage in Daniel 9, Singleton

said, he felt this had rather to do with Israel's *final* rejection of Christ in early Acts, when, stoning Stephen, they sent a message to God, saying: "We *will not have Christ to reign over us*" (See [Luke 19:11-14](#)). Otherwise, he asked, how could we explain Dan. 9:24-27?

We were stunned for a few moments, reading his objection over several times, until we saw how clear and simple a solution we had to a question which had troubled us for so many years.

Back to the Scriptures we went to check on the details and we have now not the slightest doubt that our brother is right, thanking God for the light received.

The crucifixion, the resurrection, the ascension and Pentecost were now all included in the prophecy regarding Israel and Jerusalem - right where they belonged, so that the dispensation of the mystery would begin with the raising up of Paul - just where it should!

Here the reader should glance back at our diagram and note how the problem is solved if we realize that Christ was finally "cut off" by Israel, not at the cross, but after Pentecost, at the stoning of Stephen. After this God still deals with individual Jews, but the kingdom is never again offered.

WHAT ABOUT THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM?

But what about the destruction of rebuilt Jerusalem? Is this not included in the prophetic program? Yes it is - in the 70th "week." We have never had any problem about this, though some suppose that Verse 26 of our passage predicts the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 under Titus.

Granted, many prophecies have a primary and a secondary fulfillment and this prophecy states that "the people of the [Roman] prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary" (Ver. 26) but this still refers exclusively to the *future* destruction of Jerusalem in "the great tribulation," when Jerusalem shall be besieged, not by one nation but by many.

First, note that this attack upon Jerusalem will "end ... with a flood" (Ver. 26). This "flood," clearly, is a flood *of people* from all nations, In connection with the very events referred to in this prophecy, we read in Isa. 59:10:

"When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Similarly we read in Isa. 17:12,13:

"Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them ... "

At the close of the tribulation Jerusalem will be besieged, not only by the armies of the revived Roman Empire, but by all nations. Thus Zechariah 14:1-3 prophesies with regard to Jerusalem:

"Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee.

"For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished ... "

Thus in Rev. 12:13-15 we have the "woman," Israel, almost overwhelmed by a "flood."

Further, the destruction of Jerusalem prophesied in Daniel 9 cannot refer to its destruction under Titus in A.D, 70, since the "he" of Verse 27 clearly refers to the wicked "prince" of Verse 26 who, in the future, will make a covenant with "the many" in Israel for one "week" (the 70th) and then will break it in the middle of the "week" by enthroning himself as God in the Holy of holies in the temple.

This is called "the abomination of desolation" and will take place during the coming "great tribulation" (See [Matt. 24:15,21](#)). Nor did anything like this take place when Titus' armies destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Dan. 9:27 states with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem that, not "years later," but *in this connection* the Antichrist will make and then break a covenant with Israel. Thus the destruction referred to is not that which took place in A.D. 70, but that which will take place toward the close of the "great tribulation."

THE HARMONY OF THE WORD

How blessed to observe the harmony of the Scriptures, rightly divided!

With this problem solved all the prophetic events from Daniel's day to the end fit naturally into the prophetic period outlined in Daniel 9. What is more, the present dispensation of grace is thus demonstrated again to have been indeed a mystery, or secret, *not* included in prophecy, but first made known through the Apostle Paul.

Look back at our diagram again and see how the 69 "weeks" take us from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, through the coming of Christ, His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and even through Pentecost, until Messiah's people finally cut Him off by stoning His servant Stephen and waging war against God

and His Christ. Note too, how God interrupted the prophetic program, waiting in grace until a future day (the 70th "week") when *He* will declare war on *them*.

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR US

Will we, the members of Christ's Body, be here on earth when God declares war on Christ's rejectors? By no means. Before the day of wrath comes:

"The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

"WHEREFORE COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS" (I Thes. 4:16-18).

And lest this be not assurance enough, the Apostle goes on to write of the prophetic "times and seasons," explaining that we need not be watching for Christ to come as "a thief in the night" because we are "*not of the night*"; we do not belong to that category. We look for Him rather to come and catch us away *before* the outpouring of His wrath.

"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation [from it] by our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep,⁷ we should live together with Him.

"WHEREFORE COMFORT YOURSELVES TOGETHER, and edify one another even as also ye do" (I Thes. 5:9-11).

Indeed, in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, he beseeches us on the basis of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ *and . . . our gathering together unto Him*" not to be troubled for fear the "day of the Lord" (His coming to judge) is at hand, for, says the apostle, this cannot take place until "the departure"⁸ has taken place first and the man of sin exalts himself in the Holiest Place, boasting that he is God.

⁷ Another reference to the living and the dead in Christ.

⁸ The words "a failing away" here should read "*the departure*." The apostle evidently refers to the departure of believers, an event to which he refers in both epistles (See the author's commentary at II Thes. 2:3)

Thus for the believer, thank God, the outlook is *not wrath, but rapture!* This should be a source of great encouragement to us as we see the world heading straight toward the "Great Tribulation."

Intelligent Beings In Outer Space

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE ANGELS

We are often amused at the discussions carried on in newspapers and magazines as to whether or not there are intelligent beings inhabiting outer space, and if so, whether or not they are interested in us "earth people."

Of course there are intelligent beings inhabiting outer space. Ephesians alone refers again and again to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places" (3:10; cf. 1:20,21; 2:2; 6:12) and many times throughout the Bible we find these beings in contact with men.

Sometimes in Scripture and generally in ordinary conversation these beings are called angels (Lit., agents), but even among sincere believers there is much misunderstanding about them.

This writer has a sister-in-law who, years ago, was much in demand as a soprano soloist - also a brother who was not wholly devoid of mischief. Her name was Margaret; his Henry.

One night Margaret brought a sacred concert to a close by singing the then popular hymn: "There is Singing up in Heaven." The third verse of this hymn begins with the words: "So, although I'm not an angel," and as she sang it Henry, seated forward in the audience, took on a knowing look and nodded assent!

The point in this narrative is that the vast majority of people assume that all angels are *good*. Women who are wholesome and sweet are often spoken of as angels. Some religious people even think that when little children die they go to heaven and become angels. The fact is, however, that there are many evil angels--perhaps more evil ones than good ones.

THE BASIC DIVISION

The unseen world above and about us is in many ways similar to the world of men.

As mankind is basically divided into two classes, the saved and the unsaved, so the angelic hosts are basically divided into two classes, the good and the evil.

In one chapter in Matthew (Chapter 25) we find both these classes referred to. In Verse 31 we are told that "the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all

THE HOLY ANGELS with Him," while in Verse 41 we learn that "everlasting fire" is "prepared for THE DEVIL AND HIS ANGELS."

This explains why on the one hand the Scriptures present angels in the friendliest attitude toward men, while on the other they are called "wicked spirits in the heavenlies," against whom believers are to wage warfare.

TWO PARTIES - TWO PRINCES

There are analogies too between government among the angels and the political arrangement among us here in the United States. Much as we have a two-party system, Republican and Democrat, each with its titular head, so "the principalities and powers in the heavenlies" are divided into two parties, each with its head. In Rev. 12:7 these are called "*Michael and his angels*" and "*the dragon... and his angels.*" In Verse 9 "the dragon" is identified as "*that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan.*"

Considering the great difference in character between "Michael and his angels" and the Devil and his angels," we hope none of our readers will press this analogy too far and ask us which represent the Republicans and which the Democrats!

But further, as *one* of our political leaders becomes president over all Americans, Republicans and Democrats alike, so *one* of the prince angels has been placed by God over all the heavenly hosts.

Our choice for this position would doubtless have been Michael or Gabriel, but for some reason known only to an all-wise God, He placed Lucifer in this exalted position and has allowed him to retain it even since his rebellion and fall.

That Lucifer, now Satan, is the highest prince over the angels is clear from [Eph. 2:2](#), where he is called "*the prince of the power [Lit., authority] of the air.*" It is clear too, that Satan is even over Michael in the heavenly government, for in Jude 9 we are told that in the dispute over Moses' body Michael did not dare to bring ~a railing accusation" against him, but said: "*The Lord rebuke thee.*"

All this has its analogies in human government, for while "*the powers that be are ordained of God*" ([Rom. 13:1](#)), it does not follow from this that the most exalted positions are always given to the best of men. Far from it, for in Dan. 4:17 it is written:

". . . to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the *basest* of men."

Before dealing with yet another analogy, let us consider the nature of each of these classes of angels, and how they occupy themselves.

THE FALLEN ANGELS

A great volume of Scripture indicates that the "gods" which pagans worship are more than idols of wood and stone. Behind these physical idols are Satanic spirits, fallen angels. Indeed, Satan himself, the prince of the angels, is called in [II Cor. 4:4](#), "*the god of this age.*" The angels are God's heavenly "agents." Thus he calls them "gods," but warns men: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*" ([Ex. 20:3](#)).

Basically the fallen angels are rebels against God. Perhaps the most enlightening passage of Scripture on their nature and conduct is found in Psalm 82, where "*God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; He judgeth among the gods*" (Ver. 1). Rebuking them for their behind-the-scenes mismanagement of human affairs, He says:

"How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.

"Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.

"Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.

"They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.

"I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High.

"But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the [their] princes" (Vers. 2-7).

Their rebellion against God is seen too in the New Testament Scriptures. When our Lord was on earth there was a widespread eruption of demon activity, for He had come "*to destroy the works of the Devil*" and His power threatened theirs.

The Pharisees claimed that He cast out demons ... "by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons" ([Matt. 12:24](#)) but our Lord replied that "if Satan cast out Satan" his kingdom could not stand (Ver. 26). From our Lord's reply, then, it appears that the demons were simply members of Satan's hosts, the fallen angels, opposing our Lord by possessing and deranging human beings. When He commanded them to come out, however, or when others did so in His name, they feared--and obeyed (See [Lu. 4:41](#); [8:28-32](#); [9:1](#); [10:17](#); *et al*).

In this present dispensation, however, it appears that Satan works mainly in the realm of the spiritual, even the theological. He "blinds the minds of those who believe not" (II Cor. 4:4). He is "*transformed into an angel of light*" and sends forth "*ministers of righteousness*" (II Cor. 11:14,15). The weapon we are given to oppose him with is no miraculous gift but "*the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*" (Eph. 6:17; cf. II Cor. 10:3-5).

The "prince of this world" was "judged" at Calvary (John 16:11) and at Pentecost Christ and His kingdom were offered instead (Acts 2:29-31; 3:19-21). But the divine King and His kingdom were rejected and Satan remains the world's unseen prince and "the *god of this age*" (II Cor. 4:4), blinding the minds of unbelievers and wrestling to keep believers from occupying their position and enjoying their blessings in the heavenlies.

When this present dispensation of grace is over and the world is plunged into "the great tribulation," Satan will again change his tactics, appearing as "a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5:8). This is the time of which Rev. 12:12 says: ". . . *the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*"

But let us not get ahead of ourselves, for we are yet to consider what the Scriptures say about the nature, conduct and employment of the holy angels.

THE HOLY ANGELS

The holy angels are those who remained true to God while others joined Satan in his rebellion. Sometimes we find them congregating in great numbers.

At our Lord's birth there was "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God" (Lu. 2:13). At our Lord's transfiguration "a bright *cloud*" encompassed Him and His three apostles (Matt. 17:5). At His ascension "a *cloud* received Him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). At the rapture we will be caught up "in the *clouds*" to meet the Lord (I Thes. 4: 17). Finally, when He returns to earth to reign He will come "*with clouds*" (Rev. 1:7).

What are these clouds? When this writer was a small boy he feared that some cloudy day might mean the end of the age, but surely these are not rain clouds. Evidently they are the hosts of His attending angels, for while one passage says: "Behold, He cometh with *clouds*" (Rev. 1:7) another explains that He will "Come in His glory, and all the *holy angels* with Him" (Matt. 25:31).

In Scripture a "cloud" may refer to any host or multitude (See Heb. 12:1). Thus in many Old Testament passages God is called "The Lord [Jehovah] of *hosts*," and thus the "cloud" that led Israel by day appeared as "a pillar of fire" by night (Ex. 13:21). It was none other than the *Shekinah Cloud* that later stood over the tabernacle and filled the temple with glory.

Psa. 103:20 says of these angels that they "excel in strength," and *"do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word."*

One of their principal occupations is their ministry to the people of God. In the Old Testament Scriptures there are many examples of this ministry. Psa. 34:7 says:

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

In Psa. 91:11,12 we have the words which Satan quoted, in part, to our Lord:

"For He shall give His angels charge over Thee, to keep Thee in all Thy ways."

"They shall bear Thee up in their hands, lest Thou dash Thy foot against a stone."

Besides these general statements there are many specific examples in the Old Testament of angelic ministry to God's people. One notable example is found in Dan. 6:22, where Daniel, after a night in the lions' den, was able to say to King Darius:

"My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me"

In the New Testament Scriptures too we find many examples of angels ministering to men.

An angel appeared to Joseph to reassure him of Mary's integrity (Matt. 1:20). Later an angel appeared to him again to warn him of Herod's evil plan to destroy the Christchild and advised him to flee with his family into Egypt (Matt. 2:13). Angels ministered to our Lord after His temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4:11) and again in His agony in the garden of Gethsemane (Lu. 22:43). An angel delivered the apostles from prison (Acts 5:19) and later an angel delivered Peter from prison, where he was being held for execution (Acts 12:7,8).

ANGELIC MINISTRY TODAY?

But do angels minister to believers today--to the members of the Body of Christ?

We believe they do, though in harmony with the character of this dispensation, they remain unseen, as do the evil angels with whom we "wrestle." Referring to the angels, Heb. 1:14 says:

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Some may object that this was written to Hebrews, but we reply that the Apostle Paul wrote it to the Hebrews *after Israel's fall*, to call them *out* of Judaism (Heb. 13:13). And not only would he have them come "*without the camp*"; he would have them enter "*within the veil*" (Heb. 6:19) and "*into the holies*" (Heb. 10:19,20). He calls them to be seated with Christ in the heavenlies, at God's right hand (Heb. 1:3 cf. 4:10) and designates them "*partakers of the heavenly calling*" (Heb. 3:1).

Some point to Dan. 12:1 to prove that angelic ministry pertains to Israel and not to us as members of the Body of Christ. But this passage teaches no such thing. It merely teaches that Michael was Israel's unseen prince at that time and would "stand up" in their behalf again in the future. But whose angel was Michael during the twenty-two hundred years before there was an Israel? Was Michael unemployed all this time? Or whose angel is he now? Is he merely resting?

It would be far more Scripturally correct to say that Michael was, and is, the Commander in Chief of God's holy angels, than to confine him, and the other holy angels, to a ministry to Israel alone.

Consistently we find Michael in a military role. As Gabriel is an ambassador so Michael is a soldier.

We all agree that evil angels oppose the members of the Body of Christ, but do we ever find an example of a good angel in any way associated with the Body?

Yes, we do indeed have a notable example of this in I Thes. 4. Here the Apostle Paul writes not to Israelites but to those who had "*turned to God from idols*" (1:9). To these he writes about the rapture of believers at the close of this dispensation, saying:

"For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a *shout*, with *the voice of the archangel*, and with *the trump of God*. . ." (Ver. 16).

Now the "shout" and the "trump" are both familiarly associated with war, or readiness for war, in the Scriptures. The presence of the archangel, Michael, in this connection then would indicate that we will need special protection as we are caught up to be with Christ through the domain of "the principalities and powers in the heavenlies."

We may be considered very old fashioned, but in the light of all of the above we see no reason for discarding the conviction that angels do minister to the

members of the Body of Christ. Indeed it would be difficult to believe that while God permits the evil angels to oppose us He does not permit the holy angels to aid us.

THE COLD WAR

There is another analogy between the earthly and heavenly scenes in the "cold war" that we in America have waged against the Communists for many years and the "cold war" that has been going on between the angels good and evil ever since Satan's rebellion. This latter conflict is natural, but it remains "cold" because God has permitted both sides to go only so far and no farther.

We have seen how "Michael, the archangel, when contending with the devil ... about the body of Moses, *durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee*" (Jude 9).

Another example is found in Daniel 10 where we have a situation very similar to those frequently experienced at the Berlin wall.

Daniel had been praying and mourning before God for "three full weeks" when an angel, presumably Gabriel (Cf. [Dan. 9:21](#)), appeared to him and said:

"... Fear not, Daniel; for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days; but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes,⁹ came to help me; and I remained [Lit., "was superfluous"] there with the kings of Persia" (Dan. 10:12, 13).

Clearly the prince of Persia was an angel, not an earthly prince, for no earthly prince could stop an angel and hinder him from proceeding further.

In the course of Gabriel's conversation with Daniel we learn further about the conflict between the holy and the fallen angels, as Gabriel asks:

"... Knowest [lit., "Understandest"] thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.

⁹ Five of the prince angels are referred to in Scripture: Satan, then "King of Tyrus" (Ezek. 28:12-19), Michael, then the prince of Israel (Dan. 12:1), Gabriel (Dan. 9:21), "the prince of Persia" (Dan. 10:13) and "the prince of Grecia" (Dan. 10:20).

"But I will show thee that which is noted in the Scripture of truth, and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince" (Dan. 10:20,21).

Of the prince angels, then, who stood in the presence of God ([Job 1:6](#); [Lu. 1:19](#)), there were only two who were true to God: Michael and Gabriel.

OPEN CONFLICT

Some day the Lord will allow the "cold war" between "the principalities and powers in the heavenlies" to develop into open conflict. We read about this in Rev. 12:7-9:

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

"And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan which deceiveth the whole world: He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.'

This, of course, will take place after the rapture of the Body, and will bring about "the great tribulation" (See [Dan. 12:1](#); [I Thes. 4:16--5:3](#); [Rev. 12:12](#)) which in turn, will culminate in the return of Christ to judge and reign ([Rev. 19:11-16](#)).

OUR MINISTRY TO THE ANGELS

Not only do angels have a ministry to us; we have a ministry to them.

Angels are *not omniscient*, nor is their knowledge static. Like us they gain knowledge progressively.

In a reference to the prophetic program in I Pet. 1: 10-12, the apostle closes with the words: "*which things the angels desire to look into.*"

Similarly the Apostle Paul declares that "the mystery" has now been revealed to us:

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.

"According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10, 11).

The mystery proclaimed by Paul concerns the riches of grace that flow from Calvary (Eph. 3:1-3). To him our exalted Lord revealed the glorious all-sufficiency of His finished work and how through the Cross the vilest of sinners may receive *"the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace"* (Eph. 1:7), may be *"justified freely by His grace"* (Rom. 3:24), *"reconciled to God in one body"* (Eph. 2:16), *"baptized into Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 6:3), *raised and seated with Him in the heavenlies* (Eph. 2:4-6), *"blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ"* (Eph. 1:3) and look forward to *"the ages to come,"* when God will *"show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2:7).

Imagine the effect the clear proclamation of this message is bound to have upon the angels, good and bad!

Think of the effect that this glorious message must have upon Satan and his hosts. He had sought again and again to destroy the promised Messiah. In Old Testament times he sought to destroy the seed, the line from which Christ was to come. When our Lord actually did appear on earth Satan again tried every scheme to destroy Him, by the sword, by stoning, by drowning and by other means. When none of this proved successful, *"then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot"* (Lu. 22:3) and Judas betrayed Christ to the chief priests, who succeeded in having Him crucified.

One can almost imagine the glee among the evil principalities and powers as our Lord finally yielded up His spirit. They had won! Christ was dead!

It must have been a great shock to them to learn three days later that Christ had risen from the dead, but this was still but mild compared with a greater shock to come.

From His glory in heaven our Lord later saved the "chief of sinners" and revealed to Him that the crucifixion was necessary, not only to the fulfillment of prophecy, but to the outworking of a hidden purpose of grace which had been "kept secret since the world began." All the riches of God's "purpose and grace" centered in Calvary. Calvary lay at the heart of His great plan!

As this was made known Satan might well have exclaimed: *"Not this! God planned that Christ should be crucified!"* And as we clearly repeat the glorious message the wicked angels foresee their doom, for in all of Satan's long career of deceit his masterpiece of deception was when he deceived himself by having Christ crucified! How true is God's Word: *"He taketh the wise in their own craftiness"* (I Cor. 3:19).

Yes, the cross was the undoing of Satan and his hosts. It stripped him of his rights, guaranteed his ultimate destruction and proved our Lord's power and right to reign. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that *"through death"* Christ

defeated Satan and his hosts. "*Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly triumphing over them IN IT*" (Col. 2:15). And this glorious truth was made known to and through the Apostle Paul.

Ah, but think what the clear proclamation of "the mystery" must mean to the *holy* angels!

If they rejoiced, as they did, at His birth, what must have been their thoughts when our Lord was hated, heckled and finally crucified by evil men? What must have been their concern as He prayed "*O, My Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me*" and their anguish as He cried: "*My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken Me?*" And what must their thoughts have been as He died and God draped the heavens in blackness for three hours?

But if they rejoiced as He arose again, what must have been their exultation as they began to learn that the cross was the very center of God's eternal purpose to defeat the devil and glorify His Son!

Do *all* the angels know *all* about this now? No, for we have seen that they are *not* omniscient, any more than *we* are omniscient. They learn, as we do - and partly from us. Indeed we have a responsibility in this matter, that as we clearly proclaim God's purpose in Christ, the evil angels may tremble and the holy angels rejoice.

Believers have too long ignored the existence of the angelic hosts, but God could not have declared more clearly than He has done, His purpose to reveal "the mystery" to us:

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10).

Not The Gentiles

Ignorance about Israel, confusion about the Body of Christ, and a failure to understand the absolute distinctiveness of Paul's apostleship: these have led even some dispensationalists into a gross misunderstanding of three important Scripture passages.

For the sake of those who truly long to "rightly divide" the Word of Truth, we here discuss these passages at some length.

MATTHEW 21:43

"Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

Most dispensationalists interpret this to mean that the kingdom of God was to be taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles. Even the *Scofield Reference Bible* says at this point: "Meantime the kingdom of God and His righteousness is taken from Israel nationally and given to the Gentiles."

This interpretation is unacceptable, however, in the light of several facts. First, in this passage our Lord is not addressing the multitudes, certainly not the nation as such, but only the spiritual leaders of Israel, "the chief priests and the elders" (Ver. 23). Second, He did not say that the kingdom of God would be given to *the nations*, or to the Gentiles; He said it would be given to "a nation." Third, the nation to whom the kingdom was to be "given" would "bring forth the fruits thereof," i.e., the fruits of the kingdom (See [Matt. 5,6 and 7](#)).

It is true, as we read in Romans 11:11, that through Israel's fall *salvation* was to - and has - come to the Gentiles, but *not the kingdom promised to Israel*.

All this vitally affects the interpretation of the preceding verses, the parable of the vineyard and the husbandmen ([Matt. 21:33-45](#)). The vineyard, in this parable, represents Israel, as generally agreed (See [Isa. 5:7](#)). The husbandmen are the rulers. The chief priests and the Pharisees, to whom our Lord spoke this parable, understood this to be so (Verse 45).

The rulers had been worse than unfaithful, using the vineyard (Israel) for their own gain (Vers. 34-38) and, as the parable indicates, they did not hesitate to use force to maintain their hold on the nation. This is doubtless why our Lord said:

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:12).

Yet the God-given position of the scribes and Pharisees was still recognized by our Lord, for in Matthew 23:2,3, we find Him saying to His disciples:

"The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat;

"All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say, and do not."

With their murder of Messiah ([Matt. 21:38,39](#)), however, all this was to be changed, for the kingdom would be taken from these wicked "husbandmen" and given to a *nation* bringing forth the fruits thereof (Vers. 40,41,43).

But to what nation, then, would the kingdom be "given"? Clearly, to the "little flock" of Messiah's followers. As our Lord said in Matthew 21:43 that the kingdom would be *taken from* the rulers, so He declared in Luke 12:32 that it would be *given* to the "little flock" of His followers.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Indeed, in Luke 22:28-30 we find Him saying to His twelve apostles:

"Ye are they which have continued with me in My temptations,

"And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me;

"That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Numerous passages from the Old Testament Scriptures indicate that to eat and drink at the king's table was to *reign* with him, for evidently the king assumed the financial responsibility for the maintenance of the princes under him. Indeed, the passage here in Luke 22 indicates that the twelve who were to "eat and drink" at Messiah's table would "sit on thrones" with Him in His reign.

Thus, from Matthew 21:43 it is clear that the kingdom was to be "*taken from*" those then in authority, and from Luke 12:32 it is equally clear that it was to be "*given to*" the "little flock" of Messiah's followers. Indeed, from Luke 22:28-30 it is further clear that the chief rulers in the kingdom to come were to be the twelve apostles, Matthias, of course, replacing Judas ([Acts 1:26; 2:4](#)).

But did the little flock bring forth "the fruits of the kingdom"? Indeed they did! The way of life which our Lord had commanded while on earth became an actual reality after the disciples were "all filled with the Holy Spirit" ([Acts 2:4](#)). They carried out our Lord's precepts spontaneously and to the letter.

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

"And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44,45).

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common."

"Neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

"And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need" (Acts 4:32, 34.35).

What a wonderful way of life this must have been! There was no need for storing away one's finances in banks and safe deposit vaults, for every one lovingly and spontaneously cared for his brother. It was a foretaste of the kingdom to come! Surely the Gentile nations have not brought forth these "fruits of the kingdom," or followed this way of life, nor has the Church. Even those who claim to be Pentecostalists are very careful not to part with their goods, their houses and lands, for the common good, and if they did they would be both foolish and unscriptural for, violating God's word *to us* in I Timothy 5:8, they would soon be "on relief."

JOHN 10:16

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring . . . and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd."

Surely the "other sheep" in this passage are the Gentiles! *Are they?* This has generally been assumed, it is true, even by most dispensationalists, and so we would have the revelation of the one joint body before Paul !

Again the popular interpretation is out of harmony with the rest of Scripture.

It is clear from many Scripture passages that the people of Israel were - and will be - the sheep of God's pasture ([Psa. 100:3](#)). The members of the Body of Christ are also viewed as sheep, at least by implication (In [Acts 20:28,29](#) the Church is called a "flock"; in [Ephesians 4:11](#) "pastors," or shepherds, minister to us, etc.), but the *Gentiles* are *never* called sheep, even by implication. Rather, the Gentiles are considered *dogs* ([Matt. 15:26](#)), and there is a difference.

In Bible times, as in our own, sheep were domesticated and cared for. Indeed, the very word "sheep" presupposes a shepherd. But the Gentiles were considered *dogs*. They did not have even a covenant relationship with God, but

like dogs in Bible times, were considered unclean and contemptible ([Matt. 7:6](#); [Rev. 22:15](#); and cf. [Matt. 15:26](#)).

As to the Body of Christ, here Jews and Gentiles have lost their national distinction so that in the Body there is neither Jew nor Gentile ([Gal. 3:28](#); [Col. 3:11](#)).

Who then are the "other sheep" of John 10:16? For the answer we must turn to the Old Testament Scriptures.

The reader will doubtless recall that under King Rehoboam the twelve tribes of **Israel** were divided into **two** and **ten**. Only the two, **Judah** and **Benjamin**, remained faithful to Rehoboam. The other ten chose Jeroboam as their king (1 Kings 12). Under Jeroboam the ten tribes apostatized against God by throwing out God's priests and setting up their own priesthood. They also built their own temple and later, after their return from captivity, were mongrelized with settlers from among the Gentile nations.

This is why the Samaritan woman said to our Lord:

"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (John 4:20).

And this, in turn, is why our Lord answered:

"Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews" (Verse 22).

In [Ezekiel 37:15-24](#), however, God had promised that the two tribes and the ten, represented by "two sticks," would one day be reunited and become one kingdom under one Shepherd. This, we believe, is what our Lord referred to in [John 10:16](#). He *did* have other *sheep* which needed to be brought into the fold.

This interpretation explains several other important passages of Scripture as well. For example, it explains why our Lord, in His first commission to the twelve, said:

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not;

"But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5,6).¹⁰

¹⁰ While the twelve tribes are sometimes called Israel in the Old Testament, our Lord here *excludes* Samaria, the ten tribes, from the house of Israel, evidently because of her apostasy.

However, a New Covenant was to be made “*with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*” ([Jer. 31:31](#)), and this covenant was in fact *made* at Calvary, sealed with the blood of Christ ([Matt. 26:28](#)).¹¹

Thus, "the blood of the new covenant" having been shed, and our Lord having promised to bring the "other sheep" into His fold, He *included* Samaria in His *second* commission to His apostles, the so-called "Great Commission" (See [Acts 1:8](#)).

This also explains Acts 8:12-17. Here many of the Samaritans believed and were baptized (8:12), but they did not receive the Holy Spirit, as did those who had believed and had been baptized at Jerusalem ([Acts 2:38](#)). "These signs" did not immediately "follow them that believed" in Samaria (Cf. [Mark 16:15-18](#)). Rather it was necessary to send two of the leaders from Jerusalem, Peter and John, to pray for these Samaritans and lay their hands upon them, so that they might receive the Holy Spirit ([Acts 8:14-17](#)). Those who had apostatized from divine authority in Israel could not be reunited with God's people until made to recognize Jerusalem as the seat of authority by the prayers and the laying on of the hands of Peter and John, the leading apostles from Jerusalem.

It should be noted here that the oneness of the members of the Body of Christ is far closer than the oneness of the two houses of Israel reunited, or of two sticks united together, or of two flocks of sheep brought into one fold. The oneness of the Body is erected by that "one baptism" in which the Holy Spirit unites us into one living body ([I Cor. 12:13](#)), the same baptism by which we are "baptized *into* Christ," *made one* with Him, the living Head ([Rom. 6:3](#)). This living, spiritual oneness is brought about only as we are "*baptized into*" our Lord's *death* ([Rom. 6:3](#)), as we look at Calvary and say, in effect, "This is not *His* death He is dying. Death is 'the wages of sin,' and He has never sinned. This is *my* death He is dying." Thus as we become one with Him *in His death*, we become one with *Him*, "*baptized into His death*," and so into *Himself*, and thus rising with Him also, to "walk in newness of life" ([Rom. 6:4](#)).

Thus, while our Lord's purpose for His earthly people, outlined in John 10:16, is wonderful indeed, His "eternal purpose" concerning the Body of Christ and the present "dispensation of the grace of God," is the most wonderful truth ever revealed by a loving God to sinful man (See [Eph. 3:1-11](#)).

ROMANS 10:18-21

"But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

¹¹ Thank God, this precious blood was also shed for us "Gentiles in the flesh."

"But I say, did not Israel know [Lit., understand]? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.

"But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me.

"But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

The popular interpretation of Verse 19, above, is that God was to provoke Israel to jealousy by the salvation of the Gentiles.

Now, we know that God *did* send salvation to the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy, but we are certain that this is not what Romans 10:19 refers to.

In Verse 20 we have the statement: "*I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me,*" and this, likewise, is generally made to refer to the proclamation of salvation to the Gentiles. Again, however, this interpretation does not bear Berean investigation.

In these two verses we have a similar problem to that which we considered in connection with Matthew 21:43. In Verse 19, above, the Apostle quotes Moses as saying; "I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation [not the nations, but a *foolish nation*] I will anger you."

Unquestionably Verse 18 speaks of the nation Israel. The Apostle asks: "*Have they not heard?*" That is, was not the Word of God sent to them; have they not heard? And he answers: "Yes verily," and continues with the argument that if God's Word about Christ and His kingdom had reached "into all the earth" and "unto the ends of the world," surely Israel had been more fully informed of this than any of the other nations. "*Unto them [the people of Israel] were committed the Oracles of God*" (Rom. 3:1,2).

Then follows Verse 19: "*But I say, did not Israel know [understand]?*" It is possible to hear, of course, without understanding. Ah, but Israel *did* understand very well, for the Apostle goes on to say: "First Moses saith, I *will* provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you." This passage is found in Deuteronomy 32:21 and it refers, not to the Gentile nations, but to *one* nation, and the Holy Spirit now uses this passage with reference to the little band of Messiah's followers who were, in the eyes of Israel's leaders, "no people" and "a foolish nation." The fact is that Israel was provoked to jealousy by the believing remnant. They had not previously been a "people" or a "nation," but God had made them one, as we have seen from Luke 12:32 and Matthew 19:28. They may have appeared insignificant and foolish in the eyes of Israel's rulers, but they were the nucleus of the future "nation" of

God's choice. Early Acts is replete with evidence of the rulers' attitude toward the "little flock" and of God's mighty working in behalf of this Messianic remnant.

In early Acts, as we find the apostles and the disciples of the risen Christ going everywhere proclaiming His resurrection and His royal rights, the leaders of Israel are indeed provoked to jealousy - not by the Gentiles as yet, but by this "foolish nation," those who had not been a people, but now had become the people of God's choice.

It was *after* Israel had rejected the testimony of the twelve and the "little flock" that God began to save the Gentiles through Paul, and here is where Romans 11:11 comes in: "Through their [Israel's] fall salvation is come to the Gentiles, to provoke them [Israel] to jealousy."

Thus Israel was - in the mercy of God - provoked to jealousy *twice* before God gave them up; first by the promotion of the "little flock" and then by the salvation of the Gentiles. By these measures God sought to bring His rebellious people to Himself.

But does not Verse 20 refer to the Gentiles? Again, No. Here, as in the preceding verse, the Apostle refers to the confrontation of Israel's leaders by the little flock of our Lord's followers. Note carefully: the Apostle does not say "Esaias is very *kind*," or "Esaias is very *gracious*." Rather he says:

"Esaias is VERY BOLD, and saith,¹² I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me."

The rulers of Israel, and the nation as such, had not asked the disciples to preach Christ to them. They had not "sought" Christ. They wanted to forget about Him. But God would not let them forget. The risen Messiah confronted them through His followers, who had been working mighty miracles in confirmation of their claims that He was alive and was the rightful King of Israel.

All this is further confirmed by the fact that Verses 20 and 21 of Romans 10 are *one passage* in Isaiah 65:1,2, from which the Apostle quotes. *Both* verses, in the Old Testament passage, have to do with Israel's rebellion against the risen Christ. Thus popular dispensationalists err when they make Verse 20 refer to the Gentiles, but verse 21 to Israel.

It should be observed that all four verses in Romans 10 begin with the word "But," in the Greek as well as in the *King James Version*. God, in the passage, is dealing with the excuses that might be alleged for Israel's rebellion, to show how illegitimate they are. Verse 18: "*But* I say, *have they not heard?*" Of course they had heard - more fully than any nation on earth. Verse 19: "*But* I say, *did not Israel understand?*" Of course they understood very clearly. They were rejecting

¹² Prophesying of Christ.

Messiah with all the evidence in His favor. Verse 20: *"But Esaias is very bold and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me."* That is, "I confronted them even when they wished to be rid of Me." And then, in Verse 21:

"But to Israel He saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."

This agrees with the foregoing verses and with the record of the Book of Acts. Israel, like the Gentiles at Babel, was "without excuse." When Paul first returned to Jerusalem after his conversion, the Lord said to him:

"Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, FOR THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME" (Acts 22:18).

"And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Verse 21).

Later, at **Antioch** in **Pisidia**, with the Jews there "contradicting and blaspheming," we read:

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing YE PUT IT FROM YOU, AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

Still later, at Corinth, when the Jews there too "opposed themselves and blasphemed,"

". . . he [Paul] shook his raiment, and said unto them, YOUR BLOOD BE UPON YOUR OWN HEADS; I AM CLEAN: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6).

Finally, when the Apostle arrived at **Rome** and had called "the chief of the Jews" together, he said to the recalcitrant leaders:

"... Well spoke the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

"Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

"For THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE IS WAXED GROSS, AND THEIR EARS ARE DULL OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES HAVE THEY CLOSED; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28: 25-28).

Thus God declared Israel wholly and unequivocally "without excuse." In every instance of Paul's being sent, or turning to, the Gentiles, it is made emphatically clear that *Israel herself* was to blame. They had heard the good news but had rejected it - and their Messiah. They knew, they understood, having been confronted with incontrovertible evidence, but they *would not* receive their long-promised King.

The Gentiles had been "given up" long before (Rom. 1:24,26,28), and now God, having "stretched forth His hand all day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people," gave Israel up too. Soon they, like the Gentiles at Babel, were scattered over the face of the earth.

But - blessed heaven-sent message - Israel and the Gentiles were now cast out into God's own arms of grace and love:

"FOR GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM ALL IN UNBELIEF, THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL.

"O THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES BOTH OF THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS, AND HIS WAYS PAST EINDING OUT!" (Rom. 11:32,33).

This blessed message of the saving *grace* of God is what the world so desperately needs. We are all stubborn and self-righteous by nature, but sometimes the defendant comes to the place where his attorney must say to him: "It will be to your advantage to *plead guilty* and throw yourself on the mercy of the court."

This is exactly our position, and we may rejoice that God is "plenteous in mercy," and that rather than destroying both Jew and Gentile, He concluded them all in unbelief "*that He might have mercy upon all.*"

The story is told of a mother who came to plead with Napoleon for mercy for her son, who was to be executed the next morning. "He does not *deserve* mercy," responded the Emperor. "But sire," persisted the woman, "would it be *mercy* if he deserved it?" This reply, it is said, persuaded the Emperor to grant the pardon.

It is by God's *mercy* and *grace* alone that we can be saved. Keep defending yourself and you will *never* find salvation. There is one thing God will not have, and that is your "backtalk." As Judge of all, He expects you to stop saying things in your own defense. God, in matchless love, has made full provision for sin, but

He has made no provision for a self-righteous attitude. He will have no boasting in heaven.

So stop defending yourself; come to Him with all your guilt and sin, trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and He will graciously forgive and justify you "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" ([Rom. 3:24](#)).

The Threefold Parable

First interpret; then apply. This is a basic rule of Bible study, and failure to observe it leads inevitably to confusion and error.

The three-fold parable¹³ of Luke 15 is a case in point. These words, like all Scripture, were written "*for our learning*" (Rom. 15:4) and "*for our admonition*" (I Cor. 10:11), but they were not originally *addressed* to us. They were addressed to a Jewish audience while Israel was still God's favored nation. If, therefore, we would really "learn" and be "admonished" by them we must first place ourselves, as it were, among those whom our Lord actually addressed and determine just what it was He wished *them* to understand from His words. Only after that may we draw such lessons as may apply to us.

This is the only way to really understand and profit from Scriptures not actually addressed to us. If we begin instead, by applying these parables directly to ourselves, as though they were spoken to us and about us, we are bound to *misunderstand*, *misinterpret* and *misapply*.

How often the story of the lost sheep has been used in evangelistic messages as an illustration of salvation today! The ninety and nine are supposed to represent the saved, lying safely in the fold, and the one lost sheep the unsaved. But what about our Lord's assertion that the *many* travelled the broad road and the *few* the narrow? (Matt. 7:13,14). And why does the shepherd "*leave*" the ninety and nine? and why does the Lord liken these to "*just persons which need no repentance*"?

It is the same with the story of the prodigal son. This parable is supposed to be an illustration of the need and way of salvation in this present dispensation of the grace of God. But how is it that *both* men are viewed as *sons* in the parable and both are made recipients of the father's riches before one of them is even saved, or how is it that the father should say to the *self-righteous* son, "*All that I have is thine*"? All this is left unexplained.

And these questions will remain unanswered unless we wait with the application until we have first found the true *interpretation* of our Lord's words; unless we take into consideration that those addressed were Jews, under the Law; that they did not possess copies of Romans, Galatians or Ephesians; that Christ had not yet died and that many of them did not even recognize Him as the Messiah.

When we do this it will become clear, first of all, that we have here one *progressive* parable concerning *Israel*. Now we can almost hear a protest: "Will

¹³ The three separate parables of Luke 15 really form one progressive whole. Note: 1). "*This parable*" (Ver. 3). 2). The 3 separate parables all concern *lost* things. 3). Verses 8 and 11 simply proceed with the illustration rather than reading: "Another parable spake He," etc., as in other groups of parables.

he take this away from us too?" To this we answer: *No*. This Scripture, like the rest, is *for* us, but we get most out of it only when we recognize first *to* whom the words were actually addressed. As we do this we believe that the reader will see for himself that he has lost nothing and gained immeasurably.

THE OCCASION FOR THE PARABLE

"Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.

"And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:1,2).

It was this self-righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes that called forth the three-fold parable. John the Baptist had called upon these leaders in Israel to bring forth fruits meet for repentance but they saw no need to change their ways. We read of them:

"But the Pharisees and lawyers, REJECTED THE COUNSEL OF GOD AGAINST THEMSELVES, being not baptized of [John]" (Luke 7:30).

Their conceit was almost unbelievable. On one occasion a man whose sight the Lord had restored had ventured to say to them: "*If this man were not of God, He could do nothing,*" to which the Pharisees had angrily replied:

"Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?" (John 9:34).

As if *they* had not been born in sin!

And now they murmur against the Lord for receiving runners and eating with them. Of course *they were not sinners!* And they had a surprising number of followers in Israel: self-righteous, self-satisfied, feeling no need of repentance.

It was this situation that called forth the three-fold parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son.

THE LOST SHEEP

The Lord begins to answer His critics by asking them:

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?" (Luke 15:4).

They themselves, He avers, could not turn a deaf ear to the bleating of one lost sheep; they could not leave that call for help unheeded or leave the helpless creature to die alone.

And then He proceeds to describe to them the rejoicing when that one lost sheep is found. Carrying the creature on his shoulders, the shepherd brings it home and calls his friends and neighbors together to rejoice with him.

WHO IS THE SHEPHERD?

In interpreting the parable of the lost sheep let us first ask who the shepherd represents. There can be but one answer to this. It represents the Lord Himself.

The Psalms and the Prophets had long portrayed the coming Messiah as a Shepherd, and while on earth He Himself said:

"I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD: THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVETH THIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP" (John 10:11).

WHO ARE THE SHEEP?

Shall we say they represent *mankind*? Surely not, for nowhere in Scripture is Christ seen in the relationship of a Shepherd to mankind. Nor had Gentiles ever been characterized as sheep. They were called *dogs and aliens* but never *sheep*.¹⁴ It is true that the members of Christ's Body are seen as sheep by inference,¹⁵ but this could not apply here, for there are no *lost* sheep among the members of Christ's Body. Furthermore, what could our Lord's hearers have known about the Body of Christ? The formation of this company of believers was a secret still "hid in God" at that time ([Eph. 3:1-11](#)).

The sheep in this parable represent *the people of Israel*. Any instructed Jew would have recognized this immediately. Many of the Psalms had portrayed Israel as the sheep of God's pasture ([Psa. 78:52; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3](#), etc.) and the prophets had long depicted Messiah as the future Shepherd of Israel ([Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10](#); etc.).

This explains why all the one hundred sheep in the parable, whatever their state, are seen as His sheep. The lost today are not *His sheep* in any sense, but the people of Israel, whether lost or saved, stood in a covenant relationship to God.

¹⁴ At the judgment of the nations the Lord will "*separate them . . . as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats*" (Matt. 25:32), but this is still future. Thus even if this were meant as a *characterization* of some Gentiles as sheep, it still remains that Gentiles were not looked upon as sheep in Old Testament times or in our Lord's day.

¹⁵ Acts 20:28: "flock," Eph. 4:11: "*pastors*."

That the *lost* sheep, to begin with, refers to the lost sheep in Israel, and not to lost Gentiles, is proven by our Lord's own words: When asked to help a Gentile woman, He said:

"I am not sent but unto THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL . . . it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs" (Matt. 15:24,26).

Our Lord had also distinctly commissioned the twelve saying:

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

"But go rather to THE LOST SHEEP OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL" (Matt. 10:5,6).

HOW MANY LOST SHEEP?

It is an interesting fact that *all* the people of Israel were viewed by the prophets as lost sheep which needed to be found and rescued.

Speaking of "my people," Isaiah had said:

"ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE ASTRAY; WE HAVE TURNED EVERY ONE TO HIS OWN WAY..." (Isa. 53:6).

Jeremiah had also said:

"MY PEOPLE HATH BEEN LOST SHEEP..." (Jer. 50:6).

But the trouble was that so few in Israel recognized their lost condition. There was only one in a hundred; the rest felt themselves good enough.

Mark well: the ninety and nine in the parable are not lying safely in the fold, as several of our hymns would indicate. They are in the *wilderness*, only they are all together. But the Lord says that the shepherd will "*leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until He find it.*" The whole idea here is that the Lord had come, "not to call the righteous, [i.e., those who *thought* they were righteous] but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17). He had come "to seek and to save that which was LOST" (Luke 19:10 and cf. Verse 7).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

Before commencing with the second installment of the threefold parable, we have yet to learn where the story of the lost sheep fits chronologically. Was our Lord referring to Israel's past, her present or her future?

This should not be difficult to determine, for there was but one period of history during which the Shepherd Himself came to seek the lost in Israel: that was during His earthly ministry. This agrees with His own statements to the effect that He was "*sent... unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*" and had "*come to seek and to save that which was lost*" ([Matt. 15:24](#), [Luke 19:10](#)).

THE LOST COIN

WHO IS THE WOMAN?

In interpreting the parable of the lost coin let us ask first who the woman is. Does she represent the Church of this age, as has so often been intimated? Hardly, for as we have pointed out, the Church of this age was then still a secret hid in God, so that our Lord could not have alluded to it, nor could His most spiritual followers have been expected to understand any allusion to what had never even been mentioned before.

It should be noted that, whatever the dispensation, God's people are always viewed as the woman, the weaker vessel, loved and cared for by Him and called upon to be subject to Him.

This is true of the Church today.

"FOR THE HUSBAND IS THE HEAD OF THE WIFE, EVEN AS CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH..."

"HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, EVEN AS CHRIST ALSO LOVED THE CHURCH, AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR [HER]" (Eph. 5:23,25).

But this was also true of Israel, for God says of Israel under the Law:

"... which My covenant they brake, although I WAS AN HUSBAND UNTO THEM..." (Jer. 31:32).

Israel has since been given a "bill of divorcement" ([Isa. 50:1](#)) but she will one day be restored to Jehovah, as it is written:

"AS THE BRIDEGROOM REJOICETH OVER THE BRIDE, SO SHALL THY GOD REJOICE OVER THEE" (Isa. 62:5).

"O DAUGHTER OF ZION . . . THE KING OF ISRAEL, EVEN THE LORD, IS IN THE MIDST OF THEE... HE WILL SAVE, HE WILL REJOICE OVER THEE WITH JOY: HE WILL REST IN HIS LOVE, HE WILL JOY OVER THEE WITH SINGING" (Zeph. 3:14-17).

In John 3:29 Christ is introduced as "He that hath the bride," while in Rev. 21:2,9 we see the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, "as a bride adorned for her husband."

Since then, God's people are consistently viewed as the woman in their relationship with Him, to whom would the woman of our Lord's parable naturally refer? To the redeemed in *Israel*, since His hearers were *Israelites*. We say, to the *redeemed* in Israel - not all Israel - because here the woman is shown seeking that which is lost.

THE COIN

The lost coin, like the lost sheep, represents the lost in Israel, or those who felt themselves lost, but why the change in symbolism?

Money, of course, is a medium of exchange. It represents *value*. Thus the ten coins represent the *value* of Israel to the nations.

In the preceding parable it was *pity* for a lost sheep that moved the shepherd to go and find him. His first thought was not that he had invested money in the sheep, but that the helpless creature needed to be rescued from danger and death. But here it is purely *concern* over lost *value*.

When the woman discovers that she has lost a piece of silver, she lights a candle, sweeps the house, and seeks diligently until she finds it. Then she calls her friends and neighbors together to rejoice with her that the money has been found. This brings us face to face with Israel's *worth* to the nations, since the blessing of the nations awaits the salvation of Israel.

God had promised Abraham, concerning his multiplied seed:

"And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed..." (Gen. 22:18).

But Israel in her unregenerate state could be no blessing to the world. Therefore the prophet Zechariah says:

"And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; SO WILL I SAVE YOU, AND YE SHALL BE A BLESSING..." (Zech. 8:13).

The people of Israel, therefore, were of great potential value to the world. Note, however, that all the attention is focussed upon the one lost piece and all the rejoicing takes place when it is found. The other nine pieces, as in the preceding parable, represent those who did not consider themselves lost and felt no need of repentance or salvation.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

But here again we must ask where the story fits chronologically. A number of details in the parable will help to answer this question.

First, the fact that not the Lord Himself, but the woman, is set forth as seeking the coin makes it appear that the parable speaks of a time when His people, rather than He, would seek the lost in Israel. This took place at Pentecost and after when the twelve apostles and the "little flock" of Christ's followers called upon the people of Israel to repent and save themselves from that "untoward generation" ([Acts 2:40](#)).

Note too that it was at this time that the value of Israel to the rest of the world was so strongly emphasized as, for example, in Peter's address in Solomon's porch:

"YE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE PROPHETS, AND OF THE COVENANT WHICH GOD MADE WITH OUR FATHERS, SAYING, UNTO ABRAHAM, AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE KINDREDS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.

"UNTO YOU FIRST GOD, HAVING RAISED UP HIS SON JESUS, SENT HIM TO BLESS YOU, IN TURNING AWAY EVERY ONE OF YOU FROM HIS INIQUITIES" ([Acts 3:25,26](#)).

This view of the historical setting of the parable of the lost coin is still further confirmed by its position between the parable of the lost sheep and that of the lost son, which unquestionably looks to the future.

THE LOST SON ISRAEL GOD'S SON

Surely no one will question that the father in this third parable represents God, but who are the sons? Again they represent the two types in Israel: the self-righteous and those who realized their lost condition.

Surely neither self-righteous sinners nor prodigal sinners today are called the sons of God, but here again is where Israel's *covenant* relationship to God comes in. What a father is to a son, God was to Israel because of the covenants He had made with them. Entirely apart from the matter of salvation, the people of Israel were His *covenant children*¹⁶ (See [Matt. 15:26](#), [Acts 3:25](#)). Thus Moses was instructed to say to Pharaoh:

¹⁶ Though there was, of course, the fact that *believers* could *enjoy* this relationship.

"... Thus saith the Lord, ISRAEL IS MY SON, EVEN MY FIRSTBORN" (Ex. 4:22).

In this parable, then, the symbolism rises above that of the sheep and the coin. It is more than pity for a lost creature or concern over lost value that is contemplated here. It is the *sonship* of Israel that is in view, and all the fellowship and privilege and glory that go with that position.

THE YOUNGER SON

It is the *younger* son in the parable who is first "lost" and then "found." It is he for whom the feast is held - the feast which the elder brother refuses to attend.

This in itself is significant. It was largely the younger generation in Israel that followed our Lord. The older generation, in general, felt no need of repentance. The Pharisees and Sadducees, the lawyers and scribes, the chief priests and the elders of the people, felt themselves "good enough." On one occasion they exclaimed to some who had been impressed with Christ's words: "*Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him?*" (John 7:48). And when certain of the leaders did "believe" on Him it was merely with the intellect, not with the heart, and Jesus did not commit Himself unto them (John 2:23--3:3, 12:42-48).

THE HISTORICAL SETTING

It is significant that in this last installment of the three-fold parable we have nothing about anyone *seeking* the lost. Instead we have the father waiting at home until the wandering son comes to himself and returns. This parable, then, looks to the future, when Jehovah will welcome His son, Israel, back home.

The present dispensation of the mystery is, of course, not contemplated in this parable. We find the younger son, as he comes to himself, just where a later, or younger generation in Israel will be found in the latter days: out in "a far country," "in want" and having "joined himself to a citizen of that country."

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN

Finally the prodigal comes to himself. Reflecting that his father's servants have enough and to spare while he, the son, perishes with hunger, he says:

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him; FATHER, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST HEAVEN, AND BEFORE THEE,

"AND AM NO MORE WORTHY TO BE CALLED THY SON: MAKE ME AS ONE OF THY HIRED SERVANTS" (Luke 15:18, 19).

What a change has come over the young man! First it was "give me" (Ver. 12); now it is "make me." First he demanded all that was coming to him; now he acknowledges he deserves nothing.

This is a striking picture of Israel's repentance when she comes to herself, as it is alluded to in Jer. 50:4:

"IN THOSE DAYS, AND IN THAT TIME, SAITH THE LORD, THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL SHALL COME, THEY AND THE CHILDREN OF JUDAH TOGETHER, GOING AND WEEPING: THEY SHALL GO, AND SEEK THE LORD THEIR GOD."

The rest of the story touchingly portrays the love of the Father for His renegade son.

The son had expected to have to go all the way back to his father, He would have been thankful enough if his father had answered his knock at the door.

"BUT WHEN HE WAS YET A GREAT WAY OFF, HIS FATHER SAW HIM, AND HAD COMPASSION, AND RAN, AND FELL ON HIS NECK, AND KISSED HIM" (Luke 15:20).

Ah, the father had been looking for him, anxiously awaiting his return all the time! And now the wanderer, humbly acknowledging his unworthiness to be called his father's son, was about to ask for a servant's place.

"BUT THE FATHER SAID TO HIS SERVANTS, BRING FORTH THE BEST ROBE, AND PUT IT ON HIM; AND PUT A RING ON HIS HAND, AND SHOES ON HIS FEET:

"AND BRING HITHER THE FATTED CALF, AND KILL IT; AND LET US EAT, AND BE MERRY:

"FOR THIS MY SON WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE AGAIN; HE WAS LOST, AND IS FOUND..." (Luke 15:22-24).

Thus God will one day receive Israel back with joy and feasting, as it is written:

"COMFORT YE, COMFORT YE MY PEOPLE, SAITH YOUR GOD.

"SPEAK YE COMFORTABLY [COMFORTINGLY] TO JERUSALEM, AND CRY UNTO HER THAT HER WARFARE IS ACCOMPLISHED, THAT HER INIQUITY IS PARDONED: FOR SHE HATH RECEIVED OF THE LORD'S HAND DOUBLE FOR ALL HER SINS" (Isa. 40:1,2).

"THE LORD THY GOD IN THE MIDST OF THEE IS MIGHTY; HE WILL SAVE, HE WILL REJOICE OVER THEE WITH JOY; HE WILL REST IN HIS LOVE, HE WILL JOY OVER THEE WITH SINGING" (Zeph. 3:17).

"AND I WILL REJOICE IN JERUSALEM, AND JOY IN MY PEOPLE: AND THE VOICE OF WEEPING SHALL BE NO MORE HEARD IN HER, NOR THE VOICE OF CRYING" (Isa. 65:19).

"YEA, I WILL REJOICE OVER THEM TO DO THEM GOOD, AND I WILL PLANT THEM IN THIS LAND ASSUREDLY WITH MY WHOLE HEART AND WITH MY WHOLE SOUL" (Jer. 32:41).

But the older generation "which needed no repentance" will, like the elder son, be shut out of the feast by its own choice.

THE THREEFOLD PARABLE AND US

Now that we have sought to correctly *interpret* our Lord's words, what *lessons* may we draw from them and how may the three-fold parable be applied to *us*? The answer is: *by leaving things just where they belong.*

Our Lord's parable depicts His dealings with *Israel*. Paul's epistles outline God's purpose concerning *the Body of Christ*. Let us then compare the two and see whether we have lost or gained by recognizing the distinction.

As we have pointed out, God has never yet looked upon the Gentiles as His sheep, nor is He in any way obligated to watch over them as a Shepherd, for "*even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind...*" (Rom. 1:28). Gentiles are rather seen as *dogs* (Matt. 15:26) and *aliens* and *strangers* (Eph. 2:12). Indeed, the Jew has *now also* been alienated (See Rom. 11:15, Eph. 2:16, 17).

Yet God has now taken us, believing Jews and Gentiles of this dispensation, and has given us a place far above that to be occupied by national Israel in the future. Israel is, after all, God's earthly people. Their calling and prospect are earthly. When converted they will dwell in their land with Christ as their King at Jerusalem. But we who have trusted Christ in this age of His rejection are *made one with Him* by a supernatural baptism and given a place at God's right hand, blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ (Gal. 3:26,27; Eph. 1:3). What grace!

And of what *value* were the Gentiles in God's prophetic plan? None whatever.¹⁷ God was not to bring blessing to the world through any Gentile. The adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law, the temple worship, the promises, all belonged to Israel (Rom. 9:4). We Gentiles were "*without Christ, aliens from the*

¹⁷ Though each individual, of course, is of infinite value to himself and to God.

commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). But even Israel, in her *present* condition, is of no value to the world. Yet God has taken us, cast out Jews *and* Gentiles, and has made us one with His Son, on whom the hope of the world depends. He has made us the masterpiece of His grace:

"THAT IN THE AGES TO COME HE MIGHT SHOW THE EXCEEDING RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US THROUGH CHRIST JESUS" (Eph. 2:7).

Again, the Gentiles are not called the sons of God in Scripture. We are rather seen as *aliens* and *enemies* (Col. 1:21). Indeed, even Israel is *now* Lo-ammi: "*Not My People*" (Hos. 1:9). Yet God has given believing Jews *and* Gentiles today a place of sonship far higher than that of national Israel. Israel was God's son by a *covenant* relationship. We are the sons of God in *Christ*, His only begotten Son.

"AND BECAUSE YE ARE SONS, GOD HATH SENT FORTH THE SPIRIT OF HIS SON INTO YOUR HEARTS, CRYING, ABBA, FATHER.

"WHEREFORE THOU ART NO MORE A SERVANT, BUT A SON; AND IF A SON, THEN AN HEIR OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST" (Gal. 5:6,7).

Again we say: What infinite, matchless, wonderful grace!

Let the reader decide: Do we lose by acknowledging that our Lord in His three-fold parable did not refer to Gentiles or to salvation in this present dispensation? Do we not gain immeasurably in our understanding and enjoyment of the Word when we leave the parable right where it belongs and *then* examine it in the light of the Pauline revelation?

CHRIST THE KEY

Christ is the key to the three-fold parable as He is to all the Scriptures.

It is He who was to accomplish the redemption of those who trusted Him during His earthly ministry as well as of those who trust Him now.

As God's sheep, the people of Israel failed and wandered away. To save "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" Christ Himself had to take His place with them and become a sheep.

"HE IS BROUGHT AS A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER, AND AS A SHEEP BEFORE HER SHEARERS IS DUMB, SO HE OPENETH NOT HIS MOUTH" (Isa. 53:7).

And His sacrifice takes away our sin as well.

"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, WHICH TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD" (John 1:29).

It is interesting to note that it was a piece of *silver* the woman lost. This, of course, was the *redemption* money in Israel and reminds us of the law of the kinsman redeemer ([Lev. 25:47-49](#)). Israel was the Gentiles' rich relative through whom the Gentiles should have been redeemed. But Israel, rather than redeeming the Gentiles, was bankrupt and needed redemption herself. Hence Christ was born, the seed of Abraham, that *He* might become Israel's Kinsman Redeemer - *and ours*.

"FOR THUS SAITH THE LORD, YE HAVE SOLD YOURSELVES FOR NAUGHT; AND YE SHALL BE REDEEMED WITHOUT MONEY" (Isa. 52:3).

"...I THE LORD AM THY SAVIOR AND THY REDEEMER, THE MIGHTY ONE OF JACOB" (Isa. 60:16).

"FORASMUCH AS YE KNOW THAT YE WERE NOT REDEEMED WITH CORRUPTIBLE THINGS, AS SILVER AND GOLD...

"BUT WITH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST, AS OF A LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH AND WITHOUT SPOT:

"WHO VERILY WAS FOREORDAINED BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, BUT WAS MANIFEST IN THESE LAST TIMES FOR YOU" (I Pet. 1:18-20).

"IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7).

Again, Israel was God's son ([Ex. 4:22](#)) but never attained to the place of "adoption," or *fullgrown sonship*. It was necessary to keep her, like a child, under law. Then Christ, God's perfect Son, came and took the place of a servant, a child, under the law, for their sakes--and ours. Twice the Father broke through the heavens to exclaim: "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,*" yet He died like a law-breaker, for Israel - and us. But He was raised from the dead the third day and "*declared to be the [fullgrown] Son of God, with power... by the resurrection from the dead*" ([Rom. 1:4](#)). Now all believers are accepted as fullgrown sons of God *in the Beloved One* ([Eph. 1:5,6](#)). Thus:

"... WHEN THE FULNESS OF THE TIME WAS COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON, MADE OF A WOMAN, MADE UNDER THE LAW.

"TO REDEEM THEM THAT WERE UNDER THE LAW, THAT WE [WHETHER JEWS OR GENTILES] MIGHT RECEIVE THE ADOPTION OF SONS."¹⁸

"WHEREFORE THOU ART NO MORE A SERVANT, BUT A SON; AND IF A SON, THEN AN HEIR OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST"(Gal. 4:4,5,7.)

¹⁸ Gr. *huiothestan*, placing as fullgrown sons.

Paul The Masterbuilder

AND THE OTHER BUILDERS

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians there is a passage which every preacher and Christian worker ought to ponder over prayerfully.

I COR. 3:10-15

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I [Paul] have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

"If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

"If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

It is plain that this solemn warning is sounded particularly to Christian workers and spiritual leaders, the *builders* of the Church.

In Verse 9 he says, *"For WE are laborers together with God... YE are God's building."* In other words, Paul and those associated with him as workers for Christ were the builders, while the Corinthian believers as a body were the building - part of that greater building which is called *the Church*.

In order to get the full significance of this passage let us consider another which centers, not around Paul, but around Peter.

MATT. 16:13-19

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"

"And they said, some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

"He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?"

"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.

"And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Note carefully that it was Peter's *confession* that won for him the name "rock" or "stone," and it was upon this confession that Christ was to build His Church. It is a great mistake to make Peter himself the foundation for we have just seen from I Cor. 3:11 that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

But notice that Peter confessed Jesus as "the *Christ* (Heb. the *Messiah*), the Son of the living God."

For some time *John* the Baptist, Christ and the twelve had been crying to Israel, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" The kingdom of heaven, the Church of which our Lord spoke was, of course, to be set up *on earth*, for the Old Testament abounds with prophecies concerning the rule of the heavens on earth with Christ as King. Now the twelve were told to *preach* the kingdom ([Matt. 10:7](#)) to *practice* it ([Matt. 10:8-10](#)) and to *pray* for it. ([Matt. 6:10](#), "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.*")

Peter's confession agrees with Nathanael's: "*Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel*" ([John 1:49](#)).

Thus it was Peter's confession "Thou art the *Christ*, the Son of the living God," upon which this Church and kingdom were to be built. That is, it was to be built upon a recognition of Jesus as *Christ - Messiah*.

PETER'S POSITION

This is not to minimize, for a moment, the importance of Peter's position in the building of this Church, for in view of the Lord's rejection, Peter, as the leader of Israel's twelve future judges ([Matt. 19:28](#)) is given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. He is given the power to admit or shut out. In this passage (Ver. 19) Peter is told, even before the others ([Matt. 18:18](#)), *Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* That is, he was given *official* powers until Christ Himself should return and the twelve should judge and reign *with Him*.

Before our Lord left this world He went so far as to say to His apostles,

"Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20: 22, 23).

Confused Protestantism has had a difficult time explaining these verses to Roman Catholics, and we shall presently see why.

However, these high official powers, including even the remission of sins, should be viewed in the light of Acts 2:4 and 38.

"And they [the twelve] were all filled with the Holy Ghost."

"Then Peter said unto them [the Jews], Repent, and be baptized even/one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins... "

In their official capacity the apostles were *fully* under the control of the Holy Spirit.

ANOTHER BUILDING

We know, however, that Israel did not repent as a nation and the building of that Church could not go on to completion. With Messiah, the Foundation and Corner Stone rejected, the building lay in ruins.

It was when Israel resisted the Holy Spirit and refused to acknowledge even the risen Lord as Christ that God began to unfold the mystery of His purpose and grace. They had refused to build upon the foundation which Peter had laid. Now God was going to build *another* building.

The blessing of the nations through Israel was to be held in abeyance until a future day (Cf. [Rom. 15:8,9](#) with [Rom. 11:15,25,26](#)). He would cast Israel away nationally ([Rom. 11:15](#)) so that He might deal with the whole world in grace ([Rom. 11:32](#)) *"And that He might RECONCILE BOTH (believing Jews and*

Gentiles) unto God IN ONE BODY by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:16). This is the Church of this age "the Church, which is His Body" (Eph. 1:22,23).

PAUL'S POSITION

The plans and specifications for the building of this Church were committed to Paul by the glorified Lord Himself.

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation and another buildeth thereon" (I Cor. 3:10).

"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:

"How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

"Whereby when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ),

"Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

"That the Gentiles should be fellow [joint] heirs, and of the same [joint] body, and [joint] partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel:

"Whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power.

"Unto me who am less then the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

"And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.

"According to His eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus Christ our Lord" (Eph. 3:1-11).

TWO CHURCHES

We must be very careful not to confuse this Church in Ephesians with the Church of which our Lord spoke to Peter. *That* was a prophesied Church; *This* was a mystery. The plans and specifications for *that* Church are found in the Old Testament Scriptures. The plans and specifications for *this* Church were "*kept secret since the world began,*" ([Rom. 16:25](#)), "*hid from ages and generations,*" ([Col. 1:26](#)), "*in other ages . . . not made known*" ([Eph. 3:5](#)).

You say, "Did not Peter and Paul both build on the same foundation?" Yes, but *that* Church was built upon our Lord as *Israel's Messiah*. *This* Church is built upon Him as *the glorified Head of the Body*, rejected on earth but exalted at God's right hand.

This distinction is clearly seen by a comparison of Acts 2 with II Tim. 2.

In the former passage *Peter* says distinctly that God raised Christ from the dead *to sit on the throne of David*. (See [Acts 2:29,30](#) and cf. [Acts 2:31-38](#)).

But in the latter passage Paul says:

"Consider what I say: and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

"Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my Gospel

"Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bands: but the Word of God is not bound" (II Tim. 2:7-9).

To understand what Paul means when he informs us that the Seed of David was also raised from the dead according to *his* gospel, we should turn to Eph. 1 and 2 where Paul prays that believers might be given the spiritual perception to appreciate -

"... what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

"And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.

"Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places" (Eph. 1:18-20).

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love where with He loved Us,

"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (By grace ye are saved)

"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:4-6).

Read the whole passage from Eph. 1:15 right through Eph. 2:11 and see the wonderful power of God in raising Christ from the dead and exalting Him "far above all." And see how this mighty power is shown *"to usward who believe"* as He raises us from the dead and gives us a position with Christ in the heavenlies!

Surely Peter would have preached such a message at Pentecost had he known it. But he did not know it. At Pentecost he preached Christ only as the Savior-King whom God had raised from the dead to sit on David's throne. He called upon Israel to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins so that the times of refreshing might come and that God might send back Jesus, whom they had refused ([Acts 3:19,20](#)).

Peter's message was accompanied by great wonders and signs, but who would sigh for "Pentecostal power" when he knows something of *"the power of His resurrection?"* ([Phil 3:10](#)). No wonder Paul said *"Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to MY GOSPEL."*

It is this message which the Devil so hates and for which Paul suffered as an evil doer. It seemed that with Israel's rejection all hope was gone. It seemed not only that man had made his own salvation impossible, but that God's promises had failed. *And then came the revelation of the mystery!* Before judging this Christ-rejecting world and setting His Anointed up as King, He saved the very leader of the rebellion against Christ and sent him forth with the glorious proclamation of grace, an offer of reconciliation to all His enemies by grace through faith alone. It could be through faith alone because now the fulness of our Lord's finished work had been revealed. It had been demonstrated how much had been accomplished at Calvary and what His death and resurrection had wrought.

This is the climax of the divine revelation. No wonder Satan hates it. It demonstrates the exceeding sinfulness of man's sin and the exceeding abundance of God's grace. It shows the utter failure of man and the mighty power of God. Indeed, it proclaims Satan's utter defeat, for in Col. 2:15 we read concerning Christ and Calvary:

"And having spoiled [made spoil of] principalities and powers, He made of show of them openly, triumphing over them in it."

PAUL THE MASTERBUILDER

Paul was not self-important when he called himself the "masterbuilder" of the Church of this age. He makes it clear that this position was given to him "according to the grace of God." Indeed, he always associates his unique position with the grace of God and when he emphasizes it he does so not to exalt himself but God's wonderful grace.

Read carefully [Rom. 1:5, 12:3, 15:15,16](#); [I Cor. 15:9, 10](#); [Gal. 1:15,16; 2:9](#); [Eph. 3:7, 8](#), and [I Tim. 1:12-16](#) and see how his appointment to this position was the supreme demonstration of the over-abounding grace of God.

Moses was the masterbuilder of the tabernacle. God gave him the plans and specifications and said, "See . . . that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount" (Heb. 8:5).

But as Moses represents the Law so Paul represents grace.

Paul, too, was a masterbuilder, for to him God gave, by a special revelation, the plans and specifications for the Church of this age of grace. He did not receive the full plan at once, to be sure, but step by step it was made known to him by direct revelation, so that he was a "wise" (intelligent) "masterbuilder" (chief architect).

LET EVERY MAN TAKE HEED HOW HE BUILDETH THEREUPON

Why do the builders fail to build according to the plans and specifications set forth in Paul's epistles?

Why do they ignore his warning, "*I have laid the foundation . . . let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon ?*"

They have taken Petrine material and build it upon the Pauline foundation. They talk about "building the kingdom," and try vainly to carry out the so-called "great commission." They have taken baptism, tongues, healings and signs of the times from another dispensation and brought them into the dispensation of the grace of God, until the Church is so confused and divided that no one knows what to believe.

Perhaps we ought to ponder more thoughtfully over the words of our Lord to the Pharisees:

"And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation: and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt. 12:25).

Are our spiritual leaders unaware of the condition of the Church, or have they forgotten that they will give an account before God when the building is inspected?

Surely God is not to blame for the condition of the Church. *The builders are to blame.* The truth of the matter is that many of them keep so busy "getting things going" that they have little time left to study the Word.

Some time ago we received an announcement of 30 services to be held in a certain Fundamentalist church from then until Easter, fifteen weeks later. A general theme was announced, together with 30 topics and 30 sub-topics. A few days later we received another from another Fundamentalist church where the pastor was to speak on the same general theme with the same 30 topics and sub-topics. *What a strange coincidence!*

We venture to say that the Christian public would be amazed to find how many of their pastors deliver "canned sermons" and spend almost no time in independent Bible study.

The majority of Christians today have been fed on milk and music so long that they are spiritually sick - so sick that their pastors must continue to give them something sensational or entertaining along with a light message to keep them coming.

A musician with a "mystery instrument," a girl playing cow bells, an interesting movie, native costumes - anything "catchy" to keep the people coming.

Mark well, we do not say all of these things are wrong in themselves, but we do say that many a preacher today *must* have these things to keep the people coming. His preaching does not have the power to draw them. And this condition has been brought about by the leaders themselves.

It is often argued that souls are being saved, but will the builders of the Church never awaken to the fact that hands raised and people coming forward do not measure the success of their work? *Does their work abide?* (1 [Cor. 3:14,15](#)). That is the question.

When we think of the thousands upon thousands who have professed Christ in the evangelistic campaigns of the last three decades alone, surely one would expect that New York City, Philadelphia and Chicago would be shaken by the gospel, but not so. Great numbers of these "converts" go back into the world and the majority who remain are so weak and confused that the world laughs at them. Beloved, let us face the fact: *the Church has lost its power.* The Church is much larger than in Paul's day, but also much weaker. The majority of local churches

as well as the majority of Christians are almost powerless. They may exert an influence of some sort, but they utterly lack *"the power of the Spirit."*

REWARD OR LOSS

Fortunately, salvation is by grace through faith, and we do not doubt that even in the dark ages many were saved in spite of their blind leaders and their limited knowledge, but we fear that the leaders of today, will fare little better than the leaders of that day when they appear at the judgment seat of Christ, for they certainly have not taken heed to build according to the plans and specifications committed to Paul as the masterbuilder. Just think a moment. What is the Church at today mostly composed of: "gold, silver, precious stones," or "wood, hay and stubble?" Many a man who enjoys prominence and popularity today will weep in that day to see his works go up in flames. It will be a dreadful thing to "suffer loss" when the rewards are given out.

Ministers, missionaries, Christian workers, we appeal to you in behalf of a stricken Church.

They are God's building, - we are the builders. "We are laborers together with God." What a calling! Paul, as a wise masterbuilder, has given us the plans and specifications. We should be intelligent workmen; workmen whom God can approve, who need not be ashamed.

There is only ONE way. Take your hand off the public pulse ([Gal. 1:10](#)), cease giving so much time and energy to organizing and advertising and begin to diligently, prayerfully obey

II TIM. 2:15

"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth."

The Apostolic Authority Of The Twelve

AND THE QUESTION OF APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

"Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven "(Matt. 18:18).

"Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained ' (John 20:23).

These three verses of Scripture are, of course, very significant and important in the eyes of Roman Catholics. What communicant of the Church of **Rome** does not know them! And how often Catholics have used them to silence Protestants!

On these words of our Lord Rome bases her claims of authority in spiritual matters.

ROME'S CLAIMS

The Roman Catholic Church contends:

1. That these words mean what they say.

Rome strenuously objects when Protestants modify, qualify or in any way alter the obvious meaning of these words. She insists that upon a called-out group (ekklesia) our Lord conferred full authority to act officially in His name, even to the remission of sins, and that such official acts were to be binding in heaven.

This is a strong argument. It always strengthens one's position to be able to turn to the Scriptures and say, "*This is what it says.*"

2. Rome's second great claim is that the authority of the Church was centralized in the twelve apostles, over whom Christ placed one of themselves, St. Peter, as chief.

This claim is based on the fact that while John 20:23 may have been spoken to many of Jesus' disciples, Matt. 18:18 was apparently addressed to the twelve apostles, and certainly Matt. 16:19 to Peter alone.

Thus, it is claimed, authority in spiritual matters was given to the Church, represented by the twelve apostles and personified in the Apostle Peter.

3. Their conclusion is that since the Church of today is (according to Catholic doctrine) a perpetuation of the organization which Christ instituted and vested with divine authority, there must of necessity be apostolic succession.

They contend that the apostolic body is perpetuated in the College of Bishops and that one of their own number, the Pope or Bishop of Rome, succeeds St. Peter as their chief and the supreme head of the Church on earth - that spiritual authority today is still vested in the Church, represented by the College of Bishops and personified in the Pope himself.

Protestants may lift their hands in horror at such claims, but next to the Roman Catholic interpretation of these Scriptures Protestant arguments are as weak as cotton thread.

PROTESTANT INTERPRETATIONS

1. The Catholic interpretation in modified form is found in the ritualistic creeds of many Protestant denominations. They make Rome's claims - with reservations and apologies.

2. Some Protestants argue that in these words our Lord merely gave the apostles authority to *state the terms* of salvation.

3. Others contend that the apostles were given the ability to *discern and declare* whose sins were forgiven and whose were not. That is, they could pronounce sins forgiven, not by any authority which was given to them, but because of God-given powers to discern the true spiritual state of those to whom they ministered.

4. Still others claim that our Lord meant to impress upon His followers their great responsibility and to warn them that through *their* behavior some would accept Him while others would reject Him; some would have their sins remitted, while others would have their sins retained.

But all these arguments wrest the natural, obvious meaning from our Lord's plain words. And if He did not mean what He said, who has the right to tell us what He did mean?

What then? Must we return to Rome, admit her claims and commit our souls to *men* - men who can either bless or curse us according to their will - men who do not know as much about us as we ourselves?

THE SOLUTION

The solution to this problem is again a dispensational one. It lies in the fact that from time to time God changes His dealings with men - a premise which must be granted by Romanists if indeed our Lord did confer such powers upon His disciples after several thousand years of human history had elapsed.

OFFICIALS OF THE KINGDOM

Let us consider John 20:23 in the light of its context:

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.

"And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:

"Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:21-23).

In the light of this context it is not strange to find our Lord granting official powers.

These words should be compared with His words to the twelve in Luke 22:28-30.

"Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations.

"And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me.

"That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In Matt. 19:28 the matter of the thrones is stated even more specifically:

"Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In Mark 2:7 the scribes find fault with Christ, saying, "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?"

Are we prone, perhaps, to agree too wholeheartedly with these scribes? We must not forget that our Lord Himself said,

"For the Father judgeth no man but hath committed all judgment unto the Son . . . and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also because He is the Son of Man" (John 5: 22, 27).

The Lord Jesus certainly had the authority to admit men into the kingdom or shut them out from it. Surely *He* could remit sins, and what *He* did on earth was certainly binding in heaven.

And now He gives these powers to His disciples.

"As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.

"And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me."

The twelve apostles were to be the officials of the kingdom and what is an official without authority?

PETER AND THE ELEVEN

Matt. 21:43 makes it clear that the kingdom was to be *taken from* the chief priests and elders in Israel.

"Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."¹⁹

Further, Luke 12:32 makes it clear that the kingdom was to be *given to* the "little flock."

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Matt. 19:28 makes it clear that authority in this kingdom was to be centralized in the twelve apostles.

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In Matt. 16:19 Peter is singled out as chief of the twelve when our Lord says,

¹⁹ Note carefully here that the kingdom was to be given to "a *nation*," not "*the nations*". Moreover, this "nation" was to bring forth the fruits which Israel, under the leaders of that day, had failed to produce.

"And I will give unto *thee* the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

Again and again we find Peter singled out as their leader.

In connection with the choosing of Matthias as Judas' successor, we read:

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples..." (Acts 1:15).

The record of the great Pentecostal address opens with these words:

"But *Peter*, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice..." (Acts 2:14).

Concerning those brought under conviction at Pentecost, we read:

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto *Peter* and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

Thus divine authority was given to the "little flock" represented by the twelve apostles and, personally, by Peter himself. This authority extended even to remission of sins.

Was the remission of sins then left in the hands of failing men? No, not *failing* men, for while great authority was committed to them there was no room for failure. Let us consider this more fully.

THE OFFICIAL ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

It is significant that the first official act of the "little flock" was the appointment of a successor to Judas.

Some suppose that the appointment of Matthias was a mistake; that Paul should have been the twelfth apostle. But there was no mistake.

The disciples were obeying the Scriptures which distinctly said, "*Let another take his office.*" (Cf. [Psa. 109:8](#) and [Acts 1:20](#)).

Moreover, the selection of Judas' successor was of primary importance and urgency since there must be twelve apostles to occupy twelve thrones before the kingdom could be offered to Israel, and Saul of Tarsus was not even saved until some time later.

Furthermore, Paul would not have qualified, for to be numbered with the eleven it was necessary to have been with the Lord continuously "*beginning from*

the baptism of John, unto the same day that He was taken up.. ." i.e., from the first day of our Lord's ministry to the very last (See [Acts 1:21,22](#) and cf. [Luke 22:28-30](#)).

The objection that Matthias is not mentioned after this is groundless, for this may also be said of some of the others. The fact is that the Holy Spirit Himself numbered Matthias with the eleven and bestowed upon all twelve the miraculous powers which were the credentials of their apostleship.

In addition to all this we have the words of our Lord to the very ones who appointed Matthias, that *"whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."* This should be conclusive.

Coming now to the Pentecostal scene itself we find the apostles fully exercising their authority. Peter is saying to his convicted hearers.

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

Notice carefully that water baptism was required for salvation. The apostles baptized them *"for the remission of sins."* Compare this with the words of our Lord, *"whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them,"* and *"whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven."* There is perfect harmony here.

But could not some shrewd person have deceived the apostles? *Did Ananias deceive them?* He was carried out dead!

But could there be no mistake? No, for *"they were all filled with the Holy Ghost"* ([Acts 2:4](#)) and were given special miraculous powers, including the "gift of knowledge."

Let us go on to the tenth chapter of the book of Acts.

Peter was not out of the will of God when he hesitated to go to the Gentiles. He well knew the prophetic program, that the nations were to be blessed through the rise of Israel ([Isa. 60:1-3](#)). Had he not himself quoted to the men of Israel the great Abrahamic covenant, "and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed?"

He understood that according to that program it was unlawful for him to go to one of another nation until Israel had accepted Christ and become God's priestly nation. He was in accord with his Master's will, for the Lord Himself had said, *"Let the children first be filled"* ([Mark 7:27](#)). Even according to the "great commission" the apostles were to begin their ministry at Jerusalem. (See [Luke 24:47](#) and [Acts 1:8](#)) Israel was first to be brought to Messiah's feet.

But here is Peter on Joppa's housetop, "*very hungry.*" What is he hungry for? Pork and other "unclean" food? Physically, perhaps, but the Holy Spirit interprets the vision for us and we find that a greater hunger fills his *heart*. Oh, that Israel might, as a nation, receive Messiah and that the good news might be spread to all the world! The unclean meat spoke of the Gentiles, who would be received once the "great commission" got under way - but Israel was preventing it.

It was this hunger to which our Lord responded by *a special commission* to Peter to go to the Gentile house of Cornelius, "nothing doubting." He could not understand it but he went, and before the matter was settled he had to appear before the other apostles to explain his action, and they in turn "*glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*" ([Acts 11:18](#)).

Without in the least detracting from the kingdom aspect of this scene, let us note that when Peter went to Cornelius' household it was definitely *not* according to the prophetic program. It was not because the nation Israel had received Christ. *It was in spite of the fact that Israel was rejecting Christ. But what Peter had done on earth was bound in heaven.*

This incident comes significantly after the stoning of Stephen and the salvation of Saul, and lays the foundation for the subsequent ministry of Paul, which had to do with the blessing of the Gentiles through the *fall* of Israel. Peter's experience was absolutely unique. We never find him ministering to Gentiles again. But it was Peter's experience upon which the great argument for Paul's later ministry was based and which gave it recognition among the twelve. None could deny that it was now God's purpose to send blessing to the Gentiles in spite of Israel.

The stage was now set for the ministry of Paul. There was to be a change in program. The prophetic program was to be held in abeyance while the mystery of God's secret, eternal purpose was unfolded. The twelve were to disappear from the scene and the Apostle Paul was to take their place.

THE TWELVE APOSTLES AND PAUL

"And I went up by revelation and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain . . . and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision" (Gal. 2:2,9).

Here, by a solemn agreement, James,²⁰ Cephas and John promise to confine their ministry to Israel while Paul goes to the Gentiles. This is striking in view of the fact that the twelve, not Paul, had originally been sent into all the world.

Were they all out of the will of God in making this agreement? By no means! Subsequent revelation proves that they were all very much in the will of God and that Israel's rejection of Christ had brought about a change in the program.

What the apostles had bound on earth was bound in heaven and also what they had loosed on earth was loosed in heaven.

In the light of these Scriptures it is difficult to understand how any one can argue that Paul's ministry was merely a perpetuation of that of the twelve or that the kingdom of heaven and the Body of Christ are identical.

It was probably at this same council that Paul so vigorously defended the liberty of Gentile believers. Be that as it may, it is interesting to note *what was decided* at the council referred to in Acts 15.

It was *not* decided there that believers were to be free from the Law, but that *Gentile* believers were to be free. Nothing was said about the status of Jewish believers. It was apparently not even surmised that they too might be free. It was *assumed* that they were still to remain under the Law. The full effects of Calvary had not yet been proclaimed to the Jewish believers. The Holy Spirit's leading is clearly seen here. Liberty *could not* yet be proclaimed to them.

In the first place, because of human limitations, God can teach men only a little at a time. Secondly, such a drastic change would have tended to alienate Israel further from her Messiah, just when it was God's purpose to stretch forth His hands in mercy to a disobedient and gainsaying people.

So God overruled in it all. The apostles were controlled by the Holy Spirit. The Gentiles were to be free from the Law but nothing was said as to the status of the Jews. What the apostles had loosed on earth was loosed in heaven and what they had not loosed remained bound.

It is interesting to notice the apostles' statement to Paul when he visited Jerusalem again some years later:

Acts 21:20,25: "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the Law."

"As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing..."

²⁰ James, the Lord's brother, was not even one of the twelve, but had nevertheless attained a position of leadership among them, so that he now presided over the Jerusalem council.

We repeat that in the light of all this it is difficult to understand how any one can deny the unique character of Paul's ministry. He devotes almost two chapters in his letter to the Galatians to the fact that he did not receive his message from the twelve, but *communicated* his message to the twelve, and privately to the leaders, lest his mission should be in vain.

He stresses the fact that those who had first been sent to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, had now agreed to turn over their Gentile ministry to him that he might proclaim to them "*the gospel of the grace of God.*"

BOUND IN HEAVEN - LOOSED IN HEAVEN

Let us now return to the words of our Lord to Peter, to the twelve and to the "little flock."

On these words Protestantism is divided as usual, and for the same reason as usual.

Protestantism is still trying to operate under the so-called "Great Commission." She considers the Church of this day a perpetuation of the Church of that day. She has failed to recognize the unique character of Paul's ministry. How can she expect to answer Rome?

Every Bible believer should acknowledge that our Lord meant what He said when He conferred official authority upon the group He was to leave behind. But every Christian should also acknowledge that *by this very authority the apostles turned over their Gentile ministry to Paul.* This is the answer to the claims of Rome.

Paul did not need them to appoint him the apostle of the Gentiles, for his apostleship was "*not of men, neither by man.*" But *they* needed to recognize *his apostleship.* They *did* recognize it, officially, and what they bound on earth was bound in heaven. By that same official act they themselves were loosed from the previous commission to go into all the world, for what they *loosed* on earth was loosed in heaven too. This is why Paul could later declare,

"I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office! (Rom. 11:13)

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY AND APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

Not long after the twelve had turned their Gentile ministry over to Paul, God set the nation Israel aside. Do you see what happened to the ministry of the twelve? Do you see what happens to the argument for apostolic succession?

The prophetic program has been interrupted by Israel's rejection of Christ. The Kingdom is held in abeyance. The King is a royal Exile. The prophecy has given way to "the mystery," God's secret, eternal purpose of grace.

To be sure our Lord will come again *"in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God."* Nor has He forgotten His promise to give the twelve apostles twelve thrones in the kingdom. There can be no successors to Peter and the eleven, for *they themselves* are to reign with Christ in glory. What is happening now is a parenthesis in the program of God.

Delaying the judgment of Israel and the nations, God chose *another apostle* to bring a message of grace to this Christ-rejecting world. How great is His mercy and love!

And how are men saved today? How are their sins remitted? Must they come to some recognized authority and be "baptized for the remission of sins?" Rome, still following Peter, says "Yes." But let us see what the Apostle Paul has to say about it.

"For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9).

In contrast to Peter's *"Repent and be baptized ... for the remission of sins,"* read these words from the pen of Paul:

"Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins . . . to declare, I say at this time His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of Him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:24-27).

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

What a glorious message!

And Peter himself confirmed this new arrangement at the great Jerusalem Council, for explaining how the Lord had chosen him to minister to Cornelius' household, he declared that God had *"put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9)*. Indeed, to this declaration he added the remarkable statement:

"But we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ WE [Jews] shall be saved even as THEY [Gentiles]."

And what about the kingdom? Does some man on earth hold the keys? Why, both the King and His kingdom are in exile! That is why God is honored when we, by faith, take Christ as our Savior. When we do this we are "*translated into the kingdom of His dear Son*" (Col. 1:13), "*Accepted in the beloved One*" (Eph. 1:6).

And believers are not only translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son, but are baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ Himself and made members of His glorious Body, eternally and inseparably united with Him (I Cor. 12:12, 13,27; Gal. 3:26-28).

The Unpardonable Sin

To begin with let us consider one of our Lord's parables recorded by Luke. It is frequently called "*the added parable*," because of Luke's comment:

"And as they heard these things, He added and spoke a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11).

In this parable our Lord describes how Pilate and other Roman rulers received their authority from Caesar, and likens this procedure to His own case:

"He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

"But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after Him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:12-14).

The analogy is simple and clear. Christ had been chosen by God to reign and was to go far away - into heaven itself - "to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return." During His absence His servants would work for Him but, as it sometimes happened in the cases of rulers called by Caesar to be vested with authority, His citizens would hate Him and send a message after Him, saying: "*We will not have this man to reign over us.*"

The rest of the parable describes the King's dealings with His servants, and predicts the doom of His enemies, but suffice it here to say that undoubtedly Stephen was the *messenger* referred to. It was he whom the nation Israel stoned to death and sent back to God with the message: "**We will not have this Man to reign over us.**"

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

What confusion there has been on the subject of the unpardonable sin! How many - some of them in mental institutions - have been haunted by the fear that they have committed this sin - and this while Bible teachers themselves are so far from agreed as to what the unpardonable sin is!

Surely those who know the gospel of the grace of God will not strike fear into the hearts of others by the threat of an *unpardonable* sin, for:

"... we have redemption through His blood, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7).

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND:

"THAT AS SIN HATH REIGNED UNTO DEATH, EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE BY JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD" (Rom. 5:20,21).

Surely there is no room for an *unpardonable* sin here. It has been well said that sinners who die in unbelief in this dispensation of grace will go to the lake of fire with all their sins *unpardoned*, but not because one of them was *unpardonable*.

Our Lord's warnings about the unpardonable sin had the coming of the Holy Spirit in view. Nor was this because the Holy Spirit is a more important member of the Trinity than the Holy Father or the Holy Son. It was simply that with the coming of the Holy Spirit to plead with Israel all three members of the Trinity would have done their part to bring the nation to repentance and salvation.

All through Old Testament times Israel had resisted the Father. The Father, in turn, had sent the Son, who had taught and labored among them, only to be rejected too. Now the Son was to send the Spirit, and Israel would have her last chance. Hence the Lord said:

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men ... neither in this world [age] neither in the world [age] to come" (Matt. 12:31,32).

As the number seven in Scripture speaks of *perfection* so the number three speaks of *completeness*. God Himself is a trinity: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*. The number three too, is stamped upon His creation. We ourselves have the number three stamped upon us for we are *body, soul and spirit*. The structural universe bears the same number, being made up of *time, space and matter*. And each of these again is three-fold. Time: *past, present and future*. Space: *length, breadth and height*. Matter: *energy, motion and phenomena*.²¹ And the Scriptures, in dealing with the universe, designate "*Things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth*" (Phil. 2:10).

In homiletics, the *three-point* sermon is the standard. In business we have our "*three days of grace*" and the auctioneer's "Going, going - *gone?* or "First, second - *third* and last call!" Even in sports the number three is prominent. What boy does not know that in baseball there are three strikes to an out and *three* outs to an inning? And it is always *three* cheers, never two or four. And the simplest form of the race begins with a "Ready, get set - *go!*"

²¹ See Nathan R. Wood's enlightening book: *The Trinity in the Universe*.

The number three is prominent even in parental discipline. When the writer was a boy it was not strange to hear his father say: "Now this is the second time I've spoken to you. If I have to speak again--!!!"

And thus it was with the nation Israel. When our Lord warned Israel's leaders that sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven them it was simply because the Holy Spirit was soon to descend and give them their third and last opportunity to repent as a nation. And after all their sin and blasphemy against the Father and the Son the Holy Spirit *did* come down at Pentecost, working among them so mightily and confronting them with such overwhelming proofs of our Lord's royal rights that their continued rejection of Him was utterly inexcusable and unpardonable.

Yet they did continue in their rebellion. They had resisted the Father and the Son, and now Stephen had to say: "*Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.*"

THREE BRUTAL MURDERS

Every student of the Word should know the three brutal murders around which all history revolves. These three murders represent Israel's response to God's three-fold call to repentance. They explain the unpardonable sin and form the background for the present dispensation of grace.

It was John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, who was sent as the forerunner of Christ to call Israel to repentance. He was beheaded by Herod, the wicked and licentious "king of the Jews." After John, Christ Himself took up the cry: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Him they crucified. Then, at Pentecost, Israel was given a *third* opportunity to repent, until they shed blood again, stoning Stephen to death.

It should be noticed, too, that their guilt, as well as their bitter enmity, increased with the second and third murders. As to the beheading of John the Baptist, they *permitted* it.²² As to the crucifixion of Christ, they *demand*ed it (Luke 23:33,34). As to the stoning of Stephen, they *committed* it, casting him out of the city with their own hands and stoning him there.

And so that generation in Israel committed the unpardonable sin which our Lord warned would not be forgiven, either in that age, or in the age to come.²³ (From *Acts Dispensationally Considered*, by C. R. Stam --Vol. I Pp. 235-240).

²² Had Israel, responded to John's call to repentance Herod would never have dared to even put John in jail. This explains why our Lord did nothing to release him from prison, even though this had offended John. It was not *His*, but *theirs* to do something about John's unjust imprisonment and every moment he spent in prison testified against them (Read carefully Luke 3:18-20; 7:19-29 and Matt. 14:1-11).

²³ Remember, *this present age of grace* was still a mystery when this was spoken, so that "the age to come" refers to the coming kingdom age.

Thus we close this article by quoting again those precious passages from Paul's epistles which clearly *deny the possibility* of any "unpardonable sin" during the present "*dispensation of the grace of God*":

". . . we have redemption through His blood, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7).

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND:

"That as sin hath reigned unto death, *even so might grace reign* through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20,21).

The Hope of Glory

"... I [Paul] am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill [complete] the Word of God;

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints:

"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, THE HOPE OF GLORY" (Col. 1:25-27).

Man, originally created in the image and after the likeness of God, must have been a being of great glory. On the very day that he disobeyed God, however, his glory faded and he was overwhelmed with shame, afraid even to meet his Maker. Instead of fleeing *to* God for mercy and help, he fled *from* Him and hid himself among the trees of the garden. And when God sought him out and found him, he answered:

"I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10).

Ashamed and afraid to face God; this has been man's condition by nature ever since that fateful day. With all the enmity and bitterness generated in his heart by the fall and its consequences, man has still always been completely unnerved in the presence of the glory - even the reflected glory - of God.

As the Judaeans watched their flocks on the night of Messiah's birth:

". . . Lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHONE ROUND ABOUT THEM: AND THEY WERE SORE AFRAID" (Luke 2:9).

Many others in the sacred record have likewise become "sore afraid" in the presence of God's glory - and so would we be, for the simple reason that...

"ALL HAVE SINNED, AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD" (Rom. 3:23).

The Judaeans, however, belonged to "the stock of Israel" and, as such, shared in the plan of redemption and its "hope of glory."

ISRAEL'S HOPE OF GLORY

When the Gentiles were "given up" at the Tower of Babel and were "scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth" ([Rom. 1:24](#); [Gen. 11:9](#)) "*the God of glory appeared unto . . . Abraham*" (Acts 7:2) and promised by solemn covenant that he and his seed would be richly blessed and would become a blessing to all nations. This covenant was confirmed again and again to Abraham's seed.

Later, to be sure, the Law was added to the Abrahamic Covenant, but this by no means nullified the original covenant to Abraham ([Gal. 3:17](#)). The Law, with its requirements of perfect obedience, had *been* added only to demonstrate that on *this* basis no one would ever be saved; that justification could never be obtained by the works of the Law, but only by faith ([Rom. 3:19,20](#)). Indeed, still later God made a "new covenant" with "the house of Israel and with the house of Judah," to counteract the effects of the "old covenant" - the Law ([Jer. 31:31-34](#); [Matt. 26:28](#)). Thus, in the *Abrahamic Covenant* God said: "*I will*"; in the *Mosaic Covenant* He said: "*I will if...*" but in the *New Covenant* He said: "*I will even if. . .*"

It was on the sole basis, then, of the sure promises of God that Isaiah could declare: "*And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob*" ([Isa. 59:20](#)), and could add:

"ARISE, SHINE; FOR THY LIGHT IS COME, AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD IS RISEN UPON THEE.

"For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: BUT THE LORD SHALL ARISE UPON THEE, AND HIS GLORY SHALL BE SEEN UPON THEE.

"AND THE GENTILES SHALL COME TO THY LIGHT, AND KINGS TO THE BRIGHTNESS OF THY RISING" ([Isa. 60:1-3](#)).

It was, of course, because Israel's glory was to be centered in her Messiah, that Simeon, in prayer to God, could call Christ:

"A light to lighten the Gentiles, and THE GLORY OF THY PEOPLE ISRAEL" ([Luke 2:32](#)).

In the light of all this it is not strange to find Paul writing to the Romans that to Israel "*pertaineth the adoption and the glory...*" ([Rom. 9:4](#)).

For centuries the people of Israel had already enjoyed the earnest of God's presence and glory with them in the holiest places of their tabernacle and temple. It was there, at the mercy seat, that He resided among them and met with them, representatively, each year ([Ex. 25:21,22](#); [Heb. 9:7](#)).

However, when He came to dwell with them as their long-promised Emmanuel, they rejected Him and crucified Him. Speaking of the temple, shortly before His crucifixion, He had lamented: "*Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*" (Matt. 23:38). And when they did crucify Him:

"Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom" (Matt. 27:51).

His Father's house was now *their* house and had become desolate indeed. The veil, rent from top to bottom, revealed, not the light and glory of Jehovah's presence, but the darkness and disgrace of His absence.

Graciously, the Lord had prayed from the very cross itself: "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). And in even greater grace He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven and, with overwhelming witness to His claims, had offered them His return and "the times of refreshing" upon condition of their repentance.

They stood by their awful deed, however, and would not repent, with the result that, like the Gentiles twenty centuries earlier, they were "given up" and "scattered abroad upon the face of all the earth," the glowing promises of kingdom blessing and glory all now held in abeyance.

OUR HOPE OF GLORY

With Israel cast out of God's favor, what hope could the Gentiles now possibly entertain of glory to come? According to all covenant and prophecy it was *through Israel* that the nations were to be blessed. They were to come to Israel's light and glory (Isa. 60:1-3). Ah, but *go back far enough*. The Gentiles were to be blessed through Israel, *through Christ*, her Messiah (Gal. 3:16). *He* is the Fount of every blessing, the Source of all supply. Paul emphasizes this to the Gentiles again and again, saying, e.g., to the Colossians: "*For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell*" (Col. 1:19). Why could not God answer Israel's rebellion by holding her blessing as a nation in abeyance, offering salvation and blessing to the Gentiles *through Christ and His finished work*?

This is why Paul writes to the Gentiles at Rome, who might otherwise have despaired:

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort [Lit., in a sense] as putting you in mind, because of THE GRACE THAT IS GIVEN TO ME OF GOD, THAT I SHOULD BE THE MINISTER OF JESUS CHRIST TO THE GENTILES" (Rom. 15:13-16).²⁴

²⁴ Note the foregoing context to this passage and see how it was written *in this very connection*. If the Gentiles, according to promise were to rejoice *with* His people Israel, how could they look for blessing now

The story is a touching narrative of God's love toward the hopeless Gentiles. As "the God of glory," centuries before, had appeared to Abraham, so "the Lord of glory," had now appeared to Paul, while still Saul the persecutor and, graciously *saving* him, had sent him forth as "the apostle of the Gentiles" - an apostle of grace and hope. (See [Rom. 11:13](#) and [I Tim. 1:13-16](#)). So dazzling was the glory of the exalted Christ whom he had until now rejected, that he later testified: "*I could not see for the glory of that light*" ([Acts 22:11](#)).

And to this man the Lord committed a message based, not on covenant promises, but on *grace!* not on prophecies, but on "the mystery," God's "eternal purpose, kept secret since the world began." And he was to be not only the herald, but the *living demonstration* of this purpose. As Abraham was God's great symbol of *faith*, so Paul was to be God's great symbol of *grace*.

Now the Gentiles may again hope for glory; not through Israel's rise, but through her fall, for "*through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles*" ([Rom. 11:11](#)). Or, to put it in another way, they may hope for glory to come, not through Israel, but through Israel's rejected Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His finished work avails for all, and Gentile as well as Jew²⁵ may avail himself of its merits. Thus we read in Rom. 4:25--5:2:

"[Christ] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for [on account of] our justification.

"Therefore being justified by faith, WE HAVE PEACE WITH GOD THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST:

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, AND REJOICE IN HOPE OF THE GLORY OF GOD."

Thus too we are told that God has called us to "*His kingdom*²⁶ *and glory*" ([I Thes. 2:12](#)) and that we were called "by our [Paul's] gospel, *to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*" ([II Thes. 2:14](#)). Indeed, even the believer's poor body, which is "sown in dishonor," will be "*raised in glory*" ([I Cor. 15:43](#)) and "when Christ, who is our life shall appear," we all together shall "*appear with Him in glory*" ([Col. 3:4](#)). What a prospect! And what a prospect for our blessed Savior! for remember, our glory will enhance His, for, it was all merited by Him and bestowed upon us in His matchless love and grace. Little wonder the apostle prays so earnestly that we might appreciate "*the riches of the glory of His [Christ's] inheritance in the saints*" ([Eph. 1:18](#)).

that Israel was being set aside because of her rejection of Christ? The answer: God had raised up Paul to proclaim salvation by *grace*, through Christ *alone*.

²⁵ While the *nation* has been cast out of God's favor, any individual Jew may, of course, still be saved and become a member of the "one joint body." Actually, however, there are very few Jews in the Body, hence, practically speaking, Paul calls God's work today: "*this mystery among the Gentiles.*"

²⁶ Cf. Col. 1:13.

As Messiah was - and in a sense still is - Israel's hope of glory, so our rejected, but highly exalted Savior and Lord is *our* hope of glory. The apostle, in Col. 1:26,27, does not refer to any individual believer, but to all believers, collectively, in this present dispensation, when he speaks of "*the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations*" and declares that God would have his saints know...

"What is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is CHRIST IN YOU,²⁷ THE HOPE OF GLORY."

The world about us is in a deplorable condition. The shadows of the age lengthen, but, thank God for the knowledge of "this mystery among the Gentiles," that the Lord Jesus Christ dwells by grace in His people as "*the hope of glory.*"

²⁷ . I.e., "you believing Gentiles."

Solomon's Temple

ITS TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND HOW ITS ERECTION WAS FINANCED

(Re-Published by request from an August, 1985, article.)

INTRODUCTION

The great revelation committed to Paul by our glorified Lord is rightly called "the mystery," the secret, for in it we find *the secret* of God's "eternal Purpose." As we take our stand in the Pauline epistles and *from thence* view the Old Testament Scriptures, we find abundant evidence that God's Purpose concerning the Church of the present dispensation was indeed His "eternal purpose."

While, for example, the building of Solomon's temple was not said at the time to be a type of the building of "the temple of God" of I Corinthians and Ephesians, *nor even said to be a type at all*, who can now consider its erection and Purpose in the light of Paul's writings without exclaiming, "*God had this in mind all the while!*" His heart was full of it even in the days of David and Solomon!"

THE BUILDING

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building" (I Kings 6:7).

The stones in the temple, thus made ready beforehand, remind us that the "living stones" in God's spiritual temple were "*chosen... in Him before the foundation of the world*" ([Eph. 1:4](#)). Moreover, as the stones which David had selected were quietly slipped, each one, into its place, without the sound of even a hammer, so God's living stones are given each one his place ("fitly framed together"), in the true temple, not with the noise of organizational machinery but by the quiet working of the Holy Spirit ([I Cor. 12:13](#)).

As Solomon's temple was thus quietly erected it must have seemed to observers to *grow* like a thing alive. This was meant to be so, to foreshadow God's *living* temple, which does indeed grow as we, the "living stones," are built into it:

"In whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:

"In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:21,22).

THE BUILDERS

"And David said to Solomon: My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God:

"But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto My name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in My sight.

"Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest . . . his name shall be *Solomon* [Heb. for "Peace"]

"He shall build an house for My name..." (I Chron. 22:7-10).

Moreover, as Moses received the plans for the tabernacle at the hands of God, so the plans for the temple were given to David *in writing* by God Himself, and David then turned these over to Solomon (I Chron. 28:11-19).

The actual builder of the temple, then, was Solomon, the man of rest and peace, but it must not be overlooked that his reign was one of peace *because of the battles his father had fought*. He enjoyed the rest that David had won for him by the shedding of blood. In this *both* David and Solomon were types of Christ: David, a type of Christ on earth, who won mighty victories through the blood shed at Calvary (Col. 2:14,15), and Solomon a type of the *exalted* Christ, *resting* in a finished work, and offering reconciliation and peace to all His enemies (II Cor. 5:19,20).

Further, while Solomon was the actual builder of the temple, it was David who gathered and prepared the materials for its erection.

"And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender, and the house that is to be builded for the Lord must be exceeding magnificent, of fame end of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death" (I Chron. 22:5).

In like manner it was the Christ of the cross, the Man of battles and blood, who prepared and provided for the building of God's spiritual temple by the *glorified* Christ, the One exalted "far above all."

THE PREPARATIONS

"Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation.... the work is great, for the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God.

"Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God . . . gold, silver . . . brass . . . iron . . . wood . . . , onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and of divers colors, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance.

"Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house,

"Even three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses withal.

"The gold for things of gold, and the silver for things of silver and who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" (I Chron. 29: 1-5).

Was David here boasting of the size of his personal contribution compared with that which he had gathered by other means for the building of the temple? No indeed! This was meant as a challenge to all the people of Israel to take advantage of a great opportunity to participate with him in the undertaking.

It was highly appropriate that the man of battles, blood and conquest should point to his own contribution as he called for volunteers to join him in making sacrifices for the erection of the temple. Our Lord Jesus Christ, through Paul, did the same as He sought to awaken the stingy Corinthians to their financial responsibility in the work of the Lord: "*Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" says the inspired apostle, "*that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich*" (II Cor 8:9).

THE CHALLENGE

"And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" (I Chron. 29:5).

David's call for volunteers is a beautiful foreshadowing of things that were to come, for today our Lord points to what *He* has done as He calls upon us to participate with Him in the building of God's spiritual temple (See [I Cor. 3:9,10](#)). Let us consider David's challenge in detail and apply each lesson to ourselves,

"Who then is willing... ?"

Mark well that David's challenge was to *individuals* to participate *personally*. He did not ask or suggest how much could be raised by this audience. He asked,

"Who . . . is willing?" and expected them to respond individually, as indeed they did: "I will. I will. I will."

We know that God's spiritual temple is being erected according to *His* schedule, and the last stone will be added in *His* time. Yet there is always God's challenge to us, His people, and we are convinced that the building of the true Church, God's spiritual temple, will not make significant progress until far greater numbers of *individual believers* accept His challenge and answer His "Will you?" with a hearty "*I will.*"

"Who then is *willing*. . . ?"

The temple was not built from taxes, but by voluntary contributions. Pointing to his own contribution, David said in effect: "*How many feel as I do about this? How many wish to take part with me in this enterprise?*" This is the meaning of the word *willing* here. It certainly does *not* mean, "Who will give grudging consent?!"

Thus God accomplishes His work through His people. Christ's army is not raised by conscription; all its members are enlisted men. Likewise God's administration of grace is not supported by taxes; it functions by individual *voluntary* participation.

Thus Paul declared by *inspiration*: "*If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not*" (II Cor. 8:11). Have some overdone this and lacked material wealth themselves as a consequence? Well, then, let us remember that it is such that the Lord specially commends in II Cor. 8:3,4 where Paul testifies concerning the **Macedonian** believers:

"For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift"

Note: "*willing of themselves.*" *He did* not need to urge or coax them to do their part. It was in their own hearts to do *more* than their part and this was but the natural result of their *first* having given *themselves* to the Lord and to Paul His servant (II Cor. 8:5).

"Who then is willing to consecrate his service ?"

The word translated "consecrate" here is not the usual word so rendered, and the words "his service" have been added, in KJV, to the original word, which means, literally, "*to fill the hand,*" in this case to fill the hand with an offering for the Lord, or to give a *full* hand. "As you give," said David in effect, "do not grudgingly *pick out* from your treasures some small gift for Him. Rather reach into

all that He has given you and take out a hand *full*, and give *generously, heartily* for His glory."

"Who then is willing to consecrate his service *this day* unto the Lord?"

How familiar to the ears of Christian leaders are such statements as, "I want to have a part in your ministry," or "I'll have to send you a check some time." These sentiments flow so freely from the lips of those who never seem to get around to *doing* something about it.

It is reported that a man once said to the late Paul Rader: "I'm going to send you a check one of these days," to which Rader responded: "Do you have a dime?" "I think so," said the man, and reaching into his change purse he found a dime and gave it to the evangelist. "There!" said Rader, "Now I *know* I've got *that!*"

If ever procrastination is the thief of time, it is in the matter of financial stewardship. This is why the Apostle Paul had to write to the Corinthians, who had promised a year previous to help in a financial project:

"Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have."

The Lord's work is not conducted on plans or promises, but on *performance*. How much could be accomplished if more of those whom God has blessed so richly would say, "I will give a full hand *this day* to the Lord," and would then proceed to *do* it!

THE RESPONSE

The response to David's appeal was enormous.

The princes and the people together *offered willingly* in gifts of gold, silver, brass and iron ([I Chron. 29:6,7](#)). *"And they with whom precious stones were found gave them to the treasure of the house of the Lord..."* (Ver. 8).

So great was the offering that, as we have said, most Bible commentators feel sure there must be some mistake: a corruption in the text, an error in translation or, perhaps, a misunderstanding of the values involved.

But we have shown that the facts in evidence do not permit us to entertain this doubt; that evidently the hearts of the children of Israel were moved to bring to God the greatest financial offering, probably, that His people have ever given for the glory of His name.

THE RESULTS

But *after* the gift was given, did the people feel as if they had been taken in? Did they feel that they had perhaps been carried away by their emotions and had acted too hastily? Indeed not! The record says:

"Then the people rejoiced for that they had offered willingly . . . and David the king also rejoiced with great joy" (I Chron. 29:9).

Leading the people in thanksgiving and prayer, King David said:

"Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee and praise Thy glorious name.

"But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.

"For we are strangers before Thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (Vers. 13-15).

And with reference to his own offering, the king expressed what must be in the heart of our Lord when He sees His people making sacrifices to win those for whom He died:

"As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things: and now have I seen with joy Thy people, which are present here, to offer willingly unto Thee" (Ver. 17).

Surely then, we do well in this materialistic age, to *"remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

But the most important result of Israel's generous offering was the temple itself which, when completed, was *"exceeding magnificent," "the glory of the whole earth."*

Here the results of *our* sacrifices, however, are even greater, for whereas it was Israel's calling to make God's name great *in the earth*. (I Kings 8:41,42), it is ours to glorify Him not only on earth but before the principalities and powers in the heavenlies (Eph. 3:10). And whereas Solomon's temple was material and physical, God's spiritual temple is made up of *redeemed sinners*.

What a glorious day it will be when finally God's spiritual temple has been completed! How the whole universe will wonder at what God in His grace has wrought! ([Eph. 2:7](#); [II Thes. 1:10](#)). How we shall then rejoice over any sacrifices we shall have made toward its completion! How we will wish we had done more!

Meantime, then, let us give with “full hand” to the cause of Christ and, like Israel of old, begin rejoicing *now* in the privilege of *personal participation* in His blessed service.