# From Acts to the Epistles

A Bridge from the Gospels to the Epistles

A Study about the Beginning of the Church and the Re-offer of the Kingdom to Israel

Arlen L. Chitwood

Scripture deals centrally with man in relation to a province within the kingdom of God — this earth. This province forms a kingdom within the overall kingdom of God, and man was created to rule this kingdom.

The kingdom which man was created to rule has two spheres - an earthly sphere, and a heavenly sphere. And the kingdom is ruled from the heavens over the domain - from the heavens over the earth.

God rules the whole of His universal kingdom in this manner (from a place in the heavens over His universal kingdom), and this is the manner in which He has established the governmental rule of individual provinces in His kingdom as well.

Both spheres of the kingdom are clearly seen in the Old Testament (e.g., Dan. 6:1ff; 10:13ff); but, in relation to man, the Old Testament deals more specifically with *the earthly sphere*, and the New Testament deals more specifically with *the heavenly sphere*.

Accordingly, this book, *From Acts to the Epistles*, has to do with man in relation to *the heavenly sphere of the kingdom*, not the earthly sphere. And this would be easy to understand through noting the clearly revealed content of the New Testament as a whole.

The central theme of the four Gospels (introduced in the Old Testament) has to do with the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, ending with Israel's rejection of the King and the Kingdom, resulting in the King being crucified.

The central theme of the Book of Acts (introduced in the Gospels) has to do with the inception and early years of the Church, along with a re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, ending with Israel's continued rejection.

The central theme of the Epistles (introduced in Acts) has to do with the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Christians, resulting in ready acceptance at first, but later in an ever-increasing apostasy.

And the Book of Revelation forms a climax to the entire matter, outlining events which will occur at the conclusion of this present dispensation. The book closes with the return of Christ in all His glory, the overthrow of Gentile world power, the ushering in of the Messianic Kingdom (with both its heavenly and earthly spheres), and the beginning of the eternal ages which follow.

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#### **CONTENTS**

|       | FOREWORD  | VII |
|-------|---|-----|
|       | INTRODUCTION  | ix  |
| I.    | CONTINUING FROM THE GOSPELS   | 1   |
| II.   | RESTORATION OF THE KINGDOM  | 17  |
| III.  | RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS   | 31  |
| IV.   | ACCEPTANCE BY MANY  | 45  |
| V.    | REJECTION BY THE NATION   | 59  |
| VI.   | PAUL'S CONVERSION   | 73  |
| VII.  | PAUL'S IMMEDIATE MESSAGE  | 87  |
| VIII. | PAUL'S GOSPEL   | 101 |
| IX.   | LO, WE TURN TO THE GENTILES   | 115 |
| X.    | CENTRAL MESSAGE — THE PAULINE EPISTLES PAUL'S GOSPEL, NOT THE GOSPEL OF GRACE | 131 |
| XI.   | CENTRAL MESSAGE — THE GENERAL EPISTLES $$ THE SAVING OF THE SOUL, THE LIFE    | 145 |
| XII.  | FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME  | 159 |
| XIII. | THE GOAL — THE BOOK OF REVELATION THE GOAL REALIZED IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM  | 173 |
|       | SCRIPTURE INDEX   | 191 |

#### By the Same Author —

**RUTH ESTHER** BY FAITH RUN TO WIN LET US GO ON MOSES AND IOHN END OF THE DAYS IN THE LORD'S DAY DISTANT HOOFBEATS THE BRIDE IN GENESIS SO GREAT SALVATION SEARCH FOR THE BRIDE GOD'S FIRSTBORN SONS WE ARE ALMOST THERE SIGNS IN IOHN'S GOSPEL SALVATION OF THE SOUL HAD YE BELIEVED MOSES THE MOST HIGH RULETH THE SPIRITUAL WARFARE THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN COMING IN HIS KINGDOM MYSTERY OF THE WOMAN SEVEN, TEN GENERATIONS REDEEMED FOR A PURPOSE **JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST** THE RAPTURE AND BEYOND MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM PROPHECY ON MOUNT OLIVET NEVER AGAIN! OR YES, AGAIN! THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE BROUGHT FORTH FROM ABOVE ISRAEL — FROM DEATH TO LIFE IUDE — ACTS OF THE APOSTATES O SLEEPER! ARISE, CALL...! (JONAH) THE TIME OF THE END (REVELATION) MIDDLE EAST PEACE — HOW? WHEN? SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH MESSAGE IN THE GOSPELS, ACTS, EPISTLES ISRAEL — WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

#### **FOREWORD**

The New Testament can be divided into *four main sections*—the four gospels, the Book of Acts, the twenty-one epistles, and the Book of Revelation. Each section forms an integral part of the New Testament, and *ONLY through seeing the relationship of the different parts to the whole can the New Testament be properly understood.* 

Then, viewing matters surrounding the first five books beginning the New Testament from a more specific perspective, the Book of Acts, in a respect, forms *a fifth gospel*.

And Acts, in a sequential arrangement of these opening five books, should follow Luke's gospel, not John's gospel. Acts picks up exactly where Luke left off in his gospel — with Christ's post-resurrection ministry and His ascension, with Luke adding more details as he begins Acts.

And, effecting the preceding, John's gospel actually belongs at the beginning of the New Testament, followed by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts.

John's gospel, the only non-synoptic gospel, is the one gospel that not only begins exactly the same way Genesis begins but continues with the same subject matter as well.

Rearranging the gospels in this manner would allow each Testament to begin and progress from this beginning point exactly the same way.

(For more information on the preceding, refer to Chapter I, "Genesis and John," in the author's book, *Moses and John*.)

If the first five books in the New Testament were arranged in the preceding manner, one would not only have a Pentateuch beginning both Testaments but a parallel beginning for both and a much better transition from the Old Testament to the New and from the gospels through Acts into the epistles, allowing one to better understand the transitional progression of the offer of the kingdom of the heavens from Israel to Christians.

In the preceding respect, the New Testament is simply a continuation, unveiling, and outworking of that which was previously revealed in the Old Testament.

Accordingly, the New CANNOT be properly understood apart from the Old. The Old will help explain and shed additional light upon that which is being opened up in the New; and, in a corresponding respect, the New, as well, will help open up and explain numerous things in the Old.

The two Testaments are inseparably connected in this respect.

Scripture, beginning in Genesis and concluding in Revelation, forms a divinely revealed interrelated and interdependent, progressive unveiling of God's plans and purposes. And NO part of this revelation — however large or however small — can stand alone. The WHOLE of the revelation MUST stand together, as a unit.

Thus, beginning in the Book of Acts and continuing into the epistles and on into the Book of Revelation necessitates *continually* going back to the gospels, and behind that to various parts of the whole of the Old Testament.

Placing the Book of Acts within its contextual setting — in relation to both that which precedes and that which follows — is the ONLY possible way that it can be properly understood.

The Book of Acts records a continuation of events from the gospel accounts, occupying a place immediately following the four gospels on the one hand and a place leading into the twenty-one epistles on the other.

And this book provides that which man MUST know in order to properly understand the progression of God's plans and purposes as they move from the gospels into the epistles, reaching their climax in the Book of Revelation.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Book of Acts forms the God-provided bridge between the gospels and the epistles, apart from which the epistles CANNOT be properly understood.

The gospels center around an offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel (the kingdom offered to and rejected by Israel, with Christ then announcing that the kingdom would be *taken from Israel* and "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" [Matt. 21:43]; and this was followed by Israel's crucifixion of her King [Matt. 27:22ff]).

The Book of Acts centers around a re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel (beginning in chapter two [vv. 3ff] by the new entity [the "nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (I Peter 2:9, 10)] called into existence immediately prior to that time to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected [1:5; 2:1, 2]).

However, this re-offer (beginning in Acts 2 and continuing for about the next three decades [33 A.D. to about 62 A.D.], seen throughout the Book of Acts) was rejected as well, with the offer ultimately being completely taken from Israel and the nation set aside (Acts 28:28).

And *the epistles*, though some were written prior to 62 A.D., center around the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to an entirely new entity, *the one new man* "in Christ," called into existence to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected.

The expression, "the kingdom of the heavens" (literal rendering from the Greek text, found thirty-two times in Matthew's gospel), is simply a reference to *the rule of the heavens over the earth*.

As in Dan. 4:26, "the heavens do rule" — beginning with God, the supreme Ruler over all, and progressing through an orderly structure of ruling angels (subordinate provincial rulers, with other angels possessing lesser positions of power and authority ruling under them), placed over provinces throughout the universe.

Thus, there are *TWO* spheres of rulership in God's kingdom — heavenly and earthly. And this would pertain not only to God's universal kingdom as a whole but also to the various provinces in His kingdom.

This is simply the way in which God established the whole of His universal government in the beginning (e.g., Job 1:6ff; 2:1ff). He Himself rules from a place in the heavens over an ordered universe; and it is evident from the present form of the earth's government (existing in the same form which it will take yet future) that a rule of this nature — a rule from the heavens over the governed realm — is the form which God, in the beginning, used when He established the government throughout the different provinces of His kingdom as well.

As this governmental rule pertains to the province upon which we live, Satan and his angels rule from a place in the heavens over the earth; and this rule is revealed to take the form of *powers in the heavens ruling through powers on the earth* (Dan. 10:13-21; Luke 4:6; Eph. 2:2; 3:10; 6:12).

Again, "the heavens do rule." That's the way matters in God's ordered government throughout the universe which He created have always existed, continue to exist, and will always exist.

(Note that it was *the heavenly sphere* of the kingdom which was taken from Israel, *NOT the earthly* — the kingdom covenanted to David — *which can NEVER be taken from the nation.*)

## The Existing Kingdom Past, Present, and Future

Satan, in his unfallen state, at a time in eternity past, was placed over the province upon which man presently resides — over the earth (Ezek. 28:14, 15). And a great host of ruling angels were placed in subordinate positions of power and authority with him.

The day came though when Satan became dissatisfied with his appointed position and rebelled against God's supreme power and authority. He sought to "exalt" (elevate) his throne above all the other God-appointed provincial rulers (angels ruling over other provinces elsewhere in the universe [worlds similar to the earth]) and "be like the most High" (Isa. 14:13, 14).

Because of this act, rather than elevating his throne, Satan became disqualified to rule even the province over which he had been placed. And this necessitated his subsequent removal, with another being appointed to take his place.

But God didn't immediately act in this respect. Rather, God allowed Satan to continue holding his position, for a time.

(A principle of Biblical government necessitates that an incumbent ruler continue to hold his appointed position *UNTIL* his replacement is not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne and hold the sceptre — something, for example, seen in the account of Saul and David in the Books of I. Il Samuel:

Saul was anointed king over Israel; but Saul disqualified himself by refusing, as God had commanded, to destroy the Amalekites and all of their possessions [I Sam. 15:1ff], though Saul continued to reign. And Saul would continue to reign until the one whom God had chosen to replace him was not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne.

Then note that which the type, thus far, foreshadows:

Satan was anointed king over the earth; but Satan disqualified himself through seeking to extend his rule beyond his God-appointed position [Isa. 14:13, 14; Ezek. 28:14, 15], though Satan continued to reign. And Satan would continue to reign until the One Whom God had chosen to replace him was not only on the scene but ready to ascend the throne.

In the type, shortly after God rejected Saul as Israel's ruler, God had Samuel anoint David *king over Israel* [I Sam. 16:10-13]. There were then *two anointed kings in Israel*.

But David didn't immediately ascend the throne. Rather, he eventually found himself in a place out in the hills, separated from Saul and his kingdom. And, during this time, certain faithful men joined themselves to David and remained out in the hills with him.

The day came when David was ready to ascend the throne, possessing a contingent of faithful men ready to rule with him. Then, Saul was put down, his crown was taken and given to David, and David and his faithful men moved in and took over the government.

In the antitype, after God had rejected Satan as the earth's ruler, God anointed His Son *King over the earth* [Ps. 45:6, 7, 16; Heb. 1:8, 9].

There were then, and there are today, two anointed Kings over the earth. But God's Son, as David in the type, didn't immediately ascend the throne. Rather, as David, Christ finds Himself in a place of exile,

separated from the kingdom. And, as in David's case, certain faithful individuals join themselves to Christ during this time, remaining in the place of exile with Him.

But the day is near at hand when *matters will continue EXACTLY* as seen in the type. Christ, in that day, as David in his day, will be ready to ascend the throne, possessing a contingent of faithful followers to rule with Him. Then, Satan, as Saul, will be put down, his crown will be taken and given to Christ, and Christ, with His faithful followers, will move in and take over the government.)

Satan's reign though, following his rebellion against God's supreme power and authority, was quite different than it had been before that time. Two-thirds of the angels originally holding positions of power and authority over the earth with him refused to have a part in his actions. Only one-third followed Satan (Rev. 12:4), and this left him with a disrupted power structure in the government of his kingdom, completely out of line with that which God had originally established. And not only did a ruin of this nature exist in the governmental structure of his kingdom, but the physical state of his kingdom was reduced to a ruined condition as well (Gen. 1:2a).

But the day came when God restored the physical kingdom and created man to replace the incumbent ruler. The physical creation was restored over a six-day period, and man was created on the sixth day to "have dominion" — the dominion which Satan and his angels possessed (Gen. 1:2b-28).

Satan, knowing why man had been created, immediately sought a way to bring about man's disqualification. And this is what he accomplished through man's fall, an act which, for the time, prevented man from ascending the throne and allowed Satan to continue holding the sceptre.

Following man's fall, Satan and his angels ruled over a restored province, though under a curse because of man's sin (again ruined, though after a different fashion [Gen. 3:17, 18; *cf.* Rom. 8:19-22]). But God, far from being finished with man at this point, had only begun to work out His plans and purposes as they pertained to man and one ruined province in His kingdom.

Redemption was to be provided in order that man, at a future point

in time, could realize the purpose for his creation in the beginning. Man, a creation quite different than angels, created in the image and likeness of God, was to be redeemed; and, as God originally intended, man was to one day hold the sceptre in Satan's stead (*cf.* Heb. 2:5).

The Bible is a book of *redemption*, and this redemption encompasses far more than just man's eternal salvation wrought through faith in God's provided Redeemer. It encompasses bringing redeemed man back into the position for which he was created. The purpose surrounding man's redemption is the same as the purpose surrounding man's creation in the beginning — "let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26-28).

And from the point of the fall in Genesis chapter three to the point of this dominion being realized by man in Revelation chapter twenty, ALL of God's redemptive purposes in Scripture are seen to move toward this end. ALL are seen to move toward man one day possessing dominion over the earth, in the stead of Satan and his angels.

The "gifts and calling of God are without repentance ['without a change of mind']" (Rom. 11:29). God is *NOT* going to change His mind concerning the reason He called man into existence. *Man WILL, man MUST, one day hold the sceptre, BUT in God's time.* 

In the meantime, Satan and his angels continue to occupy the throne, continuing to rule from a place in the heavens over the earth.

But the day is coming when there will be "war in heaven." Michael and his angels will fight against Satan and his angels, and Satan and his angels will be "cast out," anticipating *Man* — namely *Christ and His co-heirs* — taking the kingdom and occupying these positions, exercising power and authority over the earth (Rev. 12:4, 7-10; *cf.* Rev. 2:26, 27; 11:15; 19:11-20:6).

## The Proffered Kingdom In the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles

When John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples appeared to Israel with the message, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand" (cf. Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7), there could have been NO mistake concerning exactly what was meant. There was NO kingdom connected with the heavens and the earth outside of the one which God had established in the beginning, the one over which a disqualified provincial angel ruled.

The expression, "the kingdom of the heavens," could ONLY be a reference to the kingdom ruled by Satan and his angels from a heavenly sphere, a kingdom to one day be ruled by Christ and His co-heirs from the same heavenly sphere.

And the various things about this kingdom are things which the Jewish people *should have been fully aware of*, for the structure of the kingdom as it exists throughout Man's Day and will exist at a future time is *a clearly revealed subject of Old Testament revelation*.

This subject was introduced by Moses in Genesis. Moses spoke of that day when the seed of Abraham would exercise power and authority over the earth from two spheres — heavenly and earthly (Gen. 22:17, 18); and this power and authority, according to Moses, would be realized in that future day when God's Son exercises the Melchizedek priesthood (Gen. 14:18-22; cf. Ps. 110:1-4; Heb. 5-7).

And, as previously shown, the form in which this kingdom exists throughout Man's Day (and will exist in that coming day when Christ and His co-heirs take the kingdom) is revealed in Daniel chapter ten (vv. 13-21).

Through the ministry of John, Jesus, the Twelve, and the Seventy, "the kingdom of the heavens" was proffered to Israel. Through the ministry of these individuals, the nation of Israel was offered the sceptre held by Satan and his angels.

Had Israel accepted the offer, Christ would have taken the kingdom; and Israel, with the nation's Messiah, would have held the sceptre.

But Israel refused the offer, and the nation climaxed this refusal by crucifying the central person making the offer — Messiah Himself.

Then, the Book of Acts details a re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel — beginning on the day of Pentecost (2:3ff) and terminating about thirty years later with Paul in Rome (28:28).

Israel though again refused, and during this period God began His work of forming the one new man "in Christ," with those called out of this new man to one day occupy the heavenly positions in the kingdom which Israel had spurned.

And once Israel's refusal in the re-offer of the kingdom reached a terminal point in God's eyes, He set the nation aside and, with respect to the kingdom of the heavens, turned His attention completely toward the new entity, *the new creation* "in Christ."

(The re-offer of the kingdom to Israel could continue *ONLY* as long as a saved generation of Jews remained on the scene [the generation alive on both sides of Calvary].

Thus, once this generation of Jews began to pass off the scene, the re-offer of the kingdom *could NO longer continue*.

The re-offer of the kingdom, in this respect, continued from 33 A.D. until about 62 A.D. Then, the re-offer, of necessity, ended.)

This complete, overall picture of the offer of the kingdom of the heavens — whether to Israel (the offer and the re-offer), or to *the one new man* "in Christ" — is how the gospels lead into Acts and how Acts leads into the epistles, with Acts forming a bridge between the gospels and the epistles.

As stated at the beginning, the gospels record the original offer of this kingdom to Israel, the Book of Acts records the re-offer of this kingdom to Israel (as well as recording the inception of and a beginning offer of the kingdom to the Church), and the epistles record the continued offer (present offer) extended to Christians.

All these things are dealt with at length throughout the thirteen chapters of this book, *From Acts to the Epistles*.

## Importance of the Kingdom Understanding the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles

There can be no such thing as properly understanding the gospels, Acts, or the epistles apart from "the kingdom" being seen as *central*.

Christ's death on Calvary, effecting man's redemption, has to do with *the kingdom*. Christ Himself, while enduring the sufferings surrounding Calvary, looked beyond these sufferings to the glory which lay out ahead (Heb. 12:1, 2; *cf.* Luke 24:26).

The coming kingdom, the Messianic Era, the time during which Christ and His co-heirs will exercise power and authority over the earth for 1,000 years, was that upon which Christ focused His attention while paying the price for man's redemption. And it is *this same kingdom* upon which He has instructed redeemed man — in the midst of trials, testings, and sufferings — to focus his attention as well (I Peter 2:21; *cf.* Gen. 19:17).

Man's redemption is inseparably connected with the coming king-

dom of Christ. And though man's redemption is *eternal* in duration and connected with *a continuing regality* in the eternal ages beyond the Messianic era, *this is not where Scripture places the emphasis*. The central focus in Scripture pertaining to man's present redemption and future rule *centers on the 1,000-year Messianic Era*.

(Regality exercised by man beyond the Messianic Era will extend out into the heavens beyond the new earth [Rev. 22:1-5]. This is a realm extending far beyond the present kingdom of the heavens, out where Satan sought to extend his rule at a time in eternity past.

Scripture though centers around *man*, the present earth, and the present kingdom. Scripture centers around man occupying this present kingdom of the heavens ruled by Satan and his angels, with Christ and His co-heirs taking 1,000 years to bring order out of disorder [I Cor. 15:22-28].

The eternal ages lying beyond are mentioned in Scripture only to an extent which will allow man to understand where God is going to carry matters once order has been restored in the government of one ruined province in His universe.)

Thus, the central purpose presented in Scripture surrounding man's redemption is that man might ultimately occupy the position for which he was created — to rule and to reign over this earth.

This is something which cannot be overemphasized. And to speak of man's redemption apart from the purpose surrounding man's creation, which resulted in his fall, necessitating his redemption, is to NOT see the complete Biblical scope of redemption at all.

This is the perspective from which this book, *From Acts to the Epistles*, has been written. The focus in the book is kept *EXACTLY where it is seen moving throughout the whole of Scripture — out ahead on that coming Sabbath rest awaiting the people of God, the coming Messianic Era.* And viewing matters in the gospels, in Acts, and on into the epistles from a Scriptural framework of this nature is *the ONLY possible way that they can be properly understood*.

Interpretation must be both *textual* and *contextual*, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual." This is *the ONLY way* that a person can go beyond "man's wisdom," see that "which the Holy Spirit teacheth," and, resultingly, come into an understanding of "the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:9-13).

### 1

#### Continuing from the Gospels

Message in the Gospels, Continued in Acts

"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6b).

Prior to His death, burial, and resurrection, Christ and His disciples carried a message to Israel pertaining to "the kingdom of the heavens."

Then, during the forty days of His post-resurrection ministry, Christ spoke to His disciples of "things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Matt. 4:17-25; 10:5-8; Acts 1:3).

And, in keeping with the same subject matter, immediately before His ascension, Christ spoke to them of *the coming baptism in the Holy Spirit and the Spirit empowering them for the task at hand* (Acts 1:4, 5, 8; *cf.* Matt. 3:11).

Christ spoke to His disciples after this manner at the climax of His earthly ministry; and since the Spirit performing a work after the fashion to which Christ referred is inseparably connected with *Israel* and *the kingdom* (Acts 2:2-4ff; *cf.* Joel 2:27-32; Acts 2:14-21), the question which the disciples asked *could ONLY have been expected of them:* "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6b).

The message concerning *the kingdom* was the subject pervading every thought in the disciples' minds at this time. And, for a number of years following Pentecost, in relation to Israel, the message proclaimed had to do with *the kingdom*, as before. The message proclaimed to Israel during this time was a continuation of the message previously proclaimed by Christ and His disciples. It was *a re-offer* of that which had previously been offered — *the kingdom of the heavens*.

The same individuals Christ had previously sent to Israel *continued* to carry a message to Israel pertaining to the kingdom, attended by the same supernatural signs, wonders, and miracles.

There were though *two main differences* in the original offer and the re-offer.

Rather than accusing Israel of rejecting and killing only the prophets which God had sent unto them, to reveal to them "the coming of the Just One" (Matt. 23:34-37), the messengers now accused Israel, as well, of rejecting and crucifying the One spoken of by the Prophets, Messiah Himself (*cf.* Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:28-30; 7:51-53).

Then, the other main difference lay in the fact that the kingdom had been taken from Israel at the conclusion of the original offer, and the Church had been called into existence to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected (*cf.* Matt. 21:43; I Peter 2:9-11).

Thus, in the re-offer, it was the infant Church — entirely Jewish for the first few years of its existence — which was in possession of the kingdom (though yet to be realized). And God used those in the Church, along with believing Jews from the nation, to reach Israel with a message concerning something which no longer belonged to Israel.

In the gospel accounts, Israel was the rightful possessor of the kingdom of the heavens (though, again, yet to be realized). Israel had been made the repository for both spheres of the kingdom (heavenly and earthly), something which went all the way back to promises given to Abraham (*e.g.*, Gen. 22:17, 18; *cf.* Gen. 14:17-22; Heb. 11:8-16).

Thus, preceding the events of Calvary, Israel was offered something rightfully belonging to the nation; and the kingdom could have been established at that time, conditioned upon Israel's national repentance and baptism.

But in the Book of Acts, *Israel was no longer the rightful possessor* of the kingdom.

A new entity — the "one new man" in Christ — had been called into existence to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected. And in the re-offer of the kingdom, it was this new entity (along with believing Jews from the nation) which proclaimed the message to Israel, for those forming this new entity were now the rightful possessors of the kingdom.

#### The Re-offer of the Kingdom

This re-offer of the kingdom to Israel is something which Christ had foretold during His earthly ministry, during the original offer. Note the parable of the fruitless fig tree in Luke 13:6-9:

"He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

The picture is that of fruit being sought from the fig tree (Israel) at two different times, which would correspond to times both *before* and *after* the events of Calvary and the calling into existence of the Church. And, though Christ cursed the fig tree following the nation's failure to bring forth fruit preceding Calvary, the roots remained. This allowed the Vinedresser to "dig about it, and dung it [*i.e.*, 'fertilize it']," giving the fig tree another opportunity to spring forth and bear fruit.

And it mattered not that Israel (through the nation's religious leaders) had previously committed a sin which would not be forgiven the nation for two ages (Matt. 12:22-32), or that Christ had previously pronounced that the fig tree would remain fruitless for an age (Matt. 21:19), there was still a cultivating and a fertilizing of the fig tree following the events surrounding Calvary and the calling into existence of the Church.

And, though Israel and those proclaiming the message were living during the age in which *Israel couldn't bear fruit*, the cultivating and fertilizing of the fig tree were done with a view to Israel bearing fruit (though, again, *Israel couldn't bear fruit during this time*).

Some students of the Word studying the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel in the Book of Acts would see major problems in this whole line of thought, for Israel *couldn't possibly have accepted the re-offer*.

And, since that was/is correct, *HOW* could a bona fide re-offer of the kingdom have been made?

The kingdom had been taken from Israel, and the "one new man" *in Christ* had been called into existence to bring forth fruit in the realm where Israel had failed. And God *MUST* carry out and complete His work with this new creation, which would take 2,000 years, completing man's 6,000-year day — time which *MUST* transpire before the

kingdom could be restored to Israel.

Thus, since this was the situation at that time, again the question: *HOW* could a bona fide re-offer of the kingdom have been made to Israel? It would have been *impossible* for Israel to accept (*cf.* Matt. 19:26).

Bear one thing in mind, and the seeming dilemma can be easily resolved. *EXACTLY the same situation existed in the previous offer. Israel, in actuality, couldn't have accepted then either.* It would have been *just as impossible* then as later. Both *the events surrounding Calvary* and *the existence of the Church,* were dealt with in the Old Testament (mainly in the types); and *ALL the things which had previously been stated concerning both had to be brought to pass.* 

That would be to say, to fulfill Old Testament prophecy (numerous prophecies), not only *MUST* the Passover Lamb be slain, but the Church *MUST* be called into existence. And *ONLY Israel could slay the Passover Lamb* (Ex. 12), which meant *rejection of both the King and the kingdom on Israel's part in order for the numerous Old Testament prophecies to come to pass.* 

Thus, when all of this is put together, there is only *one possible conclusion* which can be reached:

Israel had to reject the offer of the kingdom of the heavens at Christ's first coming, for Messiah had to be rejected and slain by Israel, and the Church had to subsequently be called into existence.

ALL of this had already been foretold by Moses and the prophets, and matters had to come to pass EXACTLY as recorded in God's previous revelation to man.

And, in this respect, even though the kingdom had been taken from Israel in Matt. 21:43, there was really *NOTHING* to prevent a re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel following the events of Calvary and the calling into existence of the Church (which did not exist when the kingdom was offered to Israel the first time).

Both the events surrounding Calvary and the calling into existence of the Church could be seen in one respect before Christ's first coming and in other respects during His earthly ministry and shortly after His ascension; and an offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel at any time during this period would, of necessity, have been *EXACTLY* the

same — a bona fide offer which COULDN'T possibly have been accepted.

#### Signs, Wonders, and Miracles

A major thing which has to be taken into consideration — the thing which will possibly shed more light on the whole of the matter than anything else—is properly understanding the place which signs, wonders, and miracles occupy throughout both the original offer and the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel.

Signs, wonders, and miracles have to do with two things:

- 1) Israel.
- The kingdom.

And both Israel and the kingdom MUST be in view at the same time for signs, wonders and miracles to exist. If there is an absence of either one (either Israel, or the kingdom), signs, wonders, and miracles, as seen throughout the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts, CANNOT exist.

1) Signs, Wonders, and Miracles in the Old Testament Signs, wonders, and miracles, performed through individuals, were manifested ONLY on two occasions in all of the Old Testament.

They were manifested by Moses and Aaron surrounding Israel's deliverance from Egypt, with a view to the nation's entrance into the land of Canaan; and they were manifested by Moses' successor, Joshua, surrounding Israel's subsequent entrance into the land of Canaan (Ex. 4:29-31; 7:10ff; Joshua 3:7ff; 10:12-14).

That was the first occasion.

The second was a manifestation by Elijah and his successor Elisha, some five hundred years later (I Kings 17:1ff; II Kings 2:13ff).

Outside of these two occasions there is NOT a single reference to an individual being empowered to perform signs, wonders, and miracles throughout all of the Old Testament Scriptures. Numerous miracles are recorded in these Scriptures (e.g., the burning bush which was not consumed [Ex. 3:2], the sun being moved back ten degrees on the dial [Isa. 38:7, 8], the three Israelites being protected in the fiery furnace [Dan. 3:19-25], or Jonah being raised from the dead [Jonah 1:17-2:10]),

but these were miraculous works performed *directly by God,* not by individuals whom God had empowered to perform them.

Note that the manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles during the days of Moses, Aaron, and Joshua was in relation to *Israel* and *the kingdom*. Supernatural manifestations of power occurred relative to Israel being removed from Egypt and being established in the land of Canaan, within a theocracy.

Thus, a first-mention principle was set forth at this point in Scripture, establishing an unchangeable truth. Any time there is a mention of signs, wonders, and miracles being performed by individuals beyond this point, both Israel and the kingdom MUST be in view.

The theocracy reached its greatest heights during the days of David and his son Solomon, though far from that which could have occurred (and one day will occur) through obedience.

But after Solomon's day, with the division of the kingdom, things began to go in another direction entirely. And it was during these days that Elijah was called forth (with Elisha finishing his ministry) to call the nation to repentance.

During the days of Elijah and Elisha the people of Israel had been established in the land, within a theocracy, for about five hundred years (though now a divided kingdom). And because of continued disobedience on the part of the people, the theocracy never came close to reaching the heights which God had intended.

The manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles accompanying the ministry of Elijah and Elisha pertained to *Israel* and *the kingdom*. They had to, for a first-mention principle had previously been established; and any future manifestation had to be *EXACTLY in accord with the way matters were set forth at the beginning*.

The signs, wonders, and miracles were simply *the credentials* of those manifesting them in Israel's presence. Through a manifestation of supernatural powers accompanying the message, Israel was to recognize that the message had been sent from God; and the people were to heed the message accordingly (Ex. 4:1-9, 29-31).

The people of Israel though failed to heed the message; the nation didn't repent. And the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities followed (about 722 B.C. [northern kingdom] and 605 B.C. [southern kingdom]).

"The times of the Gentiles" began with the Babylonian captivity,

has lasted to the present day, and will last until the end of the Tribulation. This is simply a prolonged, uninterrupted period of time — lasting about 2,600 years — *during which Israel MUST dwell apart from a theocracy and remain scattered among the Gentile nations*.

And the Gentiles, among whom Israel dwells, will hold the sceptre throughout this time.

#### 2) Signs, Wonders, and Miracles in the New Testament

After moving through 1,500 years of Jewish history and seeing signs, wonders, and miracles manifested during only two occasions within that history, things suddenly changed. Israel's Messiah (in conjunction with and following the ministry of His forerunner, John the Baptist) appeared with a message concerning the kingdom of the heavens; and this message was accompanied by an unprecedented display of signs, wonders, and miracles (Matt. 4:17-25; 8:1ff; John 3:22ff).

Then, in conjunction with and very early in His ministry, Christ called twelve disciples to help carry this message; and they were empowered to perform signs, wonders, and miracles in connection with their ministry as well (Matt. 10:5-8).

(Also, Jesus later "appointed" seventy others to go "before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come" — though very little is said about them in the gospel accounts — and *He empowered them to perform signs, wonders, and miracles* [Luke 10:1-19].

Thus, at this time, there was a manifestation of supernatural signs in the camp of Israel unlike ANYTHING heretofore seen in the history of the nation.)

Christ had been sent *ONLY* to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), and *Christ sent the disciples whom He had called to Israel ALONE* (Matt. 10:6). Both Christ and His disciples went to Israel with the SAME message and the SAME accompanying manifestation of supernatural powers.

It was a message pertaining to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to the nation, attended by a manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles.

Whether it was Jesus or His disciples proclaiming the proffered kingdom, signs, wonders, and miracles accompanied their ministry and formed the credentials of those carrying the message. These were supernatural events which authenticated their message as being true and from God (John 3:1, 2; Acts 2:22; *cf.* Ex. 4:1-9). The religious lead-

ers in Israel were to see these signs, wonders, and miracles and know, from these, that the messengers were God-sent. Then, believing and understanding the message which they had heard, they were responsible for carrying it to the people of Israel (*cf.* Ex. 4:29-31; Num. 13:1-26).

However, EXACTLY the opposite occurred when the message was proclaimed by Christ and His disciples. The religious leaders not only refused to believe the message, but they, in their unbelief, carried a false message to the people of Israel (Matt. 12:14-32; 23:13).

(This is why Christ, near the end of His earthly ministry, condemned the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees — the fundamental religious leaders of that day — in no uncertain terms [Matt. 23:1ff]. They had HEARD the true message, and they had SEEN the accompanying miraculous powers, authenticating the message; but they had REJECTED the message and had SOUGHT to do away with the accompanying supernatural powers, mainly through attacking the Messenger.

The Scribes and Pharisees had sought to discredit the Messenger in the eyes of the people, bringing about reproach on the Messenger and casting doubt on His message [e.g., Matt. 9:27-34; 12:22-24; cf. John 12:10, 11]. And, whether by word or deed, this resulted in their bearing a false message to the people of Israel [Matt. 23:13].)

And all of this had its end result in Israel's *rejection* of not only the message but the Messenger as well, *the removal* of the kingdom of the heavens from Israel, *the crucifixion* of Israel's Messiah, and *the bringing into existence* of a separate and distinct entity to be the recipient of that which had been offered to and rejected by Israel. Israel had failed to bring forth fruit in relation to the kingdom of the heavens, and the "one new man" *in Christ* was called into existence to be accorded the opportunity to bring forth fruit in this realm (Matt. 21:33-43).

But, though the kingdom had been taken from Israel and the Church had been called into existence to be the recipient of this offer, there was a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel. And, if for no other reason, this is evident because of the continuance of signs, wonders, and miracles.

That would be to say, if God had terminated His dealings with Israel at or before the time that the Church was called into existence, signs, wonders, and miracles would have ceased to exist. These supernatural works had NOTHING to do with the "one new man" in Christ (who

was/is "neither Jew nor Greek" [Gal. 3:28]). They had to do with *Israel alone* (I Cor. 1:22), and they had to do with *Israel in relation to the kingdom*.

These supernatural works were manifested by those carrying the message to Israel (Acts 2:4; 3:1ff; 4:29-33; 5:12ff; 6:8ff); and when Gentiles began to be added to the body of Christ, they were manifested in at least one Church comprised of saved Gentiles — the Church in Corinth (along with possibly other Churches [I Cor. 12-14]).

And a manifestation of supernatural works in the Church after this fashion was centered around the thought of *provoking Israel* "to jealousy" (Rom. 10:19; 11:11, 14). That is, God was using those whom Israel considered *Gentile dogs* to manifest supernatural powers which naturally belonged to Israel *in order to provoke the nation to jealousy.* 

And, between a segment of the "one new man" in Christ carrying the message to Israel and another segment seeking to provoke the nation to jealousy — all being done through a manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles — the Jewish people were dealt with in what might be considered a MAXIMUM manner.

In one respect, God pulled out ALL of the stops (cf. Luke 10:13-24; 11:29-32); but the religious leaders in Israel would still have NOTHING to do with the message.

#### Pentecost and the Re-offer of the Kingdom

The true nature of the events which occurred on the day of Pentecost, as recorded in the first two chapters of the Book of Acts — when the re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel began — is generally not understood in Christendom today at all. And because of this, among other things, whole denominations have been built on a misunderstanding of these chapters.

Then, this misunderstanding has resulted in related problems. That which occurred in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost (vv. 1-13), followed by Peter's explanation of matters (vv. 14-36), is seen coming to a climax in verses 37, 38. And cult groups, not understanding the things revealed in this chapter at all, have isolated and singled out Acts 2:38 as revealing the way in which a person is to be saved.

And numerous individuals, to counter the teaching of the cults on this verse, though not understanding the context either, have taught

things concerning Acts 2:38 which are equally erroneous.

And, if either the Christian groups or the cult groups *rightly understood that which is stated in the verses leading into Acts* 2:38, the whole matter wouldn't even exist. Neither would act so completely out of line with Scripture.

In this respect, the matter really doesn't revolve around what Acts 2:38 states per se. Rather, the matter revolves around what is stated in the verses leading into Acts 2:38.

Understand the contextual verses first; then the text can be properly understood. But, attempt to isolate a verse such as Acts 2:38 from its context, and an individual can only find himself in exactly the same place that so many find themselves today — committing mayhem with Scripture and involved in cultic teachings.

Correct Scriptural interpretation and understanding is really that simple. Note the EXACT wording of the text, READ and UNDERSTAND the context, and COMPARE Scripture with Scripture (I Cor. 2:9-13).

On the day of Pentecost, 33 A.D., one hundred twenty believers were waiting in a house in Jerusalem for the Spirit which Jesus had, ten days prior to that time, promised. They were "all with one accord in one place," *waiting* (Acts 1:15; 2:1).

(Note the significance of the number *one hundred twenty* [10X12], particularly contextually. "Ten" is the number of *numerical completeness*, and "twelve" is the number of *governmental perfection*.

Christ has just spent "forty" post-resurrection days instructing His disciples in things pertaining to "the kingdom of God" [Acts 1:3]. Now, ten days later [again, completeness shown in both the numbers "forty" and "ten"], something very significant in relation to the kingdom previously proclaimed was about to occur [events on the day of Pentecost].)

Then, "when the day of Pentecost was *fully come*," just as the Lord had previously promised (though not having specified the particular day), the one hundred twenty were all "immersed in the Holy Spirit" (literal rendering of the promise in Acts 1:5 [*cf.* Matt. 3:11, *lit.*, immersion "in water," "in Holy Spirit," "in fire"]):

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing

mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:2-4).

As seen, the promise concerning the Spirit being sent in Acts 1:5 had to do with an *immersion in the Spirit;* and that promise was fulfilled in Acts 2:2 (the house *filled*, those inside *immersed*). Then these disciples were also correspondingly *filled with the Spirit* (v. 4). And the latter can be seen occurring at subsequent times in other parts of the Book of Acts as well (*e.g.*, 10:45; 11:15, 16; *cf.* 9:17, 18; 13:9).

A two-fold experience of the nature seen in Acts 2:2-4 though *has NO PARALLEL in Christendom today*.

When an individual is saved by grace through faith today, the norm is *ALWAYS the same*. "Immersion" in the Spirit *ALWAYS* occurs at the point of salvation (I Cor. 12:13), and "a filling" with the Spirit is *ALWAYS* a subsequent experience, progressively occurring over time (having to do with maturity in the faith, wrought through an assimilation of the Word [cf. Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16, 17]).

(Note that neither *immersion in the Spirit*, occurring at the time of one's salvation, nor the subsequent *filling with the Spirit* can have anything to do with one's salvation experience per se. If either had to do with one's salvation, then salvation could only be seen occurring different ways in different dispensations, for, throughout the three dispensations during Man's Day — Gentile, Jewish, Christian — immersion in the Spirit is something peculiar to the present [Christian] dispensation.

The means which God uses to restore ruined man were set in the opening chapters of Genesis and can NEVER change. Thus, to see either the immersion in the Spirit or a filling with the Spirit having to do with one's presently possessed salvation today is an impossibility.

The immersion in the Spirit has to do with *the new creation* "in Christ," [cf. II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-29], which, again, *has nothing to do with one's presently possessed salvation*; and the filling with the Spirit, having to do with dwelling in the Word — an eating of His flesh and a drinking of His blood [cf. John 6:53-56; Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16, 17] — has to do with something subsequent to the immersion in the Spirit, with the continuing process of salvation, the salvation of the soul.

And, though one's eternal salvation always remains in view, the central subject in the whole of the matter, as seen in Scripture, is ALWAYS upon the continuing part of salvation, which has to do with the coming kingdom of Christ, with realizing or not realizing an inheritance in this kingdom.)

Thus, the immersion in the Spirit and the filling with the Spirit *NEVER occur at the same time today,* as in the first two chapters of Acts and several other parts of the book. And there is *a clearly revealed reason* why these differences exist in Scripture.

In short, one experience (a filling with the Spirit, as seen in Acts. 2) is seen *ONLY DURING the time when the kingdom was being re-offered to Israel* (especially during the early years), and the other (an immersion in the Spirit) is seen *DURING this time as well but CONTINUING FOLLOWING this time*.

The emphasis in Acts chapter two is on *Israel and the kingdom, NOT on the Church.* Though the Church was brought into existence on this day as the entity in possession of the kingdom of the heavens and the entity through which God would extend a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, *events throughout Acts chapter two are essentially Jewish, NOT Christian.* 

Acts chapter two records the beginning of a re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, an offer connected with Joel's prophecy (vv. 16-21), and an offer attended by signs, wonders, and miracles (vv. 6-13, 43).

And the immersion in and the filling with the Spirit which were brought to pass on this day had to do with two things:

- 1) The beginning of the Church (an immersion in the Spirit).
- 2) A beginning fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (a filling with the Spirit).

A filling with the Spirit *in connection with Joel's prophecy*—something experienced by individuals on the day of Pentecost and at subsequent times during the period when the kingdom was being re-offered to Israel (from 33 A.D. to about 62 A.D.) — *CANNOT be the norm for any type Christian experience today, for Joel's prophecy is NOT presently being fulfilled.* 

The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy has been set aside until such a time as God once again resumes His dealings with Israel.

#### 1) Two Explanatory Greek Words

Though Christians experience an immersion in and a filling with the Spirit throughout the present dispensation, there are marked differences

when these experiences are viewed in the light of a beginning fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in Acts chapter two. The latter is something which the Spirit of God deals with in the New Testament through the use of two different Greek words for "fill."

#### a) Pimplemi

The word in the Greek text for *fill* in Acts 2:4 is not the same as the word for *fill* in Eph. 5:18 (for Christians today). The word used in Acts 2:4 is *pimplemi* (*pletho* [a different rendering of the same word] in some lexicons or concordances), and the word used in Eph. 5:18 is *pleroo*. Both words mean "to fill"; but there is a contextual difference in how the words are used, seen in *the purpose* in view.

*Pimplemi* in Acts 2:4 is used in a manner which refers to individuals being filled with the Spirit in view of *an end to* or *a conclusion of* something being attained. This is the word, for example, which is used referring to Elizabeth being brought to full-term in her pregnancy, prior to the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57). And, in conjunction with this thought, it is also the word used of John the Baptist being "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15).

John was the forerunner of the Messiah. He was the one who *initally* appeared to Israel with the message, "Repent ye [a plural pronoun, *the entire nation*], for the kingdom of the heavens is *at hand*" (Matt. 3:2). And note the terminal point — *the kingdom was AT HAND*. And John was *filled with the Spirit, from his mother's womb, to proclaim this fact as he went forth preparing the way for the Messiah*.

This word is used *five times* in the Book of Acts referring to individuals being filled with the Spirit (2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9).

The first occurrence has to do with events on the day of Pentecost; the second occurrence has to do with Peter addressing the Sanhedrin; the third occurrence has to do with individuals collectively (as on the day of Pentecost); and the fourth and fifth occurrences have to do with Paul, following his conversion on the Damascus road.

In the first three occurrences, where a filling with the Spirit is referred to by the word pimplemi, a message to the Jews is in view; and that message is accompanied by signs, wonders, and miracles (2:43; 4:14-16).

That is, a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel is in view, accompanied by miraculous signs.

And the same thing is seen *in the fourth and fifth occurrences* of the word, following Paul being introduced in the book.

When Israel had reached a climactic point in the nation's rejection of the kingdom in Acts 7:54ff (similar to the climactic point which the nation reached in the original offer [Matt. 12:22ff]), Paul appears in the book for the first time (Acts 7:58), the Samaritans from Acts 1:8 appear in the book for the first time (Acts 8:5), and Paul was subsequently set apart as the apostle who would carry the message concerning the proffered kingdom to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-15).

Note the order for the proclamation of this message as originally given to the disciples in Acts 1:8:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Paul was the one called to carry this message to the latter group (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:7). And the word *pimplemi* is used of Paul being filled with the Spirit for power, to carry this message, simply because the offer of the kingdom was still open to Israel (with the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy still being in view); and the offer would remain open for over two more decades.

The fact that the offer was still open to Israel was the reason Paul *ALWAYS* went "to the Jew first" before turning to the Gentiles, though he was the apostle called to go to the Gentiles.

The order in Rom. 1:16, in accord with Acts 1:8, was "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek [Gentile]" (cf. Rom. 2:9, 10); and Paul DIDN'T, he COULDN'T, violate this order (note that the Book of Romans was written very near the end, though within the approximate-thirty-year period in which the kingdom of the heavens was re-offered to Israel).

#### b) Pleroo

The word *Pleroo* though, used for being filled with the Spirit in Eph. 5:18, is used in a different manner. Both *pleroo* and *pimplemi* mean "to fill"; and both words can be used referring to an end or to the fulfillment of something, such as "time," etc. (*e.g.*, Acts 7:23, 30); but the use of *pleroo* in Eph. 5:18 is not connected with Joel's prophecy. The Holy Spirit previously used *pimplemi* for that purpose, at a time

when the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy was in view.

(Note that the Holy Spirit was very careful in His use of words in Acts 2:2-4.

The word used for "fill" in verse two is *pleroo*, referring to the house where the one hundred twenty disciples were waiting, *being filled* by "a rushing mighty wind"; but the Spirit of God changed words when He wanted to reveal that those inside that house had been "filled" with the Spirit in verse four.

Here He used *pimplemi*, and He continued to use *pimplemi* for this purpose [or a cognate, *pleres* (6:3, 5, 8; 7:55; 11:24)] in other parts of the Book of Acts.)

Joel's prophecy either being fulfilled or not being fulfilled is the key. The Spirit used pimplemi to describe His filling work IN CONNECTION WITH the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy; and the Spirit later used pleroo to describe His filling work APART FROM the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

This is *the distinguishing difference* which marks the way that the two words are used in Scripture.

#### 2) The Scene in Jerusalem, 33 A.D.

On the day of Pentecost in 33 A.D. there were Jews gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven. Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, states that it was not uncommon to have as many as 2,000,000 Jews in Jerusalem on this day.

The day of Pentecost was one of three annual feast days (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) which adult Jewish males were required to keep *in Jerusalem* (Deut. 16:1-16), and some had to travel great distances to get to Jerusalem in order to keep these feasts. Consequently, it was only natural that many Jews who came for the feast of Passover would remain in Jerusalem until the feast of Pentecost, slightly over fifty days later.

Thus, the Spirit was sent on a particular day — the day of Pentecost, effecting a beginning fulfillment of this festival — when numerous Jews from "every nation under heaven" were in Jerusalem; and those filled (*pimplemi*) with the Spirit (the one hundred twenty) were empowered to proclaim a message concerning the kingdom to these Jews, in all the various languages of their native countries. And these

Jews, having heard the message, were, in turn, evidently expected to carry this message back to other Jews in the countries from which they had come.

This was the beginning of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, a ministry which would last for about thirty years (until about 62 A.D.).

Then, as previously stated, all of this was inseparably connected with a beginning fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (vv. 15-21). And immediately afterward, Peter delivered a message to Israel, which, after different fashions, became quite common in the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel (vv. 22-36; *cf.* 3:12-26; 4:5-12; 5:12-16, 29-32; 6:8-7:53). And that which the religious leaders and all the others in Israel were accordingly confronted with is also something which became quite common in this re-offer of the kingdom (vv. 37-41; *cf.* 4:1-4, 13-22; 5:17-28, 33-42; 7:54-60).

The religious leaders in Acts 2, confronted with what they had done, asked:

"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (v. 37).

And Peter told them exactly what they must do:

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you [national repentance and baptism]..." (v. 38; *cf.* Matt. 3:1ff).

Only through this means could the wrong be corrected (the Jewish people, having previously rejected the message and crucified the Messenger, *now* being called upon to change their minds [vv. 22, 23, 36-38a]); only through this means could the Jewish people receive "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38b; *cf.* vv. 4, 16-21; Acts 10:45; 11:15, 16), which had to do with Joel's prophecy and a filling with the Spirit in connection with the Greek word pimplemi.

And only after the Jewish people had done this would Messiah return and dwell in Israel's midst, resulting in a continued and complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy — the entire Jewish nation filled with the Spirit, speaking other languages in a bold manner, enabling them to go forth to the Gentile nations of the earth with God's message (Joel 2:27-32; Acts 3:19-21; 7:51-56).

### 2

#### Restoration of the Kingdom

The Kingdom, the Commission, Israel and the Nations

"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6b).

The post-resurrection ministry of Christ in the Book of Acts is covered in the first nine verses, and these verses not only set the tone for the remainder of the book but they are fraught with significance and meaning. There is one central theme running through these opening verses — the kingdom of God (v. 3).

Understand how the book opens, continuing from the gospels, and you can understand the Book of Acts; BUT, misunderstand how the book opens, and the inverse of that will be equally true.

The importance of properly understanding the Book of Acts lies in the fact that this book forms the God-provided bridge between the gospels and the epistles. In the gospels, the kingdom of the heavens was offered to, rejected by, and taken from Israel. Then, in the epistles, the kingdom of the heavens is seen being offered to the "one new man," in Christ, during an entirely separate and distinct dispensation. And Acts is the book which carries a person from one point to the other, providing information, apart from which the existing relationship between the gospels and the epistles cannot be properly seen and understood.

The central theme of the gospels (introduced in the Old Testament) has to do with an offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, ending with Israel's rejection of the King and the kingdom, resulting in the King being crucified.

The central theme of Acts (introduced in the gospels) has to do with the inception of the Church (a new creation, one new man "in Christ" [II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:11-15]), a re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel by those comprising this one new man, and this re-offer being brought to a close at the end of the book, with no change seen in Israel's attitude toward their Messiah and the kingdom (Acts 28:28).

The central theme of the epistles (introduced in Acts) has to do with an offer of the kingdom of the heavens to the Church, resulting in acceptance at first, but with rejection and apostasy later increasingly becoming the norm.

And then, the Book of Revelation climaxes the whole of the matter by outlining events which will occur at the close of this present dispensation, events pertaining to the Church (chs. 1-5) and to the nations of the earth (both Israel and the Gentile nations [chs. 5-19]).

And the book closes with Christ's return, the overthrow of Gentile world power (bringing "the times of the Gentiles" to an end), the ushering in of a new dispensation (the Messianic Era), and the eternal ages which follow (chs. 19-22).

(There are two accounts in the N.T. of a history of the Church as it exists throughout the present dispensation [Matt. 13; Rev. 2, 3]. And both accounts center on one subject — that which occurs relative to the central message which was/is to be taught in the Churches throughout the dispensation, the Word of the Kingdom.

The dispensation BEGAN with this message being taught universally throughout the first century Church, with apostasy gradually beginning to make inroads during the opening years of the dispensation.

And the dispensation *ENDS* in these two accounts exactly as it is seen throughout Christendom today — with Christendom, relative to any proclamation of the Word of the Kingdom, *completely leavened* [Matt. 13:33]; with Christendom, in this respect, seen as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" [Rev. 3:14-21].)

The central theme of the New Testament is *the SAME* as that of the Old Testament. It *MUST* be, for the New is simply a continuing exposition of that previously revealed in the Old (revealed in Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets).

Both Testaments — the Old leading into the New — form *one continuous, Divinely-given revelation dealing with "things pertaining to the kingdom of God."* Scripture begins this way in the Book of Genesis, remains this way throughout, and ends this way in the Book of Revelation (*ref.* the author's book, *The Study of Scripture*, Chs. II-IV).

For Christ to speak to His disciples throughout the forty days of His post-resurrection ministry concerning "things pertaining to the

kingdom of God" was simply for Him to speak to them during this time about *that toward which all Scripture moves*. And the particular matter at hand, relating to the kingdom, concerned *Israel*. Israel *had been* dealt with and *was about to be* dealt with again relative to the kingdom.

And, though the content of Christ's instruction at this time is not given, in the light of existing conditions and the apostles' subsequent ministry, the inference is clear. His instruction could only have centered around the Church which was about to be brought into existence, Israel, and the kingdom. And the whole of the matter, as clearly stated, had to do with the kingdom of the heavens previously offered to, taken from, and about to be re-offered to Israel.

After Christ had finished instructing His disciples, He called attention to their being *immersed in the Spirit* "not many days hence" (1:4, 5). And the disciples, hearing this promise concerning the Spirit at this particular time, *could only have thought one thing*.

Since the Spirit being sent after this fashion was intimately connected in the Old Testament with the establishment of the theocracy (*cf.* Isa. 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezek. 39:28, 29; Joel 2:27-32), the disciples *could only have thought* that the Lord was about to restore the kingdom to Israel.

And, in complete keeping with that which the Lord had taught them for forty days and that which He had stated about the Holy Spirit, they asked, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (1:6b).

The way in which the Greek text is structured in the first part of verse six connects the disciples' subsequent question about restoring the kingdom to Israel with the Lord's previous statement to them about the Holy Spirit. And the Lord's response to the disciples is in complete keeping with their question.

#### At This Time Restore

Christ's response to the disciples' question — "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons..." — has left more than one person attempting to explain what the Lord meant by what He said. And the reason problems are encountered in this realm is very simple. Rather than remaining within the context, individuals invariably attempt to explain the Lord's response in the light of Scriptures which have nothing to do with the subject matter at hand.

Reference is usually made to passages such as Christ's previous rebuke of the Jewish religious leaders for not understanding the signs of the times (*e.g.*, Matt. 16:1-4). Seemingly, Christ had previously rebuked individuals for not knowing the same thing which He here tells the disciples that it is not for them to know. But this is not the case at all. It cannot be. *Scripture always provides encouragement, never discouragement, relative to studying, knowing, and understanding the signs of the times*.

Note the disciples' question and the Lord's response in the light of the context, and matters become quite clear.

The kingdom of the heavens had been offered to Israel and was about to again be offered to Israel; but in the re-offer of the kingdom, something completely new was to occur first. *The disciples (and others) were to be immersed in and filled with the Spirit in connection with this re-offer.* 

And the disciples, ten days later, in the light of their previous question, could ONLY have connected this with a beginning fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (the Spirit being poured out on all flesh, which is Messianic in its scope of fulfillment [Joel 2:27-32]). Peter clearly made this connection after the immersion in and filling with the Spirit had occurred:

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel..." (Acts 2:16ff).

That was the setting for the Lord's response to the question uppermost in the minds of the disciples. And how was He going to respond to a question concerning the kingdom being restored to Israel at a time when:

- 1) It was about to be re-offered to Israel,
- 2) And Israel couldn't possibly accept?

The "times or the seasons" in the Lord's response had to do strictly with *Israel and the kingdom at this particular time*. The disciples (and others) were to proclaim the message to Israel, with a view to national repentance and baptism on the part of the nation.

There was to be a bona fide re-offer of the kingdom to Israel (with Israel *expected to repent*), brought about through a message proclaimed by individuals who had been filled with the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, and were manifesting signs, wonders, and miracles.

Now, how was Christ going to explain to the disciples that they (along with others) were going to offer something to Israel after this

fashion which Israel, as before, couldn't possibly accept? He wasn't, for that really isn't the correct Biblical way to look at the matter. This is the way in which finite man, after some fashion, has to look at the matter in order to come to some understanding of it himself. The Biblical way to look at the matter is to be found in Christ's response. And this is exactly why He responded to the disciples as He did.

"And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7, 8).

God in His omniscience and omnipotence could make a bona fide offer to Israel such as one finds throughout the Book of Acts, though Israel, at any point in the book, couldn't possibly accept the offer. This was something placed within God's "own power," and it was not for the disciples to know "the times or the seasons" relative to this whole matter.

Rather, they were simply to go out with a message to Israel and leave the results of their ministry to the Lord. All things involved were within the Lord's omnipotent power and within His omniscient plans and purposes (*cf.* Rom. 11:32-36).

Acts 1:7, 8 provides Christ's last recorded words in Acts prior to His ascension. After He had provided instruction for forty days, after he had told the disciples of the soon-coming of the promised Holy Spirit, and after he had answered their question, "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight" (v. 9; cf. Luke 24:49-51).

#### The Commission, The Message

The ministry of the apostles (and others), seen beginning anew as the kingdom began to be re-offered to Israel on the day of Pentecost, would have had to be IN COMPLETE KEEPING with Christ's previous commission to them, seen at the end of the three synoptic gospels and the beginning of the Book of Acts.

The message COULD NOT possibly have been separated from this previous commission. One COULD ONLY have been part and parcel with the other.

Christ's commission to His apostles during His forty-day post-resurrection ministry appears to have been given in four different parts at different times, with all four parts together forming the whole of the commission as it COULD ONLY be seen and understood.

(This would be similar to the statement Pilate placed above Christ's head at the time of His crucifixion — "This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." All four of the gospel writers record a part of this statement, but not the complete statement. The complete statement is seen *only through comparing all four*.

Four parts of a complete commission, forming the whole of that commission, would also be completely in line with the way Scripture is structured throughout. No one part of Scripture provides the complete picture. But, comparing Scripture with Scripture, as Scripture is added to Scripture, the picture ALWAYS progressively comes more and more into focus.)

Thus, the different recorded accounts in which Christ commissioned His apostles during the forty days following His resurrection — given at the end of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and at the beginning of Acts—*CAN ONLY be viewed* as *different parts or forms of one commission*, with ALL FOUR having to do with EXACTLY the same thing.

These different accounts of what CAN ONLY be seen as ONE commission MUST ALL be seen as a message "beginning at Jerusalem," with the message to the Jews in Jerusalem (also elsewhere to both Jews and Gentiles, but proclaimed by Jews and attended by signs, wonders, and miracles [cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:8]).

And, as becomes quite evident, the carrying out of this commission began to occur ten days following Christ's ascension — on the feast of Pentecost. As well, that which occurred on this day, inseparably associated with the carrying out of this commission, was the beginning of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, along with the bringing into existence of the Church (forming those who would carry out this commission during the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel).

The beginning of and initial carrying out of this commission

on the day of Pentecost had to do with one hundred twenty disciples filled with and empowered by the Spirit, speaking other languages, beginning at Jerusalem, with everything completely in line with that which Christ had previously laid down when He gave the commission (cf. Acts 1:8; 2:2-43; 3:1-4:13).

## 1) The Commission and Pentecost

The fact that the message was to be carried to Israel *first*, attended by supernatural signs (Acts 2:4-43; 3:1ff), reveals one truth. And the fact that the message was subsequently to be carried to the Gentile world, also attended by supernatural signs (Mark 16:15-18; Acts 1:8), reveals another.

(In the previous four gospel accounts, during the offer of the kingdom to Israel, there are at least thirty-five separate *signs*, along with a number of general statements regarding signs [often referred to as "miracles," *i.e.*, *miraculous events* forming "signs"]. Several of the same signs appear in all four gospels, a number appear in all three synoptic gospels, and a few appear in only one gospel, particularly in John's gospel.

In the Book of Acts, during the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, there are at least thirty separate signs, along with a number of general statements regarding signs.

But these are only the recorded signs. Note the statement in John 20:30: "And many other signs..." [unrecorded signs]. And continuing "signs" in Acts could only be looked upon *in the same manner*.)

Israel, hearing the message *first*, beginning on the day of Pentecost, was expected to repent, bringing to pass *the return of the King and the restoration of the kingdom*.

And, following Christ's return and the restoration of the kingdom, Israel was to carry this message *to the Gentile world*. The nation was to fulfill its calling as *Jehovah's witness to the ends of the earth* (Isa. 43:1-10), carrying the message concerning the King and the kingdom to the Gentiles worldwide.

Viewing Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38 together, one can easily see and understand this complete, overall truth. And these are two verses which have suffered about as much at the hands of Christians in general as they have from the cult groups.

Cult groups have removed these verses from their contexts to form a basis for their false salvation doctrines and practices. And numerous Christians, attempting to counter the cults — but, as the cults, seeing only basic issues surrounding one's eternal salvation in these verses — have, as well, removed them from their contexts (though interpreting them quite differently, but *ALWAYS non-contextually*).

Thus, with respect to correct, basic interpretation, both groups — usually attempting to align all Scripture, regardless of the text and context, with basic issues regarding the salvation message — have missed the mark COMPLETELY. Both have ignored and, accordingly, have not dealt with THE SUBJECT AT HAND.

Note how these two verses read:

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

"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 Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The verse in Acts has to do solely with *Israel and the kingdom* (vv. 36, 37, 43). The fulfillment of this verse does not extend beyond Jerusalem and Judaea in the Lord's commission.

But the verse in Mark has to do with *the Gentile nations and the kingdom* (v. 15), *with Jews proclaiming the message*. The fulfillment of this verse extends beyond Jerusalem and Judaea, into Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

But Jews MUST be the ones present as the proclaimers of this message, for signs, wonders, and miracles would accompany the message.

(Note something about *the message to the Gentiles in Mark* 16:15-18. "Signs, wonders and miracles" cannot exist apart from two things being present — *Israel, and the kingdom*. This is the way matters were set forth at the beginning in the O.T., forming a first-mention principle, necessitating that matters remain this way throughout the remainder of Scripture.

Thus, first and foremost, the message seen in Mark 16:15-18 *CAN ONLY have to do with Israel and the kingdom. Accordingly, it CAN ONLY* 

have to do with saved Jews proclaiming the message to saved Gentiles, with the message having to do with the kingdom, NOT salvation by grace through faith.

This, as well, is perfectly in line with the commission as seen in Matt. 28:18-20. There is *NOTHING in this part of the commission about salvation by grace*. Rather, matters *begin with baptism and progress to discipleship and keeping the Lord's commandments*. And, the other two forms of the commission [Luke's in both his gospel and in the Book of Acts] *MUST be understood in this same respect*.

Attempts to associate any of the four forms of this commission with the Church and evangelism, as has invariably been done over the years, is completely out of line with any type sound Scriptural interpretation, closing the door to any correct understanding of the complete, overall message as presented in Scripture.)

Israel though, preceding the carrying of this message to the Gentiles, had to repent and be baptized *first* (national repentance and baptism [Acts 2:38]) — same message as seen in the original offer of the kingdom in the four gospel accounts. And this would result in the nation receiving "the gift of the Holy Spirit" — as previously seen (vv. 4-38), the Spirit being poured out on all flesh (i.e., those forming the Jewish nation being filled with and empowered by the Spirit, being able to deliver the message in all of the different Gentile languages worldwide (cf. Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:15-21).

Then Israel, as Jehovah's witness (Isa. 43:1-10), would be in a position to go forth to Samaria and to the Gentile nations throughout the earth, *boldly carrying the message to these nations in their own languages*, bringing about the fulfillment of the Lord's commission in Mark 16:15 (*cf.* Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8).

And supernatural signs would follow the proclamation of the message *to ALL seen throughout the commission* — whether to Jews, to Samaritans, or to Gentiles throughout these different nations.

Had Israel followed Peter's instructions on the day of Pentecost (in response to the question which had been asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" [Acts 2:37] — "Repent, and be baptized..." [v. 38]) — Christ would have returned and restored the kingdom to Israel.

And the nation — following the reception of "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (a continued and complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy) — would subsequently have gone forth to the Gentiles with the message

concerning the King and the kingdom, fulfilling Mark 16:15ff, along with that seen in the other three forms of the commission.

Christ's return and the "restitution ['restoration'] of all things" (which would include the restoration of the kingdom to Israel) was contingent on *Israel's repentance* (Acts 3:19-21; *cf.* Acts 7:51-56). And the ministry of the disciples throughout the Book of Acts was a ministry toward this end.

That toward which ALL THINGS had been moving for the past 4,000 years was in the offing.

A repentant and restored Jewish nation would dwell in a restored land, the theocracy would be restored to Israel, and the Gentile nations of the earth would be reached through the Jewish people going forth as God's witness to these nations, fulfilling their calling.

And these disciples, realizing the importance of Israel's repentance in the preceding respect, carried the message to the nation after *such a zealous fashion and with such fervor* that they were threatened, beaten, imprisoned, and even killed by the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 3:1ff; 4:1ff; 5:1ff; 7:1ff).

And Paul, *comprehending the importance of this matter*, near the close of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, went so far as to say:

"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh [if such could bring about Israel's repentance and that which would follow]" (Rom. 9:3).

(Note that the previous statement had to do with *Paul's position in the kingdom,* not with his eternal salvation. The former could be forfeited, but not the latter.

Israel's repentance was of such import that Paul, knowing and understanding the gravity of that involved, was willing to go to the extent of relinquishing HIS OWN POSITION in Christ's coming kingdom if the nation's repentance could be effected through such actions on his part.)

But Israel didn't repent — not on the day of Pentecost nor on any subsequent day throughout the approximately thirty years in which the re-offer of the kingdom remained open. Thus, since Israel didn't

repent, Mark 16:15ff not only remained unfulfilled but, in actuality, *CAN'T be fulfilled today*.

#### 2) The Commission, Israel, the Church, the Nations

All things with respect to miraculous signs, Israel, and the Gentile nations can perhaps best be seen in their proper perspective by observing the Lord's commission in Matthew in the light of the forms of this commission seen in Mark, Luke, and Acts (particularly in Mark). In so doing, it can only be seen that what is often called "The Great Commission" in Matthew's gospel has to do, *NOT with the Church, but SOLELY with Israel and the kingdom*.

And once God had terminated His dealings with Israel relative to the kingdom — at the end of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, about 62 A.D. — the commission given by Christ following His resurrection but prior to His ascension could no longer have to do with Israel and the nations in the same respect that it had before this time.

Beyond this time, and for the remainder of the dispensation (lasting over 1,900 years), individuals in the Church would continue carrying a message regarding *baptism* (following salvation) and *discipleship*; but this would be done *APART FROM Christ's commission and APART FROM dealing with Israel in any way relative to national repentance, with the kingdom being restored to the nation.* 

And since Israel would no longer occupy her previous position in relation to the proclamation of the message and the kingdom, *miraculous signs would, as well, no longer exist.* 

In relation to the Church, Christ's commission given to His disciples before His ascension could involve no more than *an application* of the different parts of the commission found in the three gospels and in Acts. But, applying any part of this commission to the Church would, of necessity, involve *a completely different approach*.

It would involve the proclamation of the gospel of the grace of God on the one hand and the proclamation of the gospel of the glory of Christ on the other (cf. Eph. 2:8-10; I Tim. 1:11; 2:4). In fact, so little would be the same or could be associated with or drawn from this commission that it would undoubtedly be best to not even attempt to associate one with the other, avoiding confusion.

(An application of this commission to the Church today would be somewhat like trying to apply II Chron. 7:14 to the Church [ref. the author's article, "If My People..."].

None of the four forms of the commission deals with salvation by grace per se. Nor could they, for *ALL* of them deal with the same thing, which has to do with a continuing message beyond the simple salvation message. All deal with "Jews" who are filled with and empowered by the Spirit proclaiming this message, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, as seen in Acts 2.

*NONE* of the preceding could possibly have had anything to do with the Church after about 62 A.D., when the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel ceased. And this commission *COULD ONLY have had to do with the Church before that time* - *from* 33 A.D to about 62 A.D. - *in ONE RESPECT:* 

Those forming the Church, beginning on the day of Pentecost in 33 A.D., were the ones now in possession of the kingdom [the kingdom of the heavens, not the earthly segment of the kingdom covenanted to David, which can NEVER be taken from Israel (cf. Matt. 21:43; I Peter 2:9, 10)]. And they were the ones whom God was using to re-offer the kingdom to Israel.

Beyond this time [beyond about 62 A.D.], salvation by grace could only have been the central message proclaimed by Christians going forth to the nations. And the proclamation of salvation by grace would have a purpose in view beyond the message [which would fall more in line with that seen in Christ's commission to His disciples, but not the same at all]; and that purpose is to be seen in the gospel of the glory of Christ, to be proclaimed to individuals after they have been saved.

The preceding, beginning with the gospel of grace, as stated, is *by application only*. Things seen in the commission which Christ gave to His disciples, preceding Pentecost, begin at a point in time *following* the salvation message. This commission has to do with *baptism* and *discipling all nations*, not with proclaiming the gospel of grace ["teach," KJV, in Matt. 28, 19, 20, should be translated, "disciple"]. And discipling individuals has to do with *a work among the saved*, not the unsaved.)

## 3) Exact Wording of Text

In most versions of Scripture, as in the KJV, Matt. 28:19 begins with a command: "Go ye therefore..." However, in the Greek text, the verse begins with an aorist participle, which could be better translated, "Having gone..." The thought is that Israel was *expected to repent*; and because of the nation's calling — called to be Jehovah's

witness to the Gentile nations of the earth (Isa. 43:1-10) — Israel, following the nation's repentance and the reception of "the gift of the Holy Spirit" (empowered by and filled with the Spirit, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy), would have then been expected go to the Gentiles in fulfillment of her calling (as Jonah did following his repentance and removal from the place of death).

The command in the verse actually begins with the word "teach [lit., 'disciple']." This word is an imperative in the Greek text; and the thought is that Israel, having gone out among the nations with the good news (concerning salvation, the King, and the kingdom), was to bring forth *disciples*. Saved individuals, in line with that stated in Matt. 28:19, 20, were to be *baptized* and *taught*, in that order.

Now, with these things in mind, note the form of the commission as given in Mark 16:15-18. The words "Go ye" (v. 15, KJV) are a translation of the same aorist participle seen in Matt. 28:19. And the translation here, along with the expectation relative to Israel repenting and going, would be the same as in Matthew's gospel — "Having gone..."

The command (imperative) in Mark 16:15 is in the word "preach." That is, "Having gone into all the world," they were then to "preach the gospel to every creature." And the message, as Israel went forth, would be attended by signs, wonders, and miracles (vv. 17, 18). Supernatural manifestations of power would accompany the message because of the presence of not only *Israel* but a message pertaining to *the kingdom* (not the message of salvation by grace, which is *NEVER proclaimed in connection with signs*), with the end result of the message having to do with blessings to be realized by the Gentiles in the kingdom.

The commission which Christ gave to His disciples following His resurrection, was to bring about *a salvation* connected, textually, with *belief* and *baptism*: "He that *believeth* and is *baptized* shall be *saved*..." (Mark 16:16a).

With the commission beginning at Jerusalem and Judaea — "Repent, and be baptized... (Acts 2:38a) — *repentance* (a change of mind) would result in *belief*, followed by *baptism* (same as the original offer of the kingdom in the four gospels).

Then the Jewish people, following the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit, would carry this message to the nations, with *belief*, fol-

lowed by *baptism*, being the issue regarding *salvation*, as seen in Mark 16:16. And *belief*, *baptism*, and *salvation*, as the words are used in this verse, of necessity, deal with *issues beyond the thought of individuals passing from death unto life*.

These words used together in this manner, textually, have to do with discipleship, as in Matt. 28:19, 20. And discipleship is seen to be for a purpose, to be realized in the associated kingdom being re-offered to Israel.

This CAN ONLY BE the case, for belief, baptism, and salvation in Mark 16:16 or repentance and baptism in Acts 2:38 (note salvation in v. 40), are associated with a manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles (Mark 16:17, 18; Acts 2:43), which have to do with the kingdom. And all of this sets forth the indisputable fact that "salvation" or "the gift of the Holy Spirit" in these verses CANNOT have to do with the gospel of grace and eternal life.

"Salvation" in these verses is inseparably associated with events on *the day of Pentecost*, and, in turn, inseparably associated with *Israel* and the kingdom.

In this respect, note that seen in Acts 2:21 relative to these events:

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved [a quotation from Joel 2:32 pertaining to 'deliverance' during the Messianic Era (cf. Rom. 10:13, 14)]."

And, in this same respect, note *the type* which begins in Exodus chapter twelve, and matters should become quite clear. Things having to do with one's *eternal salvation* are dealt with in events surrounding the death of the firstborn at the very beginning (in ch. 12). But *belief*, *baptism*, and *salvation*, as in Mark 16:16, textually, are associated with a *subsequent deliverance* (made possible because of *the previous death of the firstborn and associated deliverance*).

In the type, this subsequent deliverance had to do with events beyond the death of the firstborn. This deliverance had to do with the Red Sea passage (foreshadowing baptism and all which is involved [Ex. 13, 14]), looking out ahead toward the land of Canaan (the land in which the theocracy, the kingdom, was to be realized).

And these are the things which, *first and foremost*, are involved in the Lord's commission to the disciples, whether seen in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or Acts.

# 3

# Restoration of All Things

Had Israel Repented... When Israel Does Repent...

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution [restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world [age] began" (Acts 3:19-21).

Events occurring on the day of Pentecost set the tone for the ministry of the apostles throughout the Book of Acts. *Individuals* were filled with the Spirit after a fashion peculiar to that period when the kingdom of the heavens was re-offered to Israel (ref. Chapter I in this book, pp. 11-15), and this filling of the Spirit formed a beginning fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (2:4, 16-21).

Those filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost were empowered to manifest *signs*, *wonders*, *and miracles in Israel's presence*; and on this beginning day, the sign was "tongues."

Jews present in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven heard the message in their own native language. The apostles (and others), having no knowledge of all these various languages, were empowered to speak and deliver a message to these Jews in their own languages.

Then, beyond the manifested sign and being able to reach the Jews in Jerusalem with the message (*cf.* Isa. 28:10, 11), there were also those Jews in the various nations from which these men had come who must be reached. And the men present in Jerusalem, after hearing the message, would then be expected to carry this message back to the Jewish people in their own countries.

But, as in the ministry of Christ and the apostles before Calvary, so in the continuing ministry of the apostles at (and following) Pentecost.

Though the Jews present were "all amazed" through hearing the message in their own native tongue, there was "doubt"; and this was followed by *confusion* and/or *unbelief*. Some asked, "What meaneth this?" And others said, "These men are full of new wine" (2:12, 13).

But Peter, standing up with the other apostles, *told these Jews EXACTLY what was happening*. Peter said, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel..." There was *a beginning fulfillment* of Joel's prophecy through their having been filled with the Spirit and having been empowered to speak in other tongues (vv. 14-21).

Then Peter directed these Jews' attention to the issue at hand (2:22ff). Israel's Messiah had previously appeared to the nation, manifesting "miracles and wonders and signs"; and God, through these miraculous works, had provided visible evidence to Israel concerning the authenticity of both *the Messenger* and *the message*. That is, "the signs" were of *Divine origin* and had to do with *the kingdom*.

However, Israel had rejected the message and crucified the Messenger (vv. 22, 23). But God had raised Him from the dead, and there were numerous witnesses to this fact (vv. 24, 32; *cf.* I Cor. 15:4-7).

And not only had God raised Him from the dead, but He was, at that very time, in the heavens at God's right hand, *waiting*. He was awaiting that day when His "foes" would be made His "footstool" (vv. 30-35).

Peter, in verses thirty-four and thirty-five, quoted from Ps. 110:1, the first verse of a Messianic Psalm. And note how the Psalm goes on to read:

"The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies...

The Lord hath sworn and will not repent [will not change His mind], Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps. 110:2, 4).

Events occurring on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two had one purpose in view: *Israel's repentance*.

The Jewish people, nationwide, were called upon *to change their minds*. *ONLY* through this means could the nation bring about Christ's return, bring about the continuing and complete fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, and bring about a restoration of the kingdom to Israel.

THIS was what the question in Acts 2:37 and the answer in the next verse involved. And the same thing can be seen over and over in the ministry of the apostles to Israel as one begins to work his way through the Book of Acts, especially through the first seven chapters.

There are manifestations of supernatural signs, followed by a confrontation with the religious leaders in Israel, followed by a call to repentance; and the complete sequence is always followed by *the nation remaining in unbelief*, though some of the Jews hearing the message at different times believed (as the three thousand on the day of Pentecost [*cf.* Acts 2:41-47; 4:16-30; 5:12-33; 6:8-15; 8:6]).

#### Repent...and Be Converted

Exactly what is meant by *repentance* and *conversion* in relation to Israel during the ministry of the apostles throughout the Book of Acts?

Note the message previously proclaimed to Israel in the gospel accounts, beginning with John the Baptist and continuing with Christ and the apostles; then note the continuing message proclaimed by the apostles in the Book of Acts.

The message was *essentially the SAME throughout*, though in Acts, following the events of Calvary, it took on the added tone (which became a central emphasis) of the Jewish people having been "the betrayers and murderers" of Jesus (*cf.* Acts 2:23, 36; 3:14, 15; 4:10; 5:28-30; 7:52).

But there is something often not understood — which MUST be understood — about the message proclaimed to Israel. This message, beginning with John the Baptist, was NOT a salvation message in the same sense that salvation by grace through faith is to be proclaimed to Jew and Gentile alike today. Rather, the message dealt with salvation in an entirely different respect. This message dealt with salvation (deliverance) in relation to the kingdom, NOT in relation to eternal life.

Before Calvary, with Messiah present, there was a call for Israel to repent; and this was with a view to deliverance being brought to pass for the nation in the kingdom, which would subsequently be established.

Following Calvary, with Messiah absent, there was again a call for Israel to repent; and this, as before, was with a view to deliverance being brought to pass for the nation in the kingdom, which would be established following Israel's repentance and Messiah's return.

In this respect, the main difference in the message proclaimed to Israel in the original offer (in the gospel accounts) and the message proclaimed to Israel in the re-offer (in the Book of Acts) was the presence or the absence of Israel's Messiah. The conditions on Israel's part at both times were IDENTICAL: repentance and baptism (cf. Matt. 3:1-6; Acts 2:38).

*In the original offer,* Christ was already present and could have established the kingdom; whereas, *in the re-offer,* Christ was absent and would have had to return in order to establish the kingdom.

Thus, correctly understanding the message proclaimed to Israel in either the gospel accounts or in Acts, it's easy to see and understand that a salvation message pertaining to one's eternal destiny was NOT part of this message. This message concerned salvation (deliverance) in relation to the kingdom.

But this is not to say that a message pertaining to one's eternal destiny cannot be seen in the gospel accounts or in Acts, for such is not the case at all.

Even during John's ministry, preceding Christ's ministry, he referred to Jesus on two particular occasions as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36); and John's statements could only draw from Old Testament typology and point to *the events surrounding Calvary*, which would occur later (*e.g.*, Gen. 4, 22, 37; Ex. 12).

Then, that which John had expressed began to come into full focus once Israel had rejected the proffered kingdom (Matt. 12:22-32). Events in Christ's ministry turned more toward the Cross; and, during this time, numerous things can be found in the gospel accounts and in Acts pertaining to the Cross rather than to the Crown.

At the time of Israel's climactic rejection in Matt. 12:22-32, some of the Scribes and Pharisees, who had just seen Christ perform a miraculous work, asked for a sign; but Christ, seeing that they had rejected the miraculous sign which He had already performed (among others prior to that time), refused their request. He told them that no sign would be given but "the sign of the prophet Jonah," which pointed to His coming death, burial, and resurrection (vv. 38-40).

Jesus though dealt with Nicodemus (evidently an honest seeker of the truth) after a different fashion following a similar rejection by the Jews (John 3:1ff; *cf.* John 2:18-25). Nicodemus came to Jesus, admitting, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for

no man can do these miracles ['signs'] that thou doest, except God be with him" (v. 2). And Jesus simply remained within the same subject matter and dealt with that to which the signs pointed — to the kingdom.

Christ responded to Nicodemus in complete keeping with his statement. He stated that which was required for *seeing* (v. 3) and *entering* (v. 5) the kingdom, with the latter being added commentary and an explanation of the former (*cf.* John 3:36 where *seeing* or *not seeing* is equated with *possessing* or *not possessing* "life," which, both textually and contextually, has to do with *life in the kingdom*, *NOT with eternal life*).

The message of salvation by grace through faith can be derived from sections of Scripture such as Matt. 12:40, John 1:29, 36, or John 3:14-18, among many others. But, again, this was *NOT* part of the central message proclaimed to Israel by John, Jesus, or the disciples before Calvary; *NOR* was this part of the same message proclaimed to Israel by the apostles (and others) following Calvary.

That is to say, there was no call for the Jewish people to receive Jesus as their *Saviour*, in the sense of providing *salvation from eternal damnation* (either before Calvary in the gospel accounts or following Calvary in the Book of Acts).

The call was for *the Jewish people to receive Jesus as their King*, One Who would save them in the sense of providing *deliverance in the prof- fered kingdom* (cf. Matt. 2:2; 21:5, 8, 9, 15; John 19:14-19; Acts 2:30-36).

Note a statement delivered to the Jewish religious leaders following Calvary by Peter and the other apostles in this respect:

"The  $\operatorname{\mathsf{God}}$  of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30, 31).

The word "Prince" is *Archegos* in the Greek text and refers to "a Ruler." As Israel's *King* He would be their *Saviour*, their *Deliverer*.

But prior to Christ returning as King, *Israel HAD TO repent*. *THEN*, Jesus would be sent as King to bring about deliverance (as Saviour), providing forgiveness for the Jewish people's sins, with *their main sins being that of harlotry and crucifying their Messiah*. But, again, *the call for Israel to repent was NOT a message pertaining to eternal salvation or eternal damnation*.

There are things about the generation of Jews to whom the kingdom of the heavens was offered both before and following Calvary which people don't seem to understand.

This *WASN'T* a lost generation of Jews in need of hearing a salvation message — no more so than the generation living during Daniel's day, or David's day, or Jews living at any other time throughout the fourteen centuries extending from Moses to Christ.

If such had been the case, the message of John, Jesus, and the apostles (both before and following Calvary) would have been quite different. It would have dealt with the issue of eternal salvation first.

But it DIDN'T. It dealt with a kingly message first, with salvation being seen in the message in the sense of deliverance by the King in His kingdom.

## 1) Salvation in the Old and New Testaments

It may come as a surprise for some to learn that salvation, presented in the Old Testament — whether dealing with eternal verities or with the Messianic Kingdom — is *IDENTICAL* to the way salvation is presented in the New Testament.

In either Testament, salvation with respect to one's eternal destiny is entirely through Divine intervention, it is by the shedding of blood, it involves a substitutionary atonement, and a Man is revealed to be the Substitute. BUT, salvation with respect to Christ and His kingdom is ALWAYS seen in both Testaments as a separate matter, having to do with issues subsequent to those surrounding one's eternal destiny.

These are truths set forth initially in the opening two chapters of Genesis (1:1-2:3). Then, Scripture beyond that provides all the necessary details to fully understand this opening section. And, within subsequent Scripture, *no change can ever occur* from that set forth at the very beginning.

Everything must remain the same throughout, which is why there can be NO difference in salvation throughout Scripture — whether relative to one's eternal destiny or relative to deliverance in the kingdom.

And that is also why correctly understanding these matters at the outset, at the very beginning of Scripture, cannot be overemphasized. If one understands matters correctly at the beginning, he will have a foundational base which will allow him to correctly understand related subject matter dealt with various ways at later points in Scripture.

But confining the discussion to salvation with respect to one's eternal destiny — for that must be settled *first* — one thing stands out about the opening four chapters of Genesis. Not only does the foundational framework set forth in the opening two chapters deal with this matter *first* (which can only be the case, for *this MUST occur first* [1:1-5]), but Scripture in the immediately following two chapters (chs. 3, 4), as well, deals with this matter *first* (which should also only be expected, for, again, *this is what MUST occur, as well as be understood, first*).

In Genesis chapter one, work during the opening day of the restoration of the ruined creation (vv. 2b-5) — typifying man, a subsequent ruined creation, passing from death unto life — occurred *entirely through Divine intervention*.

The Spirit of God moved, God spoke, and light came into existence. The ruined material creation was *completely powerless*, as ruined man today is *completely powerless*, to act in and of itself.

Then, in chapter three, dealing once again with the same subject as the opening five verses of chapter one, God began to provide additional information. Adam partook of sin with a view to Eve's redemption (as Christ was made sin to effect our redemption [II Cor. 5:21]); and in the latter part of the chapter God slew one or more animals, introducing death and shed blood, and clothed Adam and Eve with skins.

Thus, salvation in chapter three is seen in a dual sense. It is seen through an act of the first man (typifying an act of the second Man), and it is seen through death and shed blood (typifying the death and shed blood of Christ). And, typically, from God clothing Adam and Eve, man today is seen clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Then, in chapter four, salvation is once again seen in a dual sense, but from a different perspective.

It is seen in one respect, a secondary application, through the death and shed blood of lambs from the flock; and it is seen in another respect, the primary interpretation, through the death and shed blood of a man himself (Abel, the one who offered the lambs to God). And this overall type looks out ahead to the act of One Person — "the Lamb of God" putting away sin through the sacrifice of Himself (*cf.* Gen. 4:10; Heb. 12:24).

Thus, in this chapter, additional information is provided to not only help a person understand chapter three but also the opening five verses in chapter one. And, when all of the material in these opening four chapters of Genesis is put together and understood, a person will possess a good grasp of salvation by grace through faith — a salvation based *entirely on the finished work of Christ*, one wrought *entirely through Divine intervention*.

Then in Genesis chapter twenty-two, all of the preceding is put together *in one type*. And for an individual to properly understand this one type (where different things in several preceding types have been put together), he must have an understanding of the individual preceding types and how they relate to one another. Only then will he be in a position to dig into the type set forth in chapter twenty-two and mine its treasures.

In brief, in this chapter, Abraham offered his son on a particular mountain in the land of Moriah (a place chosen by God, evidently where His Son, in the antitype, would be offered 2,000 years later); and a substitutionary atonement was involved through a ram dying in the stead of Isaac (with Isaac, through the death of the ram, seen as having himself died [cf. Heb. 11:17]).

Then the preceding — along with other places like Joseph's experiences when he went to his brethren in Genesis chapter thirty-seven — brings a person to and prepares the person for the death of the firstborn in Exodus chapter twelve.

And, when one arrives at this chapter in Exodus, all of the necessary preliminary data has already been provided; and an individual having availed himself of this preliminary data finds himself in a position where he can properly understand the material in this chapter.

Thus, a person is *NOT* to begin in Exodus chapter twelve when studying Scripture. Rather *a person is to begin in Genesis chapter one and work his way through Genesis to the Book of Exodus*, availing himself of all the previous data so that he can properly understand Exodus chapter twelve (and beyond).

And this is of VITAL importance, for this chapter in Exodus is the beginning chapter in a type which extends all the way into the Book of Joshua.

This is the basic overall type which establishes the framework upon which the whole of subsequent Scripture rests (cf. I Cor. 9:24-10:11; Heb. 3-6), with the overall type itself resting upon the foundational framework set forth at the beginning, in the opening two chapters of Genesis (1:1-2:3; cf. Heb. 4:1-9).

#### 2) Shed Blood in the Old and New Testaments

According to Scripture, Christ was slain *two different times* in history — "from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), and at "Calvary" in 33 A.D. (Acts 2:23, 36).

"The foundation of the world" carries one back to the time of the restoration of the ruined creation, beginning with Gen. 1:2b (*ref.* Heb. 4:3, 4). At the very beginning of man's history, God, looking 4,000 years ahead, saw His Son as *already slain*.

But bear one thing in mind, though Christ is seen in Scripture as "slain from the foundation of the world," He is only seen in Scripture as being "offered" at *one time* — at "Calvary," in 33 A.D. (Heb. 9:25-28). Note the reference in verse twenty-six to "the foundation of the world." The allusion is to Christ being slain at this time, though not "offered" until 4,000 years later when slain within man's history (vv. 26, 28; I Peter 3:18).

And between these two points lie all the animal sacrifices, the "offerings," in the Old Testament.

These sacrifices began with God Himself slaying one or more animals to clothe Adam and Eve *immediately following* the entrance of sin into the human race; and they ended with the slaying of the paschal lambs in 33 A.D., slain by the Israelites *at the very time* that the nation was slaying *the Paschal Lamb at Calvary*.

Thus, there is the picture. Christ was slain at the time man's history began, preceding the entrance of sin into the human race (though not offered at this time); one or more animals were slain immediately following the entrance of sin into the human race (for an offering), and they continued to be slain throughout the next 4,000 years (for offerings), for death had "passed upon all men" (Rom. 5:12); and, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son," to be slain (as the offering), though already "slain from the foundation of the world" (Gal. 4:4, 5).

Then, tying that in with the different types once again (Gen. 1-4, 22, 37; Ex. 12), it is easy to see that redemption for man is the same throughout Scripture, Old or New Testament. As stated in Heb. 9:22, "...without shedding of blood is no remission." And this blood was to ultimately be shed by a Man — *slain* from "the foundation of the world," *offered* 4,000 years later — with all the bloody animal sacrifices (for *offerings*) lying between these two times, pointing to Christ's sacrifice, *His offering once for all*.

#### a) Atonement, Reconciliation

The word "atonement" (Heb. *kaphar*) means "to cover." This is the word used throughout the Old Testament relative to the blood of animal sacrifices providing *a covering* for sins (*e.g.*, Lev. 16:6, 10, 11, 16-18, 20...). The blood of animal sacrifices *could not do away with sins*. *This blood could only cover sins*.

This is why Heb. 10:4 states:

"For it is *not possible* that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."

Thus, there were continual sacrifices throughout the Old Testament, year after year; and *blood* from these continual sacrifices provided *a covering* for sins.

This can easily be seen through activities on the day of Atonement when the high priest placed blood on the mercy seat. God dwelt in the Holy of Holies, above the mercy seat, between the cherubim, one on each end of the mercy seat (Ex. 25:21, 22). The two tablets of stone, containing the broken law, were in the ark below the mercy seat (Ex. 40:20; *cf.* Ex. 31:18; Heb. 9:4); and, with blood on the mercy seat, when God looked toward the broken law, He saw *a blood covering*, not the broken law. The blood could not do away with the Israelites' sins, but it could, and did, cover them.

The shed blood of Christ though is another matter. It *does not cover* sins. Rather, it *does away with* sins.

The word used in connection with Christ's shed blood is not a Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *kaphar*. Instead, the Greek word *katallasso*, translated "reconciliation," is used (*cf.* Rom. 5:10, 11; II Cor. 5:18-21).

Katallasso means, "to change," "to bring back into harmony." There is not even the slightest thought of forming a covering. Rather, the thought with reference to sin has to do with bringing back into harmony through doing away with sin, leaving NOTHING to cover.

This is why the writer of Hebrews drew a sharp contrast between the blood of animals and the blood of Christ in this respect (chs. 7-10). And this is also why he used the expression, "put away sin," with reference to Christ's sacrifice (9:26; *cf.* 10:1, 12).

#### b) The Paschal Lambs, The Passover Lamb

With these thoughts in mind, what was the difference between God viewing the shed blood of animal sacrifices or viewing the shed blood of His Son insofar as not seeing man's sins was concerned?

There WASN'T any difference! There COULDN'T be! God DIDN'T see man's sins in either instance.

In the former, man's sins were covered; God saw ONLY the blood which covered them. In the latter, man's sins were done away with; God saw ONLY the blood that did away with them.

God looked upon *the blood in BOTH instances* — *the ONLY thing which could cover* or *do away with* sins. That's why there can be no remission for sins *apart from* the shedding of blood. And that is also why to talk about salvation in either the Old or the New Testament apart from the shedding of blood is *utter nonsense*.

God's requirement for and recognition of a substitutionary atonement began at the time of Adam's sin and can be seen throughout the Old Testament, with all the sacrifices pointing to and typifying Christ's sacrifice. And this can perhaps best be seen and illustrated through viewing the death of the paschal lambs in Exodus chapter twelve.

Insofar as the death of the firstborn and God's corresponding satisfaction are concerned, note that there is NO difference between Jews applying the blood of the paschal lambs (by faith) to the door posts and lintel during Moses' day and Christians applying the blood of the Passover Lamb, by faith, today. In BOTH instances God is seen recognizing a vicarious death of the firstborn, and in BOTH instances, God's satisfaction can be seen.

The statement, "...when I see the blood, I will pass over you..." (Ex. 12:13), is *equally true in BOTH instances*, in both type and antitype.

And also note that God would have had to look upon the shed blood of the paschal lambs *EXACTLY the same way* throughout the fourteen centuries (thirty-five generations) from Moses to Christ — "...when I see *the blood*, I will pass over you..." God looked for *the blood*. That was *the ONE criterion*, *the ONLY criterion*.

God could *ONLY* have recognized an individual, vicarious death in each generation *EXACTLY the same way;* and, since the generation living when Christ was upon the earth was still slaying the paschal lambs year after year, God could *ONLY* have *STILL* been recognizing an individual, vicarious death, *being satisfied*.

God looked for the blood. That was the ONE criterion during Moses' day, and that could ONLY have remained the ONE criterion throughout the fourteen centuries from Moses to Christ.

And, inseparably connected with the preceding, again note that all of the animal sacrifices, viewed by God as efficacious, occurred between two points in time — between Christ being slain from the foundation of the world and being slain 4,000 years later at Calvary.

(And, to take the matter one step further: *Since Christ was the Paschal Lamb, and ONLY Israel could slay the paschal lamb [Ex. 12], WHO slew Christ before the foundation of the world?* 

Note the author's book, *Mystery of the Woman*, Ch. IV, pp. 60-62, where this is addressed.)

#### Thus...

Contrary to common belief, *Christ DIDN'T come to a lost generation of Jews* — no more so than if He had appeared to any other generation extending all the way back to Moses.

The paschal lambs were still being slain year after year, with the blood being properly applied; and *God could ONLY have still looked at the blood (which covered sin) EXACTLY the same way that He had ALWAYS looked at it.* 

And this is *EXACTLY* what the apostles recognized when carrying the message to the same generation once again following Calvary.

The salvation message they carried concerned deliverance in the kingdom, EXACTLY the same as the message which John, Jesus, and the disciples had carried to Israel before Calvary.

The message was being carried to a generation of Jews living on both sides of Calvary — Jews who had applied the blood of the paschal lambs preceding Calvary but had rejected the King and His kingdom. Still though, preceding Calvary, there was a vicarious death, resulting in God's satisfaction; and this could NOT be nullified.

But a status of this nature was for *THAT GENERATION ALONE*. Jews in any subsequent generation would be as Jews are today. A vicarious death, resulting in God's satisfaction, could be theirs *ONLY* through availing themselves of the shed blood of the Paschal Lamb.

They had to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, repenting and being converted in Acts 3:19 had to do with the Jews of *THAT one generation* changing their minds and going in a different direction. *Eternal salvation was NOT in view, ONLY deliverance in relation to Christ's return and the restoration of the kingdom to Israel.* 

And the 3,000 being "saved" on the day of Pentecost, or at times following, including Paul's conversion (ch. 9), must be looked upon after the same fashion. Their heeding the message must be looked upon in the sense of a change of mind and a change of direction, with any thought of salvation having to do with *Christ's return* and *deliverance in the kingdom*. They were saved "from this untoward ['perverse'] generation" (Acts 2:40), with respect to the kingdom.

(In contrast, note Paul and Silas' message in Acts 16:31 to a Gentile of their generation — a jailor at Philippi, one *outside* the camp of Israel, one having been *separated* from the blood of the paschal lambs.

This jailor was "dead in trespasses and sins." He was *spiritually dead* and in no position to hear and understand spiritual truths concerning the kingdom. *He had to FIRST pass "from death unto life" BEFORE a message concerning the kingdom could be proclaimed to him.* 

In his case, contrasted with those in Israel, matters surrounding the death of the firstborn in Ex. 12 had not occurred; and *the firstborn MUST first die*.

Thus, in response to his question concerning salvation, he was told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..."

He had to FIRST apply the blood of the slain Paschal Lamb. A vicarious death had to occur FIRST — the ONLY means through which this man could be made alive spiritually and be placed in a position where he could subsequently understand spiritual truth concerning the kingdom.)

#### And He Shall Send Jesus

Christ was to remain in the heavens "until the times of restitution ['restoration'] of all things" (Acts 3:21). There was to be (or, will be at a future time) *repentance* on Israel's part.

THEN,  $Christ\ would\ (or, will\ yet)$   $return\ and\ restore\ the\ kingdom\ to\ Israel.$ 

(The word translated "restitution" in Acts 3:21 is the same word in the Greek text translated "restore" in Acts 1:6. The word appears in a verb form in chapter one and in a noun form in chapter three, and *EXACTLY* the same thing is in view both places [though in a broader sense in chapter three] — *the restoration of the kingdom to Israel*.

In the past, the kingdom of the heavens was in view [which would have necessitated that the kingdom covenanted to David (the earthly sphere of the kingdom) also subsequently be restored].

In the future though, relative to Israel and the nation's repentance, ONLY the kingdom covenanted to David can be in view; and ONLY this earthly sphere of the kingdom can and will be restored to the nation.

Israel has *forfeited* the right and privilege to rule from heavenly places in the kingdom. *The Church is now in possession of the kingdom of the heavens; and Christians are the ones who will occupy heavenly positions of power and authority as co-heirs with Christ in the kingdom.)* 

Israel didn't *repent* throughout the time covered by the Book of Acts, and thus Christ did not return and bring about the "restoration of all things." And the day eventually came when the door of opportunity closed, and God set the nation aside for a dispensation.

Israel NOW has to await God's completion of His dealings with the "one new man" in Christ, which will take two days, two thousand years.

But the day is coming, and is near at hand, when God will complete His dealings with the Church, remove the Church, and then turn back to Israel once again. And, during that future time, Israel, after passing through the fires of the great Tribulation, *WILL repent*. The Jews in that day, during a time of unparalleled trouble — "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21) — *WILL call upon the God of their fathers for deliverance*.

They WILL repent, change their minds, in that day. And, when they do, God will see their "affliction," hear their "cry," and know their "sorrows"; and He will come down in the person of His Son to "deliver" them (Ex. 3:2-12; 4:19, 20).

But one thing needs to be understood relative to Israel being *delivered* in that day. True, Christ will return as King to effect salvation (deliverance) in relation to the kingdom. But the Jews of that day, unlike the Jews during the time Christ was on earth the first time, will have to be dealt with *first* in relation to matters surrounding that set forth in Exodus chapter twelve.

Israel will first have to experience her national Passover through *believing* on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Passover Lamb Who shed His blood for the nation. Israel has slain the Lamb, but they have yet to apply the blood. And only after they have applied the blood, through belief, can Israel be dealt with relative *to deliverance with respect to the kingdom*.

# 4

# Acceptance by Many

Many Believed, but Not the Nation

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

By the time of the events in the sixth chapter of the Book of Acts there were multiplied thousands of Jews who had believed the message being proclaimed (2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1). And Acts 6:7 reveals that "a great company of the priests" in Israel were numbered among these believers.

The fact that numerous priests had received the message and were being "obedient to the faith" was undoubtedly a major cause for concern among those in Israel. After all, in the Mosaic Economy, the priests were the ones standing between and representing man to God and God to man, which was done on the basis of *death and shed blood*. And, though the sacrificial system within the Mosaic Economy had been fulfilled at the time of Christ's death, shown by the rending of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Matt. 27:50, 51), the unbelieving nation still looked at the matter exactly as the Israelites had viewed it for over fourteen centuries.

However, the believing priests would have seen and understood the truth of the matter — an understanding which, because of their previous involvement in the temple worship, would undoubtedly have been quite natural for them. They would have known and understood that the whole sacrificial system surrounding the temple worship had been fulfilled in Christ.

And having understood the true nature of Christ's sacrifice and offering, they would also have understood the true nature of animal sacrifices which the Jews continued to offer following the events of Calvary. They would have understood that God, following the offering of His Son, no longer recognized temple sacrifices.

The sacrifice and shed blood of Christ had been foreshadowed by all the blood sacrifices within the Mosaic Economy — the blood of the paschal lambs which had been placed on the door posts and lintel of the homes each year, the blood from multiplied thousands of animals which the priests had slain at the brazen altar at various times throughout each year, and the blood placed on the mercy seat by the high priest on the day of Atonement each year.

Thus, an increasing number of priests understanding and accepting the true nature of sacrifices within the Mosaic Economy following Calvary could only have created a major cause for concern in the camp of Israel.

Jewish life revolved around the temple with its Levitical priests and sacrificial system. But many of the priests — who would be the ones to offer sacrifices at the brazen altar for the people — had repented.

That is, they had *changed their minds* about Christ, His sacrifice, and the message being proclaimed. And, being "obedient to the faith," they could no longer offer sacrifices for the people at the temple. They would know that the One True Sacrifice, in fulfillment of all the Old Testament sacrifices, had been offered.

And, in this respect, the statement that many priests were being "obedient to the faith" sets the stage for the climactic turning point in the Book of Acts. Immediately following this statement is the long discourse concerning Stephen (6:8ff). And this discourse leads to a climactic rejection by Israel (7:54-57), to the corresponding death of Stephen (7:58-60), to the subsequent introduction of Paul (7:58; 8:1, 3), to the beginning of a great persecution against believing Jews in Jerusalem (8:1), to the scattering of believers throughout the land and beyond (8:1), and to the beginning of the proclamation of the message beyond Jerusalem and Judaea (8:4, 5).

The fact that many priests were believing the message and being "obedient to the faith" probably provides a (if not "the") major reason for the "great persecution" arising against believing Jews in Jerusalem at this particular time (8:1). Believers were scattered "throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria" as a result of this persecution, and those scattered "went everywhere preaching the word" (8:1-4).

Then Paul, a Pharisee who had been taught by Gamaliel (5:34; 22:3), appears in Scripture as the central person going throughout the

land seeking to put a stop to that which was happening. And Paul, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples," was following this course of action with the blessing of the high priest in Jerusalem (8:3; 9:1, 2; 22:5; 23:6).

#### The Message

The priests of that day were mainly Sadducees, individuals who didn't believe in a resurrection, in angels, or in spirit realities (apart from God Himself). From a theological standpoint, they would be looked upon as the more liberal branch of Judaism, as opposed to the Pharisees, who would be looked upon as the fundamental legalists (*cf.* Matt. 23:1-4; Acts 23:7, 8). And the Pharisees and Sadducees comprised the two main religious parties in Israel at this time, with the Pharisees being, by far, the larger of the two.

The statement that a great number of the priests (who would, undoubtedly, have been mainly from the Sadducean party) "were obedient to the faith" is *NOT* another way of saying that they had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and, as a result, had been saved.

RATHER, these priests were part of the nation to which the kingdom of the heavens had been offered preceding Calvary and was being re-offered following Calvary. They were part of the nation which had been sacrificing the paschal lambs year after year.

These priests were part of a larger group of priests, previously responsible for carrying out a ministry on behalf of the people at the temple, which centered around *sacrifices* and *offerings*. They understood the sacrificial system and had to follow prescribed cleansing rituals in order to be in a position to act on behalf of the people (which included *washings*, *clean garments*, and *shed blood* [Ex. 29:1-34]). Their beliefs and practices surrounding the sacrificial system within the Mosaic Economy could only have been in keeping with their ministry; and, in this respect, they would have been numbered among those experiencing *a vicarious death of the firstborn preceding Calvary, resulting in God's satisfaction*.

These priests had *NOT* believed on the Lord Jesus Christ to bring about something which had already occurred in their lives, *i.e.*, a vicarious death of the firstborn, resulting in God's satisfaction. Such would have been *impossible*. The death of the firstborn, for them, *had already* 

occurred; and God, insofar as they were concerned, was satisfied.

*RATHER*, by believing, they had done exactly what Peter, on the day of Pentecost, had stated that the entire nation had to do in order to bring about Christ's return and the establishment of the kingdom (Acts 2:38). And Peter, at this time, viewed the entire nation in this same light (as having appropriated the blood of the paschal lambs), exactly as Christ and His disciples had previously viewed the nation.

#### 1) The True Issue

Individuals often have a somewhat difficult time conceiving that either a Pharisee or a Sadducee could have already been saved at the time Christ was on earth with His offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, or afterwards during the time covered by the Book of Acts when the kingdom of the heavens was re-offered to Israel. But this is invariably done on the basis of either *the actions* or *the various beliefs* of the Pharisees or the Sadducees.

And to look upon the matter after this fashion presents *a completely fallacious basis* for any Scriptural teaching concerning salvation.

The ONLY proper basis for viewing the status of one's salvation is to look at things the SAME way God looks at them. God looks at matters pertaining to one's salvation with respect to ONE thing.

God looks at the death of the firstborn; and God, because of a sacrifice and shed blood, recognizes a vicarious death, through which He is satisfied.

God *DOESN'T* look for what man seems to want to see in a person at all. *RATHER*, *God looks for shed blood*, setting forth *a substitutionary death*. This is *the ONLY thing* which will result in *His satisfaction*.

Note something, and note it well. At the institution of the Passover during Moses' day, when the Lord passed through the land of Egypt, He looked for *ONE thing*. He looked for *the blood of a slain lamb, which had been properly applied*.

The Lord didn't look inside the homes of the Israelites to see what the people had done, were doing, or planned to do (which He, in His omniscience, knew). Nor did He look inside those homes to see what the Jewish people individually believed about various things — such as what the Sadducees later believed about the resurrection, angels, or spirit realities (which He, in His omniscience, also knew).

NONE of this had anything to do with the matter at hand.

The *ONE and ONLY criterion* was what they believed, and had done, about the slaying and application of the blood of the paschal lambs. *NOTHING else* entered into the picture. It was exactly as stated in Ex. 12:13, "...when I see *the blood*, I will pass over you..."

And EXACTLY the same situation existed when Christ was upon earth 2,000 years ago.

The paschal lambs were *still* being slain, the blood was *still* being applied, God was *still* recognizing a vicarious death of the firstborn, and *God could ONLY have still been just as satisfied as He had been at any other time in Jewish history*, dating all the way back to the institution of the Passover during the days of Moses, over 1,400 years earlier (or — pertaining to sacrifices and God's satisfaction — at any other time in man's history throughout the 2,500 years preceding Moses, going all the way back to the slaying of one or more animals in Eden).

And as it is out of line with Scripture to look upon a Pharisee or a Sadducee during the time Christ was upon earth (who had availed himself of the blood of a paschal lamb) as *unsaved* because of his actions or certain beliefs, it is equally out of line to question an individual's salvation today (who claims to have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, having availed himself of the blood of the Passover Lamb) because of his actions or certain beliefs.

And herein is the heart of where so much false teaching relative to salvation lies today.

Man wants to add something to that which God has unchangeably established; man wants to see something beyond the appropriation of the blood.

But God has *one statement* concerning the matter, and that one statement concerns *the blood of slain paschal lambs in the type* and *the blood of the slain Paschal Lamb in the antitype: "...when I see the blood [NOTHING else, NOTHING more, NOTHING less]*, I will pass over you."

That's the way *it has been* since God slew one or more animals in Eden, that's the way *it has remained* for the past 6,000 years, that's the way *it continues to remain* today, and that's the way *it will continue to remain* throughout the endless ages which lie ahead.

(See Chapter III in this book, "Restoration of All Things," for supplementary material relative to salvation in both the Old and New Testaments.

Also note how going back to the Old Testament types helps, *more than anything else*, to clarify the issue at hand.

And this is not only true in Scriptures dealing with salvation but in Scriptures dealing with any Biblical doctrine. God gave the type to help explain the antitype; and man's failure to properly understand the antitype can, invariably, be traced back to his failure to properly understand the type. *Understand the former, and you can understand the latter.* 

This is the way God has structured His Word; and to properly understand God's Word, man MUST study this Word after the fashion in which it was written, beginning with the opening chapters of Genesis.)

## 2) Condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees

The Pharisees emanated from the ranks of the Scribes, which is why the two are spoken of together so often throughout the gospel accounts. The Sadducees, on the other hand, emanated from the ranks of the priests. And though the Sadducean priestly party was the more liberal of the two, no group in Israel heard condemnatory words from Christ even remotely close to those heard by the fundamental, legalistic Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:1ff).

But, in this condemnation, the fundamental, legalistic position of the Scribes and Pharisees was *NOT* in view.

*NOR* would the more liberal position of the Sadducees have been in view had they been the ones Christ condemned after this fashion.

And IF the Sadducees, instead, had done what the Pharisees did, then they would have been the ones addressed. But they HADN'T. The position which they held in Israel prevented such.

It was the more numerous and influential Scribes and Pharisees who controlled the religious life in Israel. *THEY* were the ones usually seen following Christ about the country, seeking to discredit the Messenger and His message, presenting a false report to the people.

And, controlling the religious life of the people after this fashion, in the words of Christ, they "shut up the kingdom of the heavens against ['in the presence of'] men..." (Matt. 23:13).

THEY had NO interest in entering the kingdom themselves, and THEY did EVERYTHING within their power to squelch the interest of others, making sure that the nation had NOTHING to do with the King and the proffered kingdom.

THEY were the ones directly responsible for the END result of Christ's ministry — the rejection of the Messenger and His message, followed by the

crucifixion of the Messenger.

Christ laid *ALL* of this to their charge in Matthew chapter twenty-three. And is it any wonder that a whole chapter in Matthew's gospel is given over to Christ's condemnation of this ruling religious party? And is it any wonder that the Scribes and Pharisees suffered a condemnation without parallel in Christ's ministry?

They stood COMPLETELY ALONE in this respect.

They were referred to as going about the country making proselytes but, in the process, because of their erroneous ways and what they taught, making a proselyte "twofold more the child of hell [Gk., *Geenna*, 'Gehenna']" than themselves. And, because of what they had done relative to Christ and His ministry, within Christ's condemnation of them, He asked, "…how can ye escape the damnation of hell ['Gehenna']?" (vv. 15, 33).

"Gehenna" was a place south of Jerusalem — a ravine called *the Valley of Hinnom* (Hebrew word for "Gehenna") — where, at the time of Christ's first advent, the refuse of the city was taken to be discarded.

"Gehenna" was the trash dump for the city.

The word "Gehenna" is used in the New Testament only by Christ, with the exception of James 3:6, where it is used in a figurative sense relative to the tongue. And Christ used this word during His earthly ministry, also in a figurative sense, referring to the place which would be occupied by those denied entrance into the kingdom of the heavens.

This was the way Christ used the word in an early discourse to His disciples concerning the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5:22, 29, 30), this was the way Christ used the word at other times during His ministry (Matt. 10:28; 18:9; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5), and this was the way Christ used the word in His condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew chapter twenty-three (vv. 15, 33), immediately preceding His crucifixion.

Christ's use of "Gehenna," contrary to popular teaching, has *NO* reference to the lake of fire, the final abode of the unsaved. Rather, He used the word in the gospel accounts in one sense ALONE. He used the word in texts which deal with entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom of the heavens.

Imagery involved in Christ's reference to the place of refuse south of Jerusalem reflects on exactly the same teaching seen in Gen. 19:30,

where "righteous" but *worldly-minded* Lot ultimately ended up dwelling in a cave on the mountain to which he had previously been told to escape (Gen. 19:17; II Peter 2:7, 8); or the same teaching is seen in Matt. 22:11-14 where the man appearing at the marriage festivities *without a wedding garment* was cast into the darkness outside.

These references, as well as the references to "Gehenna," have to do with the same thing. They have to do with teachings surrounding the place which the unfaithful among the saved will occupy during the Messianic Era, NOT with teachings surrounding eternal verities as they pertain to the unsaved.

And, in the light of the preceding, Christ's use of the word "Gehenna" in relation to the actions of the Scribes and Pharisees reveals something unmistakable. Christ, through using this word, made it very clear that those whom He so strongly condemned were in a position to not only enter the kingdom themselves but to also lead the entire nation in that direction. And, apart from being saved, they could NOT possibly have occupied a position of this nature.

(Israel's status in this respect is why Christ, at a previous time, could call attention to "children ['sons'] of the kingdom" one day being cast "into outer darkness" [Matt. 8:11, 12].

The reference was to the destiny of individual Jews in relation to, NOT eternal life, BUT the kingdom of the heavens [the kingdom, at this point in Matthew's gospel, had not yet been taken from Israel (cf. Matt. 21:43)]; and the expression, "children ['sons'] of the kingdom," is used elsewhere in Matthew's gospel as a reference to the saved, not the unsaved [with a particular emphasis on sonship — referring specifically to the rights of firstborn sons — in the kingdom (cf. Matt. 13:24, 25, 38)].

And understanding this status of the Jewish people at Christ's first coming will allow a correct interpretation of numerous other passages as well.

Note, for example, the often misunderstood account of the rich young ruler [Luke 18:18-30]. This man, coming to Christ, asked what he must do "to inherit eternal life [lit., 'inherit life for the age']," NOT what he must do to be saved. And Christ honored and answered his question exactly as it had been asked.

Eternal life is NOT inherited, it is a free gift. And aside from this fact, inheritance has to do with family members, not with those outside the family, the unsaved (Rom. 8:17].)

The message pertaining to the kingdom is *for saved individuals*, *NOT unsaved individuals*. The message for the unsaved centers around the blood of the Passover Lamb, *NOT* a message concerning the kingdom.

ONLY after a person has settled this issue is he in a position to hear and understand a message concerning the kingdom, one day realizing an inheritance as joint-heir with the Son in the kingdom.

That would be to say, ONLY after a person has been saved is he in a position to hear and understand the reason why he has been saved.

#### Obedience to the Faith

The priests in Acts 6:7 were saved "from this untoward ['perverse'] generation" (Acts 2:40). And, believing the message being proclaimed and coming out of that generation, they "were obedient to the faith."

The structure of the verb in the Greek text ("were obedient," an imperfect tense) points to something which these priests were continuously doing. That is, they were continuously giving heed to, they were continuously being "obedient to [following, subjecting themselves to] the faith."

And ascertaining exactly what is meant by the expression, "the faith," is quite simple if one remains within the context. The expression could only refer to one thing. The message being proclaimed throughout Israel had to do with the kingdom, and these priests had believed this message and were continuing to give heed to the things contained in the message.

These priests had been converted. They had repented (changed their minds), followed by baptism (Acts 2:38; 3:19); and they were now numbered among those anticipating the entire nation eventually doing the same, with the restoration of the kingdom to follow (3:20, 21).

The expression, "the faith," had to do with the message surrounding the kingdom; and the expression is used in numerous portions of Scripture exactly the same way — both in Scriptures covering that period when the message was still open to Israel (lasting approx. thirty years) and that much longer period which followed (to last almost 2,000 years).

This was the expression which the Spirit of God used to refer to the message surrounding the kingdom when the infant Church was entirely Jewish and was centered in and around Jerusalem, and this was also the expression used for the same purpose when the Church began to spread out into the Gentile world.

## 1) Use through Acts into the Epistles

In Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey, going into Asia, three cities are singled out to reveal how they dealt with converts among the Gentiles. Retracing their route, Paul and Barnabas ministered to the Christians in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, "Confirming ['Strengthening']" these Christians by "exhorting them to continue in the faith..." (Acts 14:22a).

And there can be no room to question or to wonder exactly what is meant by this exhortation. The remainder of the verse provides that information: "...we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (v. 22b; *cf.* Acts 16:5).

Sufferings must precede glory (cf. Luke 24:26; I Peter 1:11; 2:21; 4:12, 13; 5:1-4). The two are inseparably related, linked; and continuing in "the faith" involves both. Continuing in "the faith" involves the overall scope of the Word of the Kingdom.

After appointing elders in these Churches (who would have had to be men possessing a knowledge of things surrounding the Word of the Kingdom, men who could have continued to teach these things to the people), they "prayed with fasting" and committed the Christians in these Churches "to the Lord."

And following this, Paul and Barnabas went forth to proclaim the same message to Gentile converts elsewhere in Asia (vv. 23ff).

Then note how Paul used the expression, "the faith," in several of his epistles.

In II Tim. 4:7, 8, Paul stated:

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

*Keeping* "the faith" in these verses has to do with victory in the spiritual warfare throughout the pilgrim journey with a view to that

which lies out ahead. It has to do with victoriously finishing the course, the race, with a view to being approved for a crown at the judgment seat (I Cor. 9:24-27). It has to do with patiently enduring under the present trials, testings, and sufferings, with a view to the glory to be revealed (II Tim. 2:10-12). It has to do with denying self, taking up one's cross, and following Christ, with a view to ascending the throne with Him in that coming day (Matt. 16:24-17:5).

The word "fought" in verse seven is a translation of the Greek word, *agonizomai*, from which we derive our English word, "agonize." And the word translated "fight" in this verse is from the noun form of *agonizomai*, from *agon*.

A better translation of this part of the verse would read, "I have strained every muscle of my being in the good contest [the race, the warfare]..." And Paul, having governed his life after this fashion to the end ("I have *finished* my course"), had "kept the faith." Resultingly, a crown awaited Paul, which would be given to him "at that day," allowing him to ascend the throne and occupy a position with Christ in the kingdom.

(Note also I Tim. 6:12 where exactly the same expression found in II Tim. 4:7 [straining every muscle in the present race of the faith] can be seen in a different textual setting. In I Tim. 6:12, a successful completion of the race is seen to be for the purpose of laying "hold on eternal life [lit., 'life for the age' (life for the 1,000-year Messianic Era)], whereunto thou art also called..."

That is, successfully completing the present race of "the faith ['faith' in this verse is articular in the Greek text — 'the faith']" and, as a consequence, subsequently occupying a position with Christ in His kingdom, is that to which a person has been called. It is realizing the very purpose for his salvation.)

Then note Jude 3 where an intensified form of the word *agonizomai* (*epagonizomai*) is used, translated "earnestly contend." Jude wanted to write about salvation by grace through faith (v. 3a), but the Spirit of God led him to write about something entirely different.

The Spirit of God led Jude to write about the same thing Paul centered his epistles around, and the same thing the writers of Hebrews, James, Peter, and John also centered their epistles around. Jude was

constrained to write to Christians about the importance of *straining every muscle of their being* with respect to "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (v. 3b).

Jude — as Peter in his second epistle, and as Paul on numerous occasions in his ministry and epistles — centered his exhortation *to earnestly contend* "for the faith" around warnings against false teachers (*cf.* Acts 20:29-31; I Tim. 1:18-20; II Tim. 2:15-26; 3:1-8). And these false teachers were revealed to be individuals speaking perverse things against — not salvation by grace through faith — but "the Word of the Kingdom," "the faith."

In II Peter 2:19-21, men speaking perverse things against "the faith," are seen (at least, in this text) to be individuals who were knowledgeable concerning the Word of the Kingdom (the word translated "knowledge" in v. 20 is from *epignosis* ["mature knowledge"] in the Greek text, a knowledge through which they had previously "escaped the pollutions of the world" [cf. II Peter 1:3, 4]).

They had understood the Word of the Kingdom and were, at one time, engaged in the race of the faith after a correct fashion; but they had turned against what they knew to be correct teaching concerning "the faith" and had begun promulgating error, misleading numerous Christians.

Then those seen in II Tim. 3:1-8 were individuals "ever learning," but, in this ever learning process, they had never been "able to come to the knowledge [Gk., epignosis (also in 2:25)] of the truth." They were men who resisted "the truth," they were men of "corrupt minds," and they were "reprobate [Gk., adokimos, 'disapproved,' 'rejected'; (cf. I Cor. 9:27 where adokimos is also used)] concerning the faith" (vv. 7, 8).

These were individuals who failed to understand "the faith"; and they taught, by example, contrary to that which they failed to understand, misleading many. And they, exactly like the false teachers in II Peter and Jude, were not only looked upon as disapproved and rejected now but they would also be disapproved and rejected before the judgment seat.

# 2) Futuristic Use by Christ

Then Christ, previously, during His earthly ministry — looking at the end result of all the apostasy and false teaching relative to "the faith" — had called attention to one sublime truth. The end result,

caused by the working of the leaven which the woman placed in the three measures of meal very early in the dispensation (Matt. 13:33), would be a COMPLETE rejection of teachings surrounding the Word of the Kingdom by Christendom at the end of the dispensation. The leaven would work until it had corrupted the WHOLE of Christendom, with this corruptive work centering on the Word of the Kingdom.

Christ asked the question, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith ['the faith'] on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). And the way in which the question is worded in the Greek text necessitates a negative response. The Son of Man is *NOT* going to find "the faith" being taught in the Churches throughout the land at the time of His return.

Though the central message which is supposed to be taught to Christians concerns "the faith," though the central message throughout all the epistles concerns "the faith," though men like Peter and Paul wanted to stir Christians up by keeping teachings concerning "the faith" ever before them (Col. 1:25-28; II Peter 1:12-15; 3:1, 2), Christians at the end of the dispensation will be found thinking along COMPLETELY different lines.

Erroneous interpretation of Scripture throughout the Churches, as it relates to the Word of the Kingdom, will be rampant. The Churches, in this respect, will be Laodicean in their theology. And, as a result, the knowledge of Christians pertaining to the Word of the Kingdom at the end of the dispensation will be nil, with their interest lying *in OTHER realms*.

And segments of Christendom, existing after this fashion, may outwardly appear to be very fundamental in their approach to Scripture. Though the "Word of the Kingdom" will form NO part of their theology, their beliefs and practices may outwardly appear to line up perfectly with Scripture.

But bear two things in mind:

- 1) True fundamentalism portends an adherence to the fundamentals of the faith, which would necessitate an adherence to the correct central teaching of Scripture (i.e., "the faith," "the Word of the Kingdom").
- 2) The leaven corrupting one area of Biblical doctrine can only, to varying degrees, extend over into other areas of Biblical doctrine as well.

(*E.g.*, note the widely promulgated and accepted Lordship Salvation teaching. This is a false teaching pertaining to salvation by grace through faith which exists under the guise of a fundamental approach to the message — a teaching which, through destroying the gospel of the glory of Christ, has corrupted the gospel of the grace of God [by taking Scriptures having to do with the gospel of the glory of Christ and attempting to teach the simple gospel of the grace of God from these Scriptures, Scriptures which have *NOTHING* to do with this gospel].)

# 5

# Rejection by the Nation

The Same as Previously Seen in the Gospels

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him" (Acts 7:51-58a).

As there was a climactic rejection point in the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel at Christ's first coming, so was there a climactic rejection point in the re-offer of the kingdom following Christ's ascension. And in each instance, reaching this climactic point resulted in a major shift in God's dealings with Israel in relation to the proffered kingdom.

In the original offer, this climactic point is seen in the events recorded in Matthew chapter twelve. Christ, in this chapter, performed numerous miraculous signs in the presence of the Jewish people (vv.

10-15). Then, in a concluding sign, Christ healed a person possessed with a demon, who was both blind and dumb. And the people, seeing this miraculous sign, asked, "Is not this the son of David?" (vv. 22, 23).

The way in which the question is worded in the Greek text indicates that the people were in a state of confusion. The Scribes and Pharisees had been following Christ about the country, seeking, at every turn, to speak against that which was being done (Matt. 12:14, 24ff; Mark 3:22ff).

And the people, hearing Jesus and seeing His miraculous signs on the one hand and then hearing a false report by their religious leaders on the other, didn't know which way to turn.

The question which they asked after seeing Christ heal a man possessed with a demon, who was both blind and dumb, could be better translated, "Is it possible that this is the son of David [with their thoughts leaning more toward the negative than the positive]?"

And their attitude toward Christ and His ministry in this respect — more negative than positive — was undoubtedly caused by the previous influence of the Scribes and Pharisees (*cf.* Matt. 23:13ff).

The people of Israel at this point in Christ's ministry, after seeing His miraculous works, could do no more than look at the validity of the Messenger and His message in the sense of "perhaps," "maybe," "possibly."

And their thoughts, *more so than not*, were in line with those of the Scribes and Pharisees. For, even though they left room for the *possibility* that Jesus was the Son of David, *they DIDN'T really think so.* 

Then, when the Scribes and Pharisees heard the reaction of the people concerning the healing of the man possessed with a demon, who was both blind and dumb, they had a false explanation for Christ's miraculous signs — an explanation designed to completely discredit Christ in the eyes of the people. They simply attributed, to Satan, the power through which Christ performed miraculous signs (v. 24).

Christ was performing miraculous signs through the power of the Holy Spirit, after the manner in which God exercises His power (v. 28; *cf.* Gen. 1:2); and the accusation of the Scribes and Pharisees was called by Christ, "the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," something which would not be forgiven the nation of Israel for two ages — the present age and the coming age (vv. 31, 32 [the word "world" in the Greek text (v. 32) is *aion* and should be translated "age"]).

Then, immediately afterwards, the Scribes and Pharisees answered Jesus by stating, "Master, we would see a sign *from thee*" (v. 38).

The intimation was clear. The Scribes and Pharisees had declared that the previously manifested sign was *NOT from Christ, and they NOW requested to see a sign from Him.* 

Thus, Christ responded after a fashion which was in complete keeping with their unbelief, false accusation, and ridiculing request:

"An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah:

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's [huge fish's] belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth..." (vv. 39, 40; cf. vv. 41-45).

This is where the ministry of Christ changed in the gospel accounts. Because of that which the Scribes and Pharisees had done, their attention, rather than being directed to a sign having to do with *the kingdom*, was directed to a sign having to do with Christ's *subsequent sufferings* — sufferings which must precede His glory.

Then, later that same day, after all of this had occurred, *Jesus* went out of the house, sat by the seaside, and began to speak to the people in parables (Matt. 13:1ff).

Within the symbolism of the passage, the "house" refers to *the house of Israel*, and the "sea" refers to *the Gentile nations*. And Christ, because of *Israel's unbelief*, began to speak in "parables" (vv. 10-15).

Israel had turned her back on the Lord; and He, correspondingly, turned His back on the nation. And, remaining within the symbolism used, *Christ left the house of Israel and went to the Gentiles, pointing to things which were about to occur because of the nation's unbelief (cf. Matt. 21:33-43).* 

The word "parable" is simply an Anglicized Greek word — from parabole — which means, "to cast alongside." The reference is to one truth placed alongside of a previous truth to help explain the previous truth.

Thus, parables were given to further explain previously revealed truths. However, for most of the nation, the parables would be meaningless.

The people *had heard* but had not understood; they *had seen* but had closed their eyes (vv. 14, 15). They *had rejected* the previous truths. Therefore, additional truths given in the form of parables to help explain the previous truths would be *meaningless* to them.

But for others in the nation—those who had heard and had understood, those who had seen and had not closed their eyes (v. 16)—the parables would provide additional information so they could better understand the message which they had previously received. They had heard (and, through parables, were about to hear more) things which "many prophets and righteous men" had desired to see, but hadn't been allowed to see in their day (v. 17; cf. I Peter 1:9-12).

Christ though, by going out of the house in Matt. 13:1, wasn't through with Israel. He gave four parables *outside the house* (vv. 18-35), then He went back *inside the house* and gave three more (vv. 36-50).

But note, even though back inside the house, Christ *continued* to speak in parables. Thus, His ministry, even within the house, took a sharp turn at this point.

Shortly afterwards Christ called attention to the Church for the first time (Matt. 16:18), and the Cross began to move more and more to the forefront (16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19). Then, shortly before the events of Calvary, Jesus, through using a parable, called attention to that which the nation had done and was about to do — rejection, followed by crucifixion (21:33-42).

And, following this, Christ made the announcement which had been anticipated ever since the events in chapters twelve and thirteen:

"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (21:43).

The kingdom (that part of the kingdom which had been offered, the kingdom of the heavens, here called "the kingdom of God") was taken from Israel with a view to the previously mentioned Church being called into existence to be the recipient of this offer (cf. Matt. 16:18; I Peter 2:9, 10). And this leads into Christ's sharp, lengthy, unparalleled rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees — those who sat in "Moses' seat" and controlled the religious life of the people.

They, through continually speaking against Christ's message and miraculous signs, were the ones directly responsible for the nation's unbelief. And, resultingly, they were the ones not only directly responsible for the nation's rejection of the message but also for the rejection and subsequent crucifixion of the Messenger as well (Matt. 23:1ff; *ref.* Chapter IV in this book, "Acceptance by Many").

But even after Israel had rejected and slain her Messiah, God saw fit to give that same generation of Jews another opportunity to repent. Following Christ's resurrection and ascension, God used individuals in the early Church to carry the message to Israel once again.

For a period extending over approximately the first thirty years of the Church's existence, Israel was given another opportunity to repent. And in this re-offer of the kingdom — actually, quite early in the re-offer — there was a climactic point in Israel's rejection of the message, similar to the one seen in the original offer.

As in the original offer, miraculous signs were in view; and also, as in the original offer, the religious leaders in Israel completely rejected the signs (Acts 6:8ff).

This all led to Stephen appearing before the council and calling the religious leaders' attention to selected segments of Israel's history from their own Scriptures, extending all the way back to Abraham.

Stephen then brought his lengthy address to a close by calling their attention to one central fact. *Unbelief and rejection had marked the nation's history from the beginning, and the present generation had done no more than climax the actions of their ancestors from preceding generations.* 

"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers" (Acts 7:51, 52; *cf.* Matt. 23:34-38).

The conclusion to this message is built on *several KEY elements in the message itself*; and that which happened immediately after Stephen concluded his message — things occurring both in heaven and upon earth — can be understood *ONLY* if one *first* understands Stephen's message.

And this message *MUST* be understood within the framework of the way God gave it, the same way Stephen expected the Jewish religious leaders to understand it.

And this requires an element of spiritual perception. A person MUST see beyond the letter of Stephen's message (beyond the mere historical content and see that of which the history speaks) in order to understand the events which occurred both in heaven and upon earth at the conclusion of this message (vv. 54ff).

A fourfold description is given of Stephen in this respect. He was a man full of *faith*, *the Spirit*, *grace*, and *power* (Acts 6:5, 8 ["faith" in v. 8 should, almost certainly, be translated "grace," though minor manuscript evidence does exist for the KJV translation, "faith"]).

"Faith" is simply believing that which God has to say about a matter, which portends that a person possesses a knowledge of the Word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17); and "grace" is that which God is able to do, completely apart from human merit.

And a person in this position, filled with the Spirit (empowering the individual), can proclaim the Word, with results following. God, completely apart from any merit on man's part, can take His proclaimed Word and bring about the desired results.

Thus, Stephen, in this position, knowing the Old Testament Scriptures to the extent that he did, could go beyond *the letter* to *the spirit* of the matter (*cf.* II Cor. 3:6-18).

He knew what the Scriptures taught, and he possessed the spiritual insight to be able to take these Scriptures and put them together after the manner in which the Spirit of God had intended that they be put together.

And this is *EXACTLY* what he did through calling attention to selected portions of Jewish history covering approximately 1,000 years.

And he did it SO WELL that, at the conclusion, activity BOTH in heaven and upon earth reached an APEX in relation to the message surrounding the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel.

On the one hand, the heavens were opened, the Glory of God was visible, and the Son of Man could be seen standing at God's right hand, awaiting the Jewish religious leaders' reaction.

And, on the other hand, the Jewish religious leaders showed their reaction after a manner heretofore unseen in the post-resurrection ministry of the apostles — by slaying Stephen (vv. 54-60).

#### From Abraham to Christ

Stephen's address in Acts chapter seven, can be divided into several parts. He began with events during Abraham's day in order to introduce God's promise concerning a *seed*, *a land*, *and an inheritance in that land* (vv. 2-7).

Then, for most of the remainder of the address, he centered his

thoughts around the experiences of two individuals — *Joseph* and *Moses* (vv. 8-43), briefly mentioning events in Israel's history, having to do mainly with the tabernacle and temple — events extending from the days of Moses to the days of Solomon (vv. 44-51).

Stephen then concluded his address by making an application which these religious leaders should have been able to easily understand, in its entirety, apart from his saying anything further. Stephen had called their attention to a sequence of events, designed in chronological order, to reveal three things:

- 1) Israel's past history.
- 2) Israel's present status.
- 3) Israel's future destiny.

Israel's present status and future destiny were to be drawn from the nation's past history, and these religious leaders should have possessed enough spiritual insight with respect to their own Scriptures to do this.

And, knowing that these religious leaders *should have possessed this insight,* Stephen brought the matter to *a close after a fashion which could only have triggered the whole of the matter within their thinking.* He correctly accused them of doing *EXACTLY* what their ancestors had done — rejecting, and even slaying, those whom God had sent unto them.

And, as *a basis* for these remarks, he had previously set before them both Joseph's rejection by his brethren and Moses' rejection by his brethren (vv. 51, 52; *cf.* vv. 9, 23-28).

And these religious leaders, seeing what they had done in the antitype ("the betrayers and murderers" of Christ), should have easily been able to see the remainder of the matter as well (revealing Israel's future), through seeing that which subsequently happened to not only Joseph's brethren but also Moses' brethren.

# 1) Overall Scope of Stephen's Address

Stephen's address moves from the promise which God gave to Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia to the building of the tabernacle during Moses' day and to the subsequent building of the temple during Solomon's day. It moves from the promise concerning a seed, a land, and an inheritance in the land to that day approximately

1,000 years later when the seed of Abraham is seen in the land realizing an inheritance, with a temple, within a theocracy (though not in complete fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, which points to a future day beyond Solomon's day).

The promise was given to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, in Mesopotamia, when he was seventy years old, five years before he departed from Haran for the land of Canaan (*cf.* Gen. 12:1-4; 15:13-16; Ex. 12:40, 41; Gal. 3:17, 18). And, though the theocracy was established at Sinai when the tabernacle was completed and the Glory of God filled the Holy of Holies, there was no temple in the land until the days of Solomon.

It was during Solomon's reign as king over Israel that the Old Testament theocracy reached its greatest height. And the building of the temple at the greatest height of the theocracy was where Stephen drew his address to a close.

In this respect, Stephen's address, covering many types, forms one overall type. It covers the whole scope of the matter — from the promise to the realization of the promise (though the full and complete realization is seen in the antitype, not in the type).

And the fact that there would be a complete, future realization of the promise given to Abraham *should have been evident* to the religious leaders hearing Stephen's address. *Knowing that God would keep His promise to Abraham, they should have been able to clearly see three things:* 

- 1) The promise was not realized in its fullness during that time in history when the kingdom was at its greatest height (in the type).
- 2) There was, at the time Stephen gave his address, no existing kingdom in Israel.
- 3) The type, set forth through events during Solomon's day, necessitates a complete, future fulfillment in the antitype.

The theocracy had been taken from Israel over six hundred years prior to the events surrounding Calvary, allowing the Gentiles to exercise governmental power and control over the earth throughout this time, extending into the present time (and this would also be within a theocracy, though under Satan, in his kingdom). However, any Jew believing that which God had promised Abraham and having

any spiritual perception at all about that portended by events during the days of Solomon *would KNOW* that "the times of the Gentiles" *MUST have an end.* Israel *MUST be reestablished* within a theocracy at some future point in time.

This would be in complete fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham — a promise which *MUST* be brought to pass; and it would fulfill the type set forth during Solomon's reign — a type which, in the antitype, *MUST* be fulfilled. *Israel MUST be reestablished in the land with her King, the Temple, and the Glory*.

These are the two points beginning and ending Stephen's message — the promise given to Abraham and the theocracy during Solomon's day. And through beginning with the promise and ending with the theocracy, Stephen called attention to the entire scope of revealed Jewish history.

Then, between these two points, in order to drive the whole matter home, Stephen, as previously stated, spent most of his discourse dealing with two individuals — *Joseph* and *Moses*. These religious leaders, after Stephen had put the whole matter together for them, *should have been able to CLEARLY SEE what their own Scriptures plainly taught*.

They, with the spiritual perception which their position portended, should have been able to CLEARLY SEE exactly what had happened, what was then happening, and what was about to happen.

Stephen had outlined the whole matter, from their own Scriptures. He had laid the whole matter out for them. And, at this point, they should have been able to reflect on this sequence of Scriptures and CLEARLY SEE these things for themselves.

The Spirit of God had given this complete, overall type extending from Abraham to Solomon in order to explain the complete, overall antitype.

And the various, individual types, making up this larger, complete type, were given for the same reason.

Stephen had placed the complete word picture before them, from their own Scriptures. It was ALL there for them to see.

And, again, they should have possessed the spiritual insight to grasp the matter at this point. Their eyes should have been opened, as had previously occurred with the two disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:25-31).

### 2) Joseph, Moses, Christ Stephen, drawing from the Old Testament Scriptures, built his

discourse mainly around two points in time — events surrounding Christ's first coming, and events surrounding Christ's second coming.

The generation of Jews to whom he spoke had witnessed and participated in events surrounding Christ's first coming, and they were being offered an opportunity to witness and participate in events surrounding Christ's second coming as well, wherein the prophesied blessings lay.

Stephen dealt with the time Joseph went to his brothers and was rejected.

And he also dealt with that later time when Joseph again stood in the presence of his brothers, with his brothers, this time, accepting him (vv. 9-13).

Then Stephen called attention to exactly the same sequence of events occurring in Moses' life — rejection at the hands of his brethren, followed by their accepting him when he appeared again at a later date (vv. 23-36).

And the acceptance, in both cases, led into a type of that time also typified by Solomon's day, where Stephen brought his review of Israeli history to a close.

Note once again what Stephen did in this discourse. He began by laying the groundwork through calling attention to the promise given to Abraham. Then he moved through three separate parts which all ended at the same point in time — the Messianic Kingdom. He moved through the days of Joseph, the days of Moses, and the days of Solomon.

And the religious leaders, hearing this message, should have had NO trouble at all grasping the whole of that which Stephen had laid out for them. The message was CLEAR.

Joseph's brothers had rejected him, and a time of intense trouble followed. The seven years of famine which followed forced them to go to Joseph in Egypt; and this second meeting of Joseph and his brothers resulted in their accepting him, with deliverance and blessings following (Gen. 37:18-20; 41:56-42:6; 45:1ff).

Moses' brethren had rejected him, and a time of intense trouble followed. The bondage under the Assyrian (Isa. 52:4) became so great that the Israelites were forced to cry out to the God of their fathers; and God, hearing their cry and remembering His covenant, sent Moses back, resulting in the people accepting him, with deliverance and blessings following (Ex. 2:14; 3:7-10; 12:1ff).

And the parallel concerning that which had happened in the antitype COULDN'T possibly be missed. The Jewish people had rejected the One Whom both Joseph and Moses typified; and, according to the types, a

time of trouble *could ONLY follow* (specifically, the Great Tribulation spoken of so much in the Old Testament, to occur following the present dispensation when God resumes His national dealings with Israel [though all the anti-Semitism throughout the dispensation would, in a respect, be in view]).

This is EXACTLY the point Stephen drove home at the end of his discourse. Stephen used words designed to provoke these religious leaders to the point that they would be forced to see, from their own Scriptures, that which had been done. And knowing that they would be provoked to the point of seeing this much of the matter, the hope and expectation was there that they would also go on to see the remainder as well.

Between the rejection and acceptance lay *trouble*. Christ had been rejected, and only *trouble* awaited the nation. But still, even though this was set forth in the types, which couldn't be broken, that generation was given a choice. The wrong could be rectified, and the nation could move into that prophesied era of blessings lying beyond Joseph's rejection, beyond Moses' rejection, and beyond Christ's rejection. They could move into that prophesied era typified by the manifested Glory during Solomon's day.

The choice left to Israel had been echoed by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) and by Peter again at a later time (Acts 3:19-26). This is what the re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens had to do with, along with all the signs, wonders, and miracles continuing to be manifested. Israel was given an opportunity to repent (the nation was given an opportunity to change its mind), followed by national baptism.

Israel had rejected her Messiah, and the Jewish people were now being given an opportunity to receive the One Whom they had rejected.

Viewing the matter from the vantage point of Stephen's discourse, ONLY trouble could ensue during the interim lying between rejection and acceptance, and blessings could ultimately follow ONLY after acceptance.

(Note that though a bona fide offer of the kingdom to Israel occurred in both the original offer and the re-offer, *Israel, in reality, COULDN'T accept at either time.* 

Their destiny in this respect had already been SET in the types and the Prophets. Trouble ensued in the types and the Prophets before blessings, and it had to occur after this same fashion in both the antitype and in the fulfillment of that which the Prophets had foretold.)

### Looking Up into Heaven

Stephen simply laid out before Israel's religious leaders *exactly* what God Himself had to say about the matter, *EXACTLY after the manner in which God had revealed it*. And, with this in mind, is it any wonder that the heavens were opened, the Glory was manifested, and Jesus was seen standing at God's right hand (*cf.* Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:13)?

Everything was in readiness in heaven, and the decision was left to Israel's religious leaders on earth.

Had the Jewish religious leaders at this point reacted positively to the message and, in turn, led the nation in a correct direction (national repentance, followed by national baptism), Christ would have returned and restored the kingdom to Israel.

However, rejection would lead to just the opposite. The Son would resumeHis position, seated at God's right hand; and the Jewish nation would have to await both "the fulness of the Gentiles" and "the times of the Gentiles" before the heavens would again open (*cf.* Luke 21:20-24; Rom. 11:25-27).

### 1) The Heavens Opened.

Beyond Acts chapter seven, there are only three instances in Scripture where the heavens are opened. However, only the last two times where this is seen (two depictions of the same opening) correspond with events following Stephen's message.

The heavens were opened in Acts 10:11 to allow Peter to see a vision, revealing that God no longer distinguished between the Jews and the Gentiles in relation to the message being proclaimed (vv. 12-14, 28, 29; *cf.* Matt. 10:5-8), though it was still "to the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16).

Then the heavens will be opened when Christ breaks the sixth seal during the coming Tribulation (Rev. 6:12-17), which is the first of three places in this book depicting events surrounding Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation.

Then, the other depiction of this same opening appears in Rev. 19:11ff — Christ coming forth as "King of kings, and Lord of lords" at the end of the Tribulation to put an end to "the times of the Gentiles," to reestablish Israel in her rightful place at the head of the nations, and to rule and reign over the earth for 1,000 years (*cf.* Rev. 14:14-20).

Thus, only the scene depicted in Revelation chapters six and nineteen corresponds to the heavens being opened in Acts chapter seven.

The heavens being opened following Stephen's address anticipated the possibility that Christ would come forth, restoring the kingdom with its Glory to Israel. However, such didn't occur because of the subsequent, climactic reaction — rejection — of the Jewish religious leaders.

Rather than perceiving the whole of that which Stephen had laid out before them, they apparently saw no farther than the events surrounding Calvary (Joseph's rejection and Moses' rejection, typifying Christ's rejection).

And, resultingly, they became infuriated to the point that they took Stephen, cast him outside the city, and stoned him (Acts 7:54-58).

And, as a consequence — though the message continued to be proclaimed, with the door remaining open for Israel to repent (continuing to remain open for almost three more decades) — the heavens would NOT be seen opened again in relation to Christ's return and the restoration of the kingdom with its Glory to Israel until that future day following Israel's greatest time of trouble, in Rev. 6:12-17; 19:11ff (cf. chs. 6-19a).

## 2) The Glory, The Son of Man

The Glory was removed from Israel at the time of the Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 10:4, 18; 11:22, 23). *And, with this captivity and the removal of the Glory, the theocracy ended and "the times of the Gentiles" began.* 

There can be *NO* restored theocracy during "the times of the Gentiles." But this period of time *MUST also one day end,* with the Glory and the theocracy subsequently being restored to Israel (Ezek. 43:1-5). This is what was anticipated by the Glory being seen through the opened heavens.

And the expression, "Son of man," is *a Messianic title*, drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures (*cf.* Ps. 8:4-6; Dan. 7:13, 14; Heb. 2:5-10). This expression was used by Christ on numerous occasions during His earthly ministry, referring to Himself (*e.g.*, Matt. 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8; 13:37, 41; 16:13-16).

And Stephen's use of this expression, describing to Israel's religious leaders what he saw in heaven, was in complete keeping with its Messianic usage elsewhere. Stephen, through the opened heavens, saw *the Glory of God* and *the Son of Man standing*, awaiting Israel's reaction to the message.

A more powerful message could not have been delivered to Israel's religious leaders. This wasn't what Stephen had to say about the matter. Rather, this was what God had to say. And, resultingly, it put the heavens in motion to the extent that it did. And also, resultingly, it caused an uproar on earth to the extent that it did as well.

On the one hand, the heavens were opened, revealing movement within the Godhead itself.

On the other hand, Israel's religious leaders on earth were so shaken that they slew the man who had called their attention to that which God had to say.

(And herein is a truth which needs to be instilled within every minister, along with every other Christian, in the country. If an individual, in his ministry and witness, wants to proclaim the type message which will result in movement among those both in heaven and upon earth, there's only *ONE WAY* in which it can be done. It can be done *ONLY after the SAME fashion that Stephen did it*.

This is why Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word..." [i.e., Proclaim that which God has to say about the matter (II Tim. 4:2)]. And note the context of Paul's exhortation — Christ's appearance to judge man and to then rule and reign in His kingdom [vv. 1-8].

Then note that which subsequently happened to Paul when he followed his own instructions to Timothy and proclaimed the message after the same fashion Stephen had done immediately preceding his death, a death Paul had consented to [II Tim. 1:15; 4:14-18].)

Thus, with a message of the nature Stephen proclaimed, is it any wonder that the nation found itself at this climactic place, with Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, coming into the picture immediately afterwards? Stephen's message, with its conclusion, is the apex of the Book of Acts.

The course which the nation would take for the next two millenniums was SET at this point, with all the sufferings which the nation would have to endure.

And, with Stephen's death, the progression of events in the Book of Acts began to increasingly go in a completely different direction, as had previously been seen through a similar negative reaction of Israel's religious leaders in Matthew chapter twelve during the original offer of the kingdom to Israel.

# 6

# **Paul's Conversion**

A Prototype of Israel's Conversion Yet Future

"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 any be found of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 9:1-5).

Saul, later called Paul, is introduced in Scripture at the same time Stephen was cast out of the city and stoned by the council. Stephen had laid out before the council, from their own Scriptures, *EXACTLY* what had happened, was happening, and was about to happen.

And this was something which couldn't be denied, for Stephen had simply called their attention to EXACTLY what God had to say about the matter, EXACTLY as God had revealed it.

Then, closing his discourse, Stephen provoked the Jewish religious leaders to the point of forcing them to see that which had been done, based on revelation from their own Scriptures (Acts 7:51-58).

Because of that which the Jewish religious leaders had just heard, Stephen, in his closing remarks, forced the issue after such a fashion that they were left with *two choices*. These religious leaders could either:

- 1) Acknowledge that which they had done.
- 2) Or, do away with the one who had called this to their attention.

They could either *acknowledge* being "the betrayers and murderers" of "the Just One" and repent of their act (subsequently resulting in the entire nation repenting) or they could *do away* with Stephen and leave matters unchanged.

And even though Stephen's message moved the very Godhead in heaven to react after a fashion which anticipated the possibility that Israel would repent — the heavens being opened, with the Glory visible and Jesus seen standing at God's right hand — God, in His omniscience, knew EXACTLY what these Jewish religious leaders would do.

He knew that they would reject the message and slay Stephen. And He had a particular man ready, standing by — a man introduced at this point in Scripture for reasons known only to God at this time.

Those in the council laid their clothes down "at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen..." Saul was "consenting" unto Stephen's death, and he "kept the raiment" of those who slew Stephen (Acts 7:58-8:1; 22:20).

And not only was Saul introduced at this point in the book, but attention was immediately called to his actions.

He was the great persecutor of believing Jews. He "made havoc of the Church" (*ref.* Ch. IV, p. 60, in the author's book, *Message in the Gospels, Acts, Epistles*). He entered into homes and dragged believers away, having them imprisoned and beaten. Saul was at the center of the "great persecution" arising at the time of Stephen's death (Acts 8:1-3; 22:19).

But God had other plans for Saul. This was the man who, himself, would shortly be converted and subsequently experience a lifetime of sufferings for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16).

This was the man who, following his conversion, would give himself wholly over to Christ, as, prior to his conversion, he, unknowingly, had given himself wholly over to the cause of destroying the work of Christ on earth.

And, accordingly, this was the man through whom God would make known the mystery, the man God had chosen to carry the message which had been rejected by Israel to the Gentiles, and the man God had chosen to pen most of the New Testament epistles.

This is why attention in the Book of Acts, shortly following his introduction, shifts to Saul. *He is introduced* at the end of the seventh chapter, *his activities* are outlined at the beginning of the eighth chapter,

his conversion is recorded at the beginning of the ninth chapter, and by the time of the events recorded in the thirteenth chapter he occupies the central place among Christians within God's plans and purposes as they unfold throughout the remainder of the book.

Events surrounding the termination of Stephen's message present one of the most interesting pictures in all of Scripture.

On the one hand, the heavens were opened, with the Glory visible and Jesus seen standing at His Father's right hand, awaiting the Jewish religious leaders' reaction to the message.

And, on the other hand, Saul was standing by, for God already knew how these religious leaders would react.

(Since God already knew how these religious leaders would react, some may be inclined to wonder why God would open the heavens and reveal His Glory and His Son after this fashion, portending the possibility of something occurring which God already knew couldn't occur.

And, beyond that, God already had Saul standing by to be introduced at the time of Israel's climactic rejection, with a view to the progression of events throughout the remainder of the dispensation going in a completely different direction, though the re-offer of the kingdom continued to remain open to Israel.

The outworking of God's plans and purposes in the preceding respect can best be understood in the light of the overall offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel.

Preceding Calvary there was an offer of the kingdom, and following Calvary there was a re-offer of the kingdom. And the nation couldn't possibly have accepted the offer at either time, which God, in His omniscience, knew beforehand.

But, even though Israel couldn't possibly have accepted the offer in either instance, a bona fide offer was made in both instances. And even following Stephen's death the SAME bona fide offer remained open throughout the time covered by the remainder of the book, though things within God's plans and purposes were then moving in an entirely different direction.

Thus, when the heavens were opened at the termination of Stephen's message — with the Glory visible and Jesus seen standing — there was a bona fide movement within the Godhead in heaven relative to the possibility of Israel repenting. Such a movement was in complete keeping with the way things had been done during the original offer and during the re-offer of the kingdom. And this was done [as other things had

been done before] even though God knew [as at any time before] that the nation wouldn't repent.

This is simply the manner in which God is seen revealing Himself in Scripture. And God even revealed Himself through Paul after this fashion very near the end of that period during which the re-offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel. When Paul wrote Romans [about 60 A.D.], he said:

"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" [9:3].

Paul's desire to see Israel repent was *so great* that he himself was willing to be separated from Christ and His Glory if such could bring this to pass.

Even though things were going in a completely different direction at this time, with the door for Israel about to be closed, God had still left the door open to this degree.

Paul and others, ministering out in the Gentile world, were still, in accord with Rom. 1:16, going "to the Jew first" *in every city* where their ministry carried them. This was in complete keeping with God's plans and purposes, though this was also with a view to something which couldn't happen. And, even though it couldn't happen, they ministered after a fashion expecting that it could, and possibly would, happen.

Again, this is simply the manner in which God is seen revealing Himself in Scripture. And the matter is not so much for man in his finite wisdom to understand as it is for man in his finite wisdom to believe.)

## Paul — A Type

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern [Gk., hupotuposis, "original type," "prototype"] to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Tim. 1:15, 16).

The conversion and subsequent ministry of Paul forms *a dual type*. One facet of the type is revealed at the outset of God's dealings with Paul in the Book of Acts, and the other facet of the type is revealed toward the end of Paul's ministry in his first letter to Timothy (Acts

9:1ff; I Tim. 1:15, 16).

The first part of the type reflects back on Stephen's message, setting Paul forth as a type within the framework of that which Stephen had called attention to through drawing from several different types.

And *the second part of the type* reflects back on Paul's ministry, setting Paul forth as *a type* within the framework of his calling.

And only an omniscient God — One able to see the future as well as He could see the past and present — could take a man such as Paul and, from his experiences and actions, establish a dual type of this nature.

But this is only a very minute part of the typical structure of Scripture. God, throughout His Word, beginning with Adam, has taken individuals, and, within the framework of His omniscience and sovereignty, has brought things to pass within their lives after such a fashion that He could later use these things to teach His people *great spiritual truths*.

And the experiences of these individuals, forming types, *MUST* present teachings which are completely harmonious, one with the other.

The Word of God, in this respect, has been structured after an intricately detailed fashion which defies all human understanding.

It is *spiritual* in its structure, given by the infinite God, through the Spirit, and totally beyond finite, human comprehension; and *it MUST be interpreted by the Spirit Who gave it, as He takes spiritual things one place and compares them with spiritual things in another place.* 

Anyone, saved or unsaved, can see the "letter" of Scripture. But only a saved person who allows the indwelling Holy Spirit to lead him "into all truth" can possess the type spiritual perception which will allow him to move from the "letter" to the "spirit" of the Word, correctly viewing that which is *spiritual*.

Scripture must be compared with Scripture, under the leadership of the Spirit of God. The Spirit, Who gave the Word, MUST be allowed to open this Word to a Christian's understanding through "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (cf. John 16:13-15; I Cor. 2:9-3:2).

And one form of the spiritual manner in which the Word has been given can be seen in Paul's conversion and subsequent ministry.

Paul's conversion *followed* Stephen's extensive use of various types (forming one overall type) from the Old Testament, in relation to the message concerning *Israel and the kingdom*; and Paul's conversion *pre-*

*ceded* that which God was about to do within His plans and purposes, in relation to the message concerning *Christians and the kingdom*.

Thus, in keeping with the timing and reason for Paul's conversion, as previously noted, God, from a typical standpoint, brought matters to pass in two realms:

- 1) He, through Paul's conversion, *formed one part of the type* by reflecting back on that which Stephen had brought out in his message.
- 2) He, through Paul's calling, would form another part of the *type* by reflecting on things which were about to occur within the framework of His plans and purposes.

The first part of the type was *in relation to Israel*, and the second would be *in relation to Christians*.

#### 1) In Relation to Israel

Stephen, during the course of his message, began with God's promise to Abraham and ended with God's fulfillment of this promise during Solomon's day (though the complete fulfillment is seen, not in the type through activities brought to pass in Solomon's day, but in the antitype through activities which will be brought to pass in that coming day following Christ's return).

But Stephen also dealt with other types lying between these two points in his complete message, types which carry a person to the same goal, to the Messianic Kingdom. He dealt extensively with the experiences of Joseph; and then he also dealt extensively with the experiences of Moses, leading into those of his successor, Joshua.

That which had just occurred in Israel — the rejection of Israel's Messiah — was set forth in the experiences of both Joseph and Moses. And that set forth in the experiences of Solomon, concluding Stephen's message, was also previously set forth in additional experiences of both Joseph and Moses — experiences following the time of their acceptance by their brethren (concluded, in Moses' case, with the experiences of his successor, Joshua).

Then, when God began to deal with Paul, He set forth these same concluding truths again within the framework of Paul's conversion.

God, through Paul's conversion, set forth once again *a type of Israel's future conversion*. Even though Israel had rejected that which had been set forth several different ways in Stephen's message (blessings to follow the rejection and sufferings, associated with Israel's future conversion), God set the matter forth *once again* in the person through whom He was now about to deal.

God, because of Israel's rejection, turned to Paul, the man whom He had chosen to carry the message pertaining to the kingdom to the Gentiles — the Gentiles saved first, then the message of the kingdom to be proclaimed to them. But in Paul's very conversion, God showed the end of that to which Stephen had referred, though an entire dispensation lasting 2,000 years would elapse before these things could occur.

In the very conversion of the man whom God had chosen as the apostle to the Gentiles (with a view to Israel being set aside for the remainder of the dispensation), God showed *the END* of the matter in relation *to Israel*. God showed *EXACTLY* what would happen to Israel at the end of the present dispensation, *EXACTLY* as Stephen had shown the Jewish council, *EXACTLY* as the Old Testament prophets had foretold.

Paul was converted through Christ's personal appearance, through Christ personally revealing Himself to him. This same type was previously seen through both Joseph revealing himself to his brethren a second time (Gen. 45:1ff) and Moses revealing himself to his brethren a second time (Ex. 4:19ff). And all three types point to that coming day when Christ will reveal Himself to His brethren a second time (Zech. 12:10-14; 13:6-9; Rev. 1:7).

Paul, in the type, was converted as the apostle to the Gentiles, the one who would carry the message concerning the King and His kingdom to all the Gentile nations.

And, in the antitype, this is *EXACTLY* what will occur following Israel's national conversion. Israel, in accord with the nation's calling, will carry God's message to all the Gentile nations.

The Jewish people will carry the identical message which Joseph's brothers carried in the type, following Joseph's revelation to them — "Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt" (Gen. 45:26).

Carried over into the antitype this message would read, "Jesus is yet alive, and He is Governor over all the earth."

And they will carry the identical message which Moses' brethren were to carry following his second appearance to them. Once they had been established in the land, within a theocracy, they, in fulfillment of their calling (Isa. 43:1-10), were to carry God's message to the Gentile nations of the earth.

Exactly when will all this occur? God revealed once again, immediately following Paul's conversion, the answer. It will occur *after two days, on the third day* (Acts 9:9), as seen in the opening of the eyes of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus by Christ personally appearing unto them on the third day (Luke 24:13-31).

(The exact wording of Acts 9:9 states that Paul was without sight for "three days." But note the exact wording of several other related texts. Jonah was in the belly of the fish "three days and three nights," as Christ was in "the heart of the earth" this same length of time [Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:40]. Christ though was raised "on the third day," as Israel will be yet future [Matt. 16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19; Luke 24:21, 46], which means that Jonah [a type of both Christ and Israel] had to also be raised *on the third day*.

Both Hosea in the Old Testament and John in the New reveal that Israel's blindness will be lifted [synonymous with Israel, as Jonah, being removed from the place of death] *after two days, on the third day* [Hosea 5:15-6:2; John 11:6, 7, 43, 44; *cf.* Rom. 11:25, 26; II Cor. 3:14-16].

Thus, when dealing with Paul as a type, the same thing must be said relative to the length of time Paul remained blind, with his sight then being restored. As a type of Israel, he was blind *for three days*, with his sight then being restored [Jonah 1:17]; but also, as a type of Israel, it was *after two days, on the third day* that his sight was restored [Hosea 5:15-6:2].

Viewing "three days" and "on the third day" as synonymous expressions after this fashion [which has to be the case, for this is the way both are set forth in Scripture, referring to the same period of time] is in complete keeping with the way God has established matters in the Old Testament and carried them over into the New [cf. Gen. 40:13, 20; I Sam. 30:12, 13; II Chron. 10:5, 12; Esther 4:16; 5:1; Jonah 1:17; Matt. 12:40]. Only through reckoning time within a given sequence of days, as God has established time, revealed in the Old Testament, can statements that Christ was raised "on the third day" be reconciled with statements that He was raised "after three days" [cf. Matt. 27:63; Mark 8:31; Luke 24:7, 21, 46; I Cor. 15:4].

And the same statements are seen in Scripture relative to Israel's future restoration as well, for all of God's firstborn Sons will be raised up to live in His sight *on the third day* [ref. Chapter V, "Three Days and Three Nights," in the author's book, O Sleeper! Arise, Call!].)

Then note one additional thing about Paul's conversion. Paul's immersion in and filling with the Spirit, following his conversion, was connected with *Joel's prophecy and its fulfillment*. Immediately following the time that his sight was restored — *after two days, on the third day* — Paul was "filled with the Holy Spirit"; and he then "arose, and was baptized" (Acts 9:17, 18).

The word used for "fill" — being filled with the Spirit — in verse seventeen is *pimplemi*. And this is the same word which the Spirit had previously used in chapter two relative to the disciples being filled with the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, resulting in *a beginning fulfillment of Joel's prophecy* at the time that the message surrounding the re-offer of the kingdom began to be proclaimed to Israel.

(*Ref.* Chapter I in this book, "Continuing from the Gospels," pp. 9-16, for a discussion of the Greek words *pimplemi* and *pleroo* in relation to Joel's prophecy and Christians today.)

In effect, through using *pimplemi* relative to the work of the Spirit at the time of Paul's conversion, God showed two things:

- 1) The re-offer of the kingdom still remained open to Israel, with the possibility remaining that Joel's prophecy could still be fulfilled at that time.
- 2) Joel's prophecy (though not being fulfilled today, for God is not presently dealing with Israel) will be fulfilled in its completeness in the antitype of Paul's conversion at the time of Israel's future conversion, following the two days of the present dispensation, on the third day.

### 2) In Relation to Christians

The additional type which God established through Paul's experiences had to do with God's longsuffering in His dealings with Paul, mainly in relation to the manner in which God dealt with Paul following his conversion experience in Acts chapter nine. This type, in connection with God's longsuffering, had to do with Paul's calling as the apostle to the Gentiles. And, within this calling, it had to do with the manner in which Paul conducted his life (because of that which he knew lay out ahead), the resultant sufferings which he endured,

and the resultant glory which would follow.

God established within the person of Paul a "pattern" [Gk., hupotuposis, referring to 'an original type,' 'a prototype']. And God, in the person of His Son, had been longsuffering toward Paul, establishing this prototype (I Tim. 1:15, 16).

Though God had been longsuffering toward Paul in his preconversion days (as Paul went about seeking to destroy the work of Christ on earth), the text centers on God's longsuffering relative to Paul in his post-conversion days. That is, the prototype established in the person of Paul has to do with both, but the text and context center more specifically on the latter. And through His longsuffering in this respect, God established an original type which the Spirit could later use to teach Christians "the deep things of God" surrounding not only Israel's calling but their calling as well (I Cor. 2:10).

In the verses immediately preceding this section in I Timothy, Paul referred to "the glorious gospel [lit., 'the gospel of the glory'] of the blessed God," which had been "committed" to his trust. And Paul then expressed thanks unto the Lord for empowering him, counting him faithful, and calling him into the ministry, though he had previously been "a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious [injurious with respect to 'violence']." But the grace which God had showed toward Paul "was exceedingly abundant," looking completely beyond that which man had done or was able to do to that which God was not only able to do but would do (vv. 11-14).

Then, in the verses immediately following this section in I Timothy, Paul first referred to "the King eternal..." to Whom "be honour and glory forever and ever." Then he charged Timothy concerning the spiritual warfare and the necessity of believing and being spiritually aware of the issue at hand, which was in complete keeping with that which the Spirit of God had previously revealed through the prophets. And Paul's charge in this respect was with a view to the faith—"which some having put away concerning faith [lit., 'concerning the faith'] have made shipwreck" (vv. 17-20).

The whole of the matter in I Tim. 1:11-20 involves Paul set forth as *a pattern, an original type, a prototype,* of how individuals, after they have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, can govern their lives in order to one day come into a realization of the hope of their calling. It has

to do with Paul set forth as *the pattern* which Christians can follow if they, as Paul, would one day realize the purpose for their salvation.

Paul was *a driven man*. He, on the basis of that which had been revealed to him, looked out ahead and saw *a goal*; and he was *completely*, *totally obsessed with reaching this revealed goal*. Attaining to this goal governed *everything* brought to pass in the course of his ministry.

Paul had been commissioned as the apostle to the Gentiles to carry the gospel of the glory of Christ to Christians throughout the Gentile world. And his thoughts were centered completely in this realm, in the realm of his calling. And though Paul, during the course of his ministry, often dealt with the unsaved and had to begin with the simple gospel of the grace of God (e.g., Acts 16:30, 31; 20:24; I Cor. 15:3, 4; cf. I Cor. 2:2), this was NOT the central focus of his ministry. Rather, the central focus of Paul's ministry — that to which he had been called — had to do with the gospel of the glory of Christ (as seen in I Tim. 1:11-20, along with numerous other places throughout his epistles).

This was the realm upon which *his every thought was constantly focused*. This was the realm upon which *his entire ministry centered*.

Paul looked out toward that coming day when Christ would ascend the throne; and, knowing that *the very purpose for his salvation* had to do with ascending the throne with Christ in that coming day, Paul did two things:

- 1) Paul governed his own life accordingly.
- 2) He sought to instruct and exhort other Christians to govern their lives after the same fashion, for the same reason (cf. Eph. 1:15-18; Phil. 3:7-21; Col. 1:23-29).

And God set Paul forth as *a pattern, an original type, a prototype,* in this respect (*cf.* Phil. 3:17-19; II Tim. 1:13). His life, because he had given himself wholly over to Christ and the Spirit's leadership, was one of suffering, rejection, physical and spiritual abuse, imprisonment... (II Cor. 11:23-27). But it was also one of corresponding involvement with "the care of all the churches" (v. 28) and one wherein he could say toward the end of his journey:

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Tim. 4:7, 8).

God, through Paul, has set forth *His example, His prototype*. Paul's life *was given over ENTIRELY to fulfilling that to which he had been called*. The personal cost, in his eyes, was immaterial. He took exactly the same attitude toward sufferings in his ministry which Christ had taken toward sufferings at Calvary (Heb. 12:2).

Achieving the goal would be worth any sufferings or persecution which he would have to endure. And his interest, far from being in himself alone, was equally, *if not more so*, in seeing that Christians within the scope of his ministry achieved this same goal as well (*cf.* Acts 20:25-32).

#### Paul — The Apostle to the Gentiles

Paul was saved to carry the message which Israel had rejected to Christians throughout the Gentile world (though there were no Christians in the Gentile world at that time). The message had gone to the Samaritans at the time of the dispersion following Stephen's death (Acts 8:5), but this message was carried to the Gentiles only following Paul's conversion.

Those in the household of Cornelius were the first Gentiles to hear the message, though this message came from Peter's lips rather than from Paul's (Acts 10:34-48). But Peter, within the next three chapters of the book (chs. 11-13), would gradually be replaced by Paul as the central person through whom God would carry out His plans and purposes in the early Church.

"The gospel of the circumcision" had been committed to Peter; but now Paul had been called forth to carry the gospel to the "uncircumcised" (Gal. 2:7; *cf.* Acts 9:15; 26:13-20; Rom. 11:13). Thus, there is a transition in central personages, from Peter to Paul, at this point in the book.

(It is often taught that the eunuch from Ethiopia in Acts chapter eight was a Gentile from that part of the world. However, this cannot be correct, for the message was not carried beyond Samaria, to the Gentiles, until later [in ch. 10].

The eunuch in chapter eight, to whom Philip proclaimed truths concerning Christ from Isaiah chapter fifty-three, could only have been a Jew living in Ethiopia who had been to Jerusalem to worship [as those Jews from "every nation under heaven" on the day of Pentecost in the second chapter of the book].)

### 1) Because of Israel's Rejection

In the original offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel in the gospel accounts there was *a climactic rejection by Israel*, recorded in Matthew chapter twelve. And it was *only following* this climactic rejection that the calling into existence of the Church came into view in Christ's ministry (Matt. 16:18).

*The same thing* can be seen in the re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, though from a different perspective.

In the re-offer of the kingdom, there was a climactic rejection by Israel in Acts chapter seven, and this was immediately followed by a heretofore unseen individual being introduced. Paul, the one whom God had chosen to carry the message to the Gentiles, was waiting in the wings.

The Church was God's new entity on earth to begin carrying God's message to the Gentiles (though God's command was to carry the message "to the Jew first" so long as the offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel). And Paul was the central person within this new entity — the one whom God had chosen — to lead those comprising this new entity *in a correct direction* at the beginning.

And not only was this the case, but Paul was the one through whom God had chosen to make known all the various things surrounding the message being carried to the Gentiles — things encompassed within the scope of *the mystery* (Eph. 3:1-11).

Then, beyond that, Paul was correspondingly the vehicle through whom God would, by means of *His revealed Word*, communicate to the Church the numerous things surrounding the ministry to which He had called Paul.

God would use Paul to write thirteen epistles. And these epistles, along with the general epistles (including Hebrews, which Paul couldn't have written [Heb. 2:3b]), would reflect on preceding revelation and provide *all the various God-given facets of information* surrounding the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to the Gentiles.

# 2) The Course of the Dispensation Set

From the moment that the Jewish religious leaders rejected Stephen's message and "ran upon him with one accord," placing their clothes "at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul," and "stoned Stephen" (Acts 7:57-59), the course of the dispensation was SET.

God, from this point forward, though the door still remained open for Israel to repent, would begin to work with and through Paul.

From this point forward, the progression of events would *increasingly* go in a completely different direction. From this point forward, *the focal point* for the message would be the Gentile world.

And because of the man whom God had chosen — a man wholly given over to fulfilling his calling — this message would be carried throughout the Gentile world during the short course of the next three decades (Col. 1:5, 6, 20-23).

Paul was *to set the course* which Christians comprising the Church at the time of and following his conversion were to take, and he was *to be the prototype* set forth by God to show how other Christians, as well, should conduct their lives as they moved in this direction.

Note also II Tim. 1:13 (the only other place *hupotuposis* ["original type," "prototype"] is used in the N.T.):

"Hold fast the form [Gk., *hupotuposis*] of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."

Pastors of Churches throughout the dispensation were/are to conduct their ministries after the pattern set by Paul — centering their ministries to those under their care *THE SAME PLACE* Paul centered his ministry—*on the coming kingdom with its Glory*. And Christians under their care are to likewise center their attention *EXACTLY THE SAME PLACE*.

This is the direction toward which all of Paul's epistles move, which is in complete keeping with the direction toward which all Scripture moves. And if any minister proclaims the Word, THE ONLY THING WHICH GOD HAS GIVEN HIM TO PROCLAIM, he cannot help but bring his ministry in line with Paul's ministry, in line with the prototype.

It cannot be otherwise. It would be IMPOSSIBLE to have a ministry centered around proclaiming the Word, following the prototype, but not centered around proclaiming the things having to do with the coming kingdom of Christ.

# 7

# Paul's Immediate Message

Continuing with the Re-offer of the Kingdom

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took council to kill him:

But their lying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him" (Acts 9:20-24).

Paul, traveling from Jerusalem to Damascus, carried "letters" from the high priest in Jerusalem. These letters were addressed to "the brethren" (to the Jews in the synagogues in Damascus); and they gave Paul the authority, as the official agent of the Sanhedrin, to carry out the task at hand. These letters would be recognized by the Jews in Damascus as official documents, allowing Paul the freedom to find, bind, and take back to Jerusalem any individuals which he found in Damascus "of this way" (cf. Acts 9:1, 2; 22:4, 5; 26:10-12).

Paul though, through Christ's personal appearance to him, was converted enroute to Damascus. And following his immersion in and being filled with the Spirit, Paul spent several days with the disciples he had come to Damascus to bind and take back to Jerusalem.

Then, immediately afterward, he went to the synagogues in Damascus, but not with reference to the letters which he carried. Rather, he went to the synagogues to proclaim that which he himself had come to realize — that Jesus was the Son of God, the very Christ (Acts 9:1-22).

This astonished those who heard him, for they knew what he had been doing and the original intent of his journey from Jerusalem to Damascus. And, because of that which he was now doing, the Jews in Damascus "took counsel to kill him" (vv. 20-23).

But, unlike Stephen's ministry which had come to an end following his proclamation of this same truth, the Lord was just beginning to work through Paul.

Some of the disciples in Damascus lowered Paul over the city wall in a basket (since the city gates were guarded), and Paul then traveled to Jerusalem and sought to "join himself to the disciples" there.

But, prior to Barnabas' intervention on Paul's behalf, explaining what had happened at Damascus, the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him (vv. 24-27).

Afterward, Paul began to speak "boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus" in Jerusalem, resulting in some of the disciples in the city having to take him to Caesarea and then send him to Tarsus, outside the land of Israel (vv. 28-30).

And it was after this that the Lord led Paul into Arabia, removed him into His presence in heaven, and personally taught him — over a period lasting possibly as long as three years — the message which he was to carry to the Gentiles (II Cor. 12:1-7; Gal. 1:11-18).

Note in the Book of Acts that Paul is conspicuously absent during the period extending from verse thirty of chapter nine to verse twenty-five of chapter eleven. And this period not only covers several years but events occurring during this period opened the way for Paul, at the end of this period, to be reintroduced and begin the ministry to which he had been called.

During this period, the message had begun to be carried to the Gentiles (10:1ff); and once Paul had been taught the various things about the message which he was to carry to the Gentiles, then he is reintroduced in the book and replaces Peter as the central person in the early Church through whom God would then continue His work (13:2ff).

Peter had been God's chosen spokesman to carry the message to the Jews. But, with Israel's climactic rejection after hearing Stephen, there was a shift within God's plans and purposes from the Jews to the Gentiles; and attention at this time immediately turned to Paul, who was God's chosen spokesman to later carry the message to the Gentiles (*cf.* Gal. 2:7, 8). And, though the door still remained open for Israel to repent, with the message, of necessity, still going "to the Jew first," it was now "also to the Greek [Gentile]" (Rom. 1:16).

Following Stephen's death, the emphasis shifted from Peter's ministry to Paul's ministry (though Paul hadn't even been converted at this time, and his main ministry would not begin for several years). The emphasis shifted from the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel to an offer of the kingdom to the Gentiles (saved Gentiles, Christians), though, again, the message was still "to the Jew first."

(In order to see the proper sequence of different things which have been briefly covered in the preceding several paragraphs, the remainder of this chapter will deal with *Paul's ministry immediately following his conversion;* the next chapter [Ch. VIII] will deal with "the mystery" opened up and revealed to Paul by the Lord after he had been taken to Arabia, then to heaven; and several following chapters [particularly Chs. IX, X, and XII] will deal with *Paul's ministry after his return*.

Paul's ministry within the scope of his calling — as the apostle to the Gentiles — is seen only following his return [from heaven, then from Arabia], for this ministry had to do with "the mystery" which had been revealed to him [cf. II Cor. 12:1-7; Gal. 1:11-18; Eph. 3:1-11; Col. 1:20-29].

Paul's ministry immediately following his conversion [a relatively short ministry] was to Israel, with the kingdom of the heavens in view.

And following his being taught by the Lord Himself, his ministry [covering several decades] was to the Gentiles — though, still "to the Jew first" — with the kingdom of the heavens still in view.

[The Apostle John, in the Book of Revelation, was taken to the Isle of Patmos and then removed from this isle into Christ's presence, into a future time, to personally see the events transpire which God wanted him to record and send to the seven Churches in Asia (the future judgment of Christians, the future Tribulation, Christ's return and millennial reign, and the eternal ages beyond).

Something very similar happened to Paul when he was taken into Arabia to be taught the message which he was to proclaim throughout the Gentile world.

Paul, in his second letter to the Church in Corinth, called attention to a past time when he was removed into "the third heaven," into "paradise," which could only have been the dwell-

ing place of God. And there Paul received "revelations" (II Cor. 12:1-4, 7; *cf.* Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7). Paul, like John, had been taken to a remote place on the earth, then removed into the heavens to receive the revealed Word, *directly from Christ Himself*.

Note that the preceding is evidently what will happen to the 144,000 Jews in Rev. 14 as well, those Jews who will proclaim a message which they could know little to nothing about at the time of their conversion, but a message which they will proclaim worldwide to the Gentiles during the last half of the Tribulation (ref. Ch. XXVI in the author's book, *The Time of the End*)].

The WHOLE of the New Testament has to do with a message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens. This message is introduced in the gospels [derived from the Old Testament Scriptures], continued in Acts, then continued in the epistles [both the Pauline and general epistles], and then realized in the Book of Revelation.

Salvation itself is looked upon in *TWO main senses* in the New Testament:

- 1) Man passing from death unto life [being brought back into a position wherein he can realize the purpose for his very existence to rule and reign (Gen. 1:26-28)].
- 2) Man ultimately coming into a realization of the purpose for his very existence [occupying a position with Christ in the kingdom].

The message to Israel in both the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts centers around the latter, not the former. The message was directed to a people to whom God had, during Moses' day, given the Passover lamb; and these people — the Jewish people — had been sacrificing and applying the blood of the paschal lambs year after year throughout the centuries from Moses to Christ.

However, the message going to the Gentiles, or to any generation of Jews living beyond the time when the kingdom of the heavens was originally offered and then re-offered to Israel, is another matter entirely.

The bearer of the message would have to begin with the former—the simple gospel of the grace of God. *ONLY then could a message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens come into view* [ref. Chs. III, IV in this book, "Restoration of All Things," and "Acceptance by Many"].

These things, along with *a new creation* "in Christ" being in view [with the Jew and the Gentile together in one body], is why Paul had

to be taken into Arabia, then into the heavens, to receive extensive instructions from the Lord concerning the message which he had been called to proclaim.

And if a person doesn't come into some type understanding of the overall proclamation of the message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens — beginning with Israel and progressing to the Gentiles, with the kingdom ultimately being realized — that person will FAIL to understand the MAIN purpose of salvation and the MAIN message of the New Testament, whether in the gospels, Acts, the epistles, or the Book of Revelation.)

#### God's Son, the Christ

Paul, at the time of his conversion, was a Jew who had been well trained in the Old Testament Scriptures. He had previously sat at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the great teachers of the law of that day (Acts 22:3; cf. Acts 5:34). Paul understood the "letter" of Scripture; and once his blindness had been lifted, his prior training allowed him to easily see — from the very Scriptures which he had studied over the years, Scriptures which he knew — EXACTLY what had happened, what was presently happening, and what would happen should Israel repent.

Paul didn't have to spend time studying the Scriptures to know that Jesus was *the Son of God, the very Christ*. He didn't have to spend time studying the Scriptures to know the things surrounding that which Stephen had previously tried to get the religious leaders in Israel to see. Paul knew the "letter" of Scripture and could *NOW* see that of which the "letter" spoke, within its *correct spiritual framework*.

And after being immersed in and filled with the Spirit and spending several days with the disciples in Damascus, *he immediately went into the synagogues of the city and preached Christ* — "that he is the Son of God," "proving that this is very Christ" (Acts 9:20-22).

He confounded — threw them into a state of confusion — the Jews, showing them from their own Scriptures (using the Scriptures to prove) the exact identity of the One Whom they had rejected and crucified.

Had Paul been called as another apostle to carry the message to Israel, there would have been little need for the Lord to later take him aside for an extensive period to teach him the message which he was to proclaim. Paul was already preeminently qualified for a ministry of this nature to Israel.

But he was far from qualified for the ministry to which he had been called, for this ministry involved going to a people "having no hope, and without God in the world." And aside from that, it involved "a remnant according to the election of grace." Then, including both those without God and those within the remnant, it involved what is called in Scripture, "the mystery" (cf. Rom. 11:5; Eph. 2:12; 3:1-11).

Israel was about to be set aside, and God was about to deal solely with *the one new man* "in Christ" for almost two millenniums before resuming His dealings with Israel. This *one new man* "in Christ" would be comprised of those taken mainly from among the Gentile nations (though "a remnant according to the election of grace [believing Jews]" would be included), and Paul was called forth as the person through whom God would communicate truths having to do with the message surrounding the kingdom as it would pertain to this *new creation* during the interim (*cf.* II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:11, 12; 3:26-29).

Thus, Paul's ministry to Israel following his conversion was relatively short, for God had other plans for Paul. But, though short and not his main calling, it was perfectly in keeping with the ministry of others to Israel which had preceded and it was perfectly in line with his own ministry to the Gentiles which would follow.

## 1) The Message

Paul's proclamation of Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus as "the Son of God," the "very Christ" (Acts 9:20, 22) was a message carrying a prevalent basic Scriptural thought surrounding *Sonship*. It had to do with the position which Christ held relative to *the government of the earth*. It was a message concerning *Christ and the proffered kingdom*.

"Sonship" implies *rulership* (*cf.* Matt. 3:17; 4:3-8; 17:5; II Peter 1:17). *Sons alone* occupy positions of rulership within God's kingdom. That's the way it has always been, that's the way it presently exists, and that's the way it will always continue to exist.

Satan, the incumbent ruler over the earth (the ruler which God placed over the earth in the beginning, the only ruler this earth has ever had), is *a son of God;* and angels ruling under him are also *sons of God.* 

Angels are sons of God because of *a special creative act of God*. And an angelic rule of the nature which Satan holds is not peculiar to just this earth, one province in God's kingdom. This is a form of rule which

exists on provinces throughout God's kingdom, apparently not only in our own galaxy but in other galaxies created and placed throughout the entire universe over which God exercises governmental power and control (Job. 1:6-12; 2:1-7).

Satan is "the anointed ['messianic'] cherub," placed by God "upon the holy mountain of God" [a kingdom, this earth] though one day to be cast out of this "mountain" (Ezek. 28:14-16).

(The "cherubim" [singular, "cherub"] are first mentioned in Scripture in connection with *the earth's government*, establishing an unchangeable way—a first-mention principle—in which angels designated by this name are seen throughout Scripture. They are first seen in Scripture guarding the entrance to the garden in Eden following man being driven from the garden because of sin. They were placed as guardians to prevent man from reentering the garden, in his fallen state, and eating of the tree of life—the tree which would have provided [and will yet future provide] the wisdom and knowledge for man to rule and reign over the earth.

And a "mountain" in Scripture signifies *a kingdom*. Satan, in his unfallen state, was given a kingdom [this earth], and he was placed, by God, in the position of the messianic angel [the ruling angel] over this "mountain," this *kingdom* [v. 14].)

Satan though, the appointed ruling angel over one kingdom in the universe, rebelled against the One Who had placed him in this position. He sought *to exalt his throne* and become "like the most High," *i.e.*, he sought to rule all the kingdoms of the universe rather than just the one kingdom over which he had been placed (Isa. 14:13, 14). And, as a result, judgment was pronounced upon Satan (Isa. 14:15-17; Ezek. 28:15-19), and his kingdom was reduced to a state of complete ruin (Gen. 1:2a).

But Satan himself and the angels who accompanied him in his rebellion continued to reign, though over a ruined kingdom.

A principle of Biblical government necessitates an incumbent ruler, though he may have disqualified himself, continue holding his position until his God-appointed replacement is not only on the scene but ready to assume the reins of governmental power and authority (*e.g.*, the account of Saul and David in I Sam. 15-II Sam. 1).

God has reserved to Himself the right and power to remove one

ruler and position another ruler within His kingdom after this fashion (Dan. 4:17-32; 5:17-21).

Scripture opens with one brief statement concerning God, in the beginning, creating the heavens and the earth; and this is followed by one brief statement concerning the earth being reduced to a ruin (Gen. 1:1, 2a). Then Scripture continues with a detailed account (though brief) of how God, at a later point in time, over a six-day period, restored the ruined province within His kingdom (vv. 2b-25).

And immediately following the restoration of the ruined province, on the same day that God completed his restorative work, he created man, for a revealed purpose. The material creation was restored with a view to man's creation, and man was created for the purpose of replacing the disqualified, incumbent ruler, Satan (vv. 26-28).

But, though the first man, Adam, was present — *a son of God*, because of God's special creative act (which Adam had to be in order to fulfill the purpose surrounding his creation [*cf.* Luke 3:38]) — God didn't immediately remove Satan and place Adam in his position. Rather, God allowed the fall to occur, leaving the man disqualified (along with his descendants, who would be *sons of Adam*, begotten in Adam's fallen image and likeness), allowing Satan to continue holding the sceptre. And this was for purposes involving God's Son, *the second Man*, *the last Adam* (Gen. 3:1ff; I Cor. 15:45-47).

Then, four thousand years later, the second Man, the last Adam appeared. And at the time of His baptism, at the hands of John, God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). And this announcement had to do with the matter at hand — Christ's position as God's Son, with the earth's government in view.

Immediately after the Father had declared Jesus to be His "beloved Son," the Spirit led Jesus "into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matt. 4:1ff). Where the first man, the first Adam, had failed, Jesus, the second Man, the last Adam, had to show that He wouldn't, and really couldn't, fail. Jesus had to demonstrate, to the incumbent ruler, that He, as God's Son, was fully qualified to take the sceptre.

This was *the crux* of that which occurred in the temptation account, seen at the very outset of Christ's ministry; and this was why the temptation at the hands of the incumbent ruler centered around *two things*:

- 1) Satan questioning *Jesus' Sonship*, though Satan knew His exact identity ("If thou be the Son of God...").
- 2) Satan offering to Jesus *all the "power" and "glory" associated with "the kingdoms of the world,"* which God had "delivered" unto him, contingent on Jesus *falling down and worshipping him* (cf. Matt. 4:3-9; Luke 4:3-7).

But Jesus, though demonstrating to the incumbent ruler (and thus establishing, once for all, the fact for the record) that He was fully qualified to take the sceptre, didn't immediately assume this position. Rather, following this demonstration, He went to Israel with a message, offering those comprising the nation positions with Him in the kingdom at that future time when He would ascend the throne.

Israel though refused, climaxing this refusal by slaying their Messiah.

Then there was a re-offer of the kingdom to Israel by the apostles (and others) in the Book of Acts. *But Israel still refused, reaching a climactic point in this continued rejection by slaying Stephen.* 

And, though Paul was called out at this time as the apostle to the Gentiles, the offer of the kingdom still remained open to Israel (as it had immediately following the events of Calvary).

And when Paul went to the Jews in the synagogues in Damascus, this whole overall thought is EXACTLY what he had in mind — proving to these Jews, from their own Scriptures, that Jesus was the Son of God, the very Christ (the Messiah, the One Whom God had chosen to take the earth's sceptre, the One Whom God would ultimately place in this position).

#### 2) The Response

Paul's message to the Jews in Damascus concerned things having to do with *the CONTINUED re-offer of the kingdom to Israel.* 

But the Jews in Damascus responded to this message *EXACTLY as* the Jews in Jerusalem had previously responded. They not only rejected the message, but, as the Jews in Jerusalem had previously slain a person proclaiming the message (followed by their slaying numerous other disciples [Acts 26:10]), the Jews in Damascus, in like manner, sought to slay Paul (Acts 9:20-24).

Then, when Paul went to Jerusalem, he began to teach these same truths about Jesus among the Jews there. And their reaction was the same as the Jews in Damascus had been, which was the same as the actions of the religious leaders in Jerusalem had been at the time of Stephen's message before the council. The Jews in Jerusalem, hearing Paul, not only rejected the message but they also sought to slay Paul as well (Acts 9:26-29).

The course which Israel was following — continued rejection of the message — had already been set, though the offer of the kingdom still remained open and the message was still being carried to Israel. This course was set during the original offer of the kingdom, prior to the events of Calvary; and it was set again in the re-offer of the kingdom, prior to Paul's conversion.

*In the original offer,* there was the "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," a sin which would not be forgiven the nation during either the present age or the coming age (Matt. 12:22-32).

And in the re-offer, there was the stoning of Stephen at a climactic time when the heavens had been opened, with Stephen seeing the Glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:1-60).

The message was to the Jew only throughout the original offer, and it was to the Jew first throughout the re-offer.

But in the re-offer of the kingdom, unlike in the original offer, the message was *also to the Gentile* (Matt. 10:5, 6; Acts 1:8; Rom. 1:16).

Paul went *ONLY to the Jews* in Damascus and Jerusalem, for these were not only Jewish cities but Paul had yet to be instructed concerning the message which he was to carry to the Gentiles as well.

And once Paul had been taken to Arabia, then into the heavens, had been instructed by the Lord, and had begun his ministry in the Gentile world, he STILL carried the message to the Jewish people first.

As long as the offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel, this was God's designated order, even out in the Gentile world. It didn't matter what Gentile city Paul entered, as long as the offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel, he ALWAYS went to the Jews in that city first.

And he carried *the SAME message* to these Jews that Peter and others had carried to Israel prior to Paul's conversion. It was only *AFTER* the Jews had rejected the message that he was free to also go to the Gentiles in that city (*cf.* Acts 13:46-48; 17:1-4; 18:1-6; 19:8; 28:17-28).

And, though some of the Jews in the various cities where Paul's missionary journeys took him believed (as had occurred throughout the

original offer and was occurring during the re-offer of the kingdom), there was no repentance by the nation. There was only rejection (as had also occurred throughout the original offer and was occurring during the re-offer of the kingdom).

In Paul's case it was to the Jews beginning in Damascus, then Jerusalem, then to those in the various cities in the Gentile world.

And it mattered not whether the message was carried to Jews in the land or to Jews dispersed among the Gentile nations, the response was always the same. *SOME believed, BUT the nation itself remained in unbelief.* 

#### God's Two Firstborn Sons

For the past 3,500 years God has had two firstborn Sons, *Israel* and *Christ* (Ex. 4:22, 23; Heb. 1:6). And the main thought behind this standing, in relation to both Sons, concerns *the rights of the firstborn*.

Israel became God's firstborn son when the nation was adopted during Moses' day, but Jesus has been God's firstborn Son from eternity.

The rights possessed by firstborn sons in the Old Testament were threefold — regal rights, priestly rights, and the right to receive a double portion of the father's goods. The firstborn was to be the ruler of the family, the spiritual head of the family, and receive a double portion of the father's goods when the inheritance was divided.

Israel is God's firstborn son because of *a special creative act, followed by adoption*. Jacob was a special creation of God, and God adopted the nation descending from Jacob through his twelve sons (Isa. 43:1; Rom. 9:4).

And, possessing a national firstborn status of this nature, Israel was (and remains today) in line to exercise national kingly and priestly rights in relation to the Gentile nations of the earth. Israel was to rule over the nations, and the nations were to be blessed through Israel; and, originally, Israel was to realize this status through occupying both heavenly and earthly positions in the kingdom — giving Israel a double portion.

Christ though is God's firstborn Son after an entirely different fashion. He has been God's firstborn Son from eternity. He is spoken of as "the firstborn of every creature ['of all creation']" (Col. 1:15), "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18; *cf.* Rev. 1:5), and "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). Christ is the Son above all sons, seated at the right hand of Power in the heavens.

And this is the Son Whom the Father begat (with the Son then becoming "God's only begotten firstborn Son"), Who showed that He was fully qualified to take the earth's sceptre and then paid redemption's price so man could be placed back in the position for which he had been created.

This is the Son Who offered Israel positions with Him from the heavens following that time when His Father would give the kingdom to Him and remove the incumbent ruler.

And *this is the Son* Who is today offering these same positions (rejected by Israel) to Christians.

(And though God presently has *these two firstborn Sons*, with a view to these two Sons one day exercising the rights of primogeniture, God will, before these Sons exercise the rights of the firstborn, bring into existence *a third firstborn son*. God's firstborn son Israel has forfeited the right to rule and reign from the heavens over the earth, and God will one day bring forth *another firstborn son to occupy these heavenly positions*.

Christians, as the Israelites, form a special creation, though an entirely different type creation [II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26-29]. And, because of this special creation, Christians, as the Israelites, can one day be adopted into sonship.

Christians are presently seen as both "children" and "sons," but not *firstborn sons*. And only firstborn sons can rule in the human realm in God's kingdom.

Christians though will one day be adopted into a firstborn status, a position in which they can rule [Rom. 8:18-23]. God will then have a third firstborn son [Heb. 12:23], with this son having been adopted for the same purpose that Israel was adopted — to realize the rights of primogeniture.

[For additional information in this realm, refer to the author's book, *God's Firstborn Sons*].

During the Messianic Era, God's firstborn son, the Church, will rule from the heavens over the nations of the earth; God's firstborn son, Israel, will rule on the earth, over the Gentile nations; and God's firstborn Son, Jesus, will rule from both the heavens on His Own throne and the earth on David's throne. This is the manner in which the rulership will be established in the coming age, anticipated in Rom. 8:19.)

## 1) Moses' Message, Paul's Message

There is a parallel between the message God instructed Moses to

deliver to the Pharaoh of Egypt and the message which Paul, almost fifteen centuries later, carried to those in Damascus and Jerusalem shortly after his conversion (and later to Jews throughout the Gentile world).

Moses' message involved ONE of God's firstborn Sons and had to do with the rights of primogeniture; and Paul's message involved BOTH of God's firstborn Sons and also had to do with the rights of primogeniture.

#### a) Moses

At the time God called Moses to return to his brethren in Egypt, He instructed Moses to tell the Pharaoh of Egypt,

"Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me..." (Ex. 4:22b, 23a).

And God expected the Pharaoh of Egypt, apart from further explanation, to understand the message. God expected the Pharaoh to understand, from this Divine declaration, that *Israel* (the nation under subjection to the power of Egypt), NOT Egypt, was the nation possessing the rights of primogeniture in relation to all the other nations of the earth.

There is no written record that Moses delivered this message to Pharaoh, in so many words. But there is a written record concerning God delivering this message to Pharaoh. And God delivered the message in such a way — through the death of the firstborn, both *an individual* and *a national death* — that, in the end, the power of Egypt found itself buried beneath the waters of the Red Sea, while God's firstborn son, Israel, stood on the eastern banks (outside Egypt), in resurrection power, singing the victor's song.

Burial for both Israel and the Egyptians, following the death of the firstborn in Egypt, occurred in the Red Sea.

Israel, having experienced the death of the firstborn *vicariously*, had died, but yet lived. The Egyptians though, having experienced the death of the firstborn apart from a substitute, had died, but couldn't live.

The dead — both the Israelites and the Egyptians — *had to be buried,* which occurred in the Red Sea.

For the Israelites, the sea had NO power over them; and they subsequently stood in resurrection power on the eastern banks.

For the Egyptians though, the sea had COMPLETE power over them; and they were buried and left in the sea, the place of death (cf. Dan. 3:19ff).

And this left God's firstborn son on the eastern banks of the sea, outside Egypt, ready to go forth and ultimately realize the rights of primogeniture in the land covenanted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

## b) Paul

Paul's message to both the Jews in Damascus and Jerusalem (and later to Jews throughout the Gentile world) concerned both of God's firstborn Sons — His only adopted firstborn son, and His only begotten firstborn Son. And this message involved the rights of primogeniture to be realized by both Sons.

Paul's message was directed to one son, and the message was about the other Son. It involved one son (Israel) recognizing and accepting the other Son (Jesus), which would result in Christ's return, the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, and both Sons together realizing the rights of primogeniture.

But the son to whom the message was proclaimed wouldn't repent, ultimately resulting in the other Son remaining in heaven until such a time as the Father could bring forth a third firstborn son to occupy the heavenly positions in the kingdom, which had been spurned.

## 2) From Matthew through Acts

The message delivered to Israel in the section of Scripture extending from the Gospel of Matthew through the Book of Acts was essentially the same. It had to do with an offer of the kingdom of the heavens, contingent on the nation's repentance, followed by baptism.

The message delivered by Peter to Israel on the day of Pentecost (at the beginning of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel [repentance, followed by baptism] — Acts 2:38) was the same message which John the Baptist had previously delivered to Israel (at the beginning of the original offer [repentance, followed by baptism] — Matt. 3:2-6).

And the message throughout both the original offer and the re-offer of the kingdom had to do with God's two firstborn Sons realizing the rights belonging to the firstborn.

This was the message proclaimed to Israel throughout the period.

It was introduced by John in the wilderness of Judaea (Matt. 3:1ff), and it was concluded over three decades later by Paul in Rome (Acts 28:17-29).

# 8

## Paul's Gospel

A Message to the Saved Regarding the Kingdom

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.

For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it:

And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace,

To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen [the Gentiles]; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days" (Gal. 1:11-18).

The Apostle Paul was saved at a particular TIME for a particular PURPOSE.

He was saved AFTER the Jewish religious leaders had reached a climactic point in their rejection of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 7:54ff; cf. Luke 13:6-9).

And he was saved *TO carry God's message concerning the kingdom* — which had been rejected by Israel — to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; cf. Rom. 1:5; Gal. 2:7).

Carrying this particular message to the Gentiles was a PIVOTAL change which would result in a CONCLUDING work within the framework of God's plans and purposes as they pertained to man during his allotted 6,000-year day; and this was something which, among other things, had been predetermined and set in the eternal council chambers of God before the ages had even begun (Heb. 1:1, 2; cf. Acts 15:14-18).

This was something which God had made known in the Old Testament types (in perfect keeping with decisions and determinations made in the beginning [e.g., Gen. 1, 2, 24, 41; Ex. 2]).

This was something which had been seen in Christ's earthly ministry preceding Calvary (again, in perfect keeping with decisions and determinations made in the beginning [Matt. 12:22-32;13:1;16:18;21:33-43]).

And this was something which God had begun to bring to pass through Paul's conversion (again, in perfect keeping with decisions and determinations made in the beginning [Acts 9:1ff]).

Through taking this message to the Gentiles, *God could acquire* the co-rulers who would occupy the throne with His Son in the kingdom.

That is, through taking this message to the Gentiles, *God could bring into existence a third firstborn son to rule with His Son in the kingdom (cf.* Heb. 2:5-10; 12:23).

Acquiring *the co-rulers* for the kingdom, bringing into existence *a third firstborn son*, would fulfill that previously set forth in the types; and, in like manner, this would also fulfill that set forth at a time before the establishment of the types, in the eternal council chambers of God.

With Paul's conversion, God began *a concluding work* which would allow Him to bring His plans and purposes in relation to man, throughout Man's Day, to a close.

(With reference to *three firstborn Sons*, "three" is the number of *Divine perfection*; and God [a triune being], throughout His revelation to man, is seen performing His works in perfect accord with *a numerical system* which He Himself established at a time prior to these works.

Scripture begins with God using a numerical system after this fashion [God working six days and resting the seventh]; and Scripture continues, as seen throughout the Word, after this same fashion [e.g., references to ten plagues in Egypt, to the third day, after six days, twelve tribes, twelve apostles, ten virgins, ten talents, ten pounds, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven vials].

In a numerical respect, in keeping with the way God does things, it would not only be natural but actually necessary for God to have *a third firstborn son* to occupy a position in the earth's government during the coming age. It will require *three firstborn Sons* to form a triad of Sons within the framework of the government in that coming day, showing *Divine perfection in the earth's government* — *something which the present two Sons, apart from a third, could NOT do.* 

It is evident that God, in the beginning, established the structure of the earth's government — with Satan and his angels ruling the earth from a heavenly sphere — within the framework of a triad of twelve's [three sets of twelve]. "Twelve" is the number of *governmental perfection*, and three sets of twelve would have shown *Divine perfection in the earth's government* at this time.

However, that perfect structure *does NOT exist today*, for the government of the earth is presently in disarray and has been since that time when Satan rebelled against God's supreme power and authority [Isa. 14:13, 14]. Two-thirds of the angels originally ruling with Satan refused to participate in his attempted coup, ceasing to rule with him [represented by the twenty-four elders — two representative sets of twelve — in Rev. 4:4, 10]. Angels represented by the third set of twelve remained with Satan and have continued to rule with him down to the present time [Rev. 12:4].

But in the coming age this *Divine perfection* which once existed in the heavenly sphere of the kingdom will be restored. When Christ and His co-heirs take the kingdom, not only will Christians wear crowns presently worn by angels represented by the two sets of twelve in Rev. 4:4 [which is the reason for these crowns being relinquished in v. 10] but also by angels represented by the third set of twelve in Rev. 12:4 [their crowns, along with Satan's crown, will be taken by force when Christ returns].

Christ will wear the crown presently worn by Satan, and Christians will wear crowns presently worn by angels who either ruled with Satan in past time or rule with him today.

ONLY then will Divine perfection once again exist within the structure of the earth's government [ref. the author's book, The Time of the End, Ch. VII; also ref. Ch. XIII in this book, "The Goal — The Book of Revelation"].

Then, viewing the whole of the kingdom — both heavenly and earthly spheres — as previously shown, there will be *THREE firstborn Sons* ruling the earth, forming *a TRIAD* within the government.

Israel, God's firstborn son, will rule here on earth; The Church, God's firstborn son, will rule from the heavens over the earth; and

Christ, God's firstborn Son, will have a dual reign — from His Own throne in the heavens and from David's throne on earth.

And, beyond that, man himself, the one who will rule the earth in that coming day, forms a trinity — *spirit*, *soul*, *and body* [I Thess. 5:23].

And, beyond that, the Son, who will rule supreme over all things in both spheres of the kingdom is the One in Whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" — *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* [Col. 2:9].)

Though reference is made numerous times in Scripture to Paul being called to carry the message surrounding the kingdom *to the Gentiles* (*e.g.*, Acts 9:15; Rom. 1:5; 11:13; 15:16; Gal. 2:2, 7; Col. 1:27) — allowing God to begin His work of bringing into existence *a third firstborn son* — Scripture also teaches that the message could *NOT* be carried *directly to the Gentiles per se*.

That is, the message could *NOT* be proclaimed directly to the Gentiles as it had been proclaimed directly to Israel.

The Gentiles were *ALIENATED* from all of God's past dealings with Israel. And being so alienated, the Gentiles had "no hope" and were "without God in the world." They were "dead in trespasses and sins" and, thus, *in NO position or condition* to receive such a message (Eph. 2:1, 12).

The Gentiles had to *FIRST* be removed from their dead, alienated state. They had to *FIRST* pass "from death unto life" (John 5:24). They had to *FIRST* believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:5-13).

And, through believing, they would become part of *a completely new creation* "in Christ" — a creation made possible only following the events of Calvary, a creation separate from either Jew or Gentile (though being "Abraham's seed [because of the Christians' position *in Christ*], and heirs according to the promise" [Gal. 3:26-29]). And this was a creation which included believing Jews but would ultimately be comprised mainly of believing Gentiles (Acts 15:14; Gal. 3:28; *cf.* II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:13-15; Col. 3:9-11).

Thus, in relation to the message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens, Scripture often refers to Paul being called to minister to "the Gentiles" simply because those forming the new creation "in Christ" would (following Paul's conversion) be taken mainly from the Gentiles rather than from the Jews. They would form the main nucleus of this

"new creation," this "one new man."

This was all part of what Paul called "the mystery" (cf. Eph. 3:1-6; Col. 1:25-28). And, though "the mystery" revealed to Paul had to do with the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of the grace of God, of necessity, had to be proclaimed first among those out in the Gentile world.

Thus, when going to the Gentiles, Paul invariably, of necessity, had to begin with the simple message surrounding the gospel of the grace of God, though that was not his main ministry, the ministry to which he had been called. And these two facets of Paul's ministry — with his emphasis on the gospel of the glory of Christ — can be seen over and over in the Book of Acts and in the epistles which he wrote.

#### The Dual Message

The overall order and scope of Paul's ministry becomes *self-evident* for anyone reading Scripture with an open mind and looking for these two facets of his ministry.

Paul proclaimed the good news surrounding *the grace of God* with a view to his then being able to proclaim the good news surrounding *the glory of Christ*.

Paul explained to individuals *HOW they could be saved*, with a view to subsequently being able to explain to them *WHY they had been saved*.

For example, note how plainly this is outlined in Paul's final message to the Christians in Ephesus, through their elders (Acts 20:24-32). Or, for that matter, note also how plainly this is outlined in Paul's epistle to the Christians in Ephesus (1:7ff; 2:1ff; 3:1ff). And a similar structure can be seen in other epistles, not only in the Pauline epistles but in the general epistles as well.

But, because there is such confusion among Christians in the dual nature of I Cor. 15:1-4 in this respect, this passage will be used to illustrate the point. This whole passage is invariably used erroneously by Christians, not in a dual sense, but in a singular sense — as a reference ONLY to the gospel of the grace of God.

The text though deals *FIRST* with the gospel of the glory of Christ; *THEN*, the text drops back and briefly deals with the gospel of the grace of God; and the text *THEN* returns to the beginning point, the gospel of the glory of Christ, the subject more at hand at this juncture of the book.

Paul, briefly referring back to the beginning point within the overall scope of these four verses, evidently did this to place things in a proper perspective. *The emphasis though is on the END of the matter, NOT on the beginning.* 

Note these four verses:

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

By which also ye are saved [*lit.*, 'ye are being saved'], if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures;

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

Paul's reference to "the gospel" in verses one and two is *NOT* a reference to the gospel of the grace of God at all. Rather, it is a reference to things which the Lord had previously opened up and revealed to Paul after he had been taken to Arabia (then into "the third heaven" [II Cor. 12:1-7]), things which he had proclaimed to those in Corinth *AFTER* he had proclaimed the gospel of the grace of God to them.

The problem emerges when a person erroneously attempts to make Paul's reference to "the gospel" in verses one and two pertain to the gospel of grace. Then the error is continued and compounded by seeing his reference to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in verses three and four as somewhat explanatory of that seen in the opening two verses (i.e., all four verses seen referring to the gospel of grace).

A connection of this nature is only partially correct (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in vv. 3, 4 sets forth the COMPLETE gospel message [the COMPLETE panorama of the good news, beginning with the gospel of grace and ending with the gospel of glory — ONE overall message concerning good news, with TWO main facets]).

The latter part of verse three — Christ's death — has to do with the gospel of the grace of God; and verse four — Christ's burial and resurrection — have to do with the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Thus, viewing I Cor. 15:3b, 4 from the perspective of the overall type beginning in Exodus chapter twelve, death in the latter part of

verse three can only be a reference to *the death of the firstborn*, seen in the type in Exodus chapter twelve. Then, burial and resurrection in verse four *move beyond the death of the firstborn*.

Burial and resurrection have to do with that subsequently seen in the type — *the Red Sea passage* (the dead [the firstborn, previously slain] is to be buried in the Sea), followed by *resurrection from the place of burial in the Sea on the eastern banks* (*FOR the new man, NOT the old*).

And this is then followed by the march toward Sinai, and then to the land of their inheritance [Ex. 14ff; cf. I Cor. 9:24-10:11]).

The old man was to be buried in the Sea because of that which had previously occurred — the death of the firstborn. But the old man had NOTHING whatsoever to do with things lying beyond burial in the Sea (e.g., note the typology of Ishmael and Isaac relative to the Abrahamic Covenant and the inheritance [Gen. 17:18-22; 21:9-12]).

## 1) I Corinthians 15:1, 2

Verses one and two have to do with *present and future* aspects of salvation (not past, as seen in the gospel of the grace of God). These verses have to do with *holding fast* to that which had been proclaimed (with the possibility that there could be *loss*), and they have to do with Christians in Corinth either *believing* or *not believing* the message with reference to *a purpose* (or *cause*) in view.

The *present and future* aspects of salvation in this gospel are shown by the words, "By which also ye are saved [*lit.*, '...ye are being saved']"; *holding fast* to the message proclaimed is shown by the words, "if ye keep in memory [*lit.*, 'if ye hold (are holding) fast'] what I preached unto you"; and *believing* or *not believing* the message with reference to *a purpose* in view is shown by the words, "unless ye have believed in vain [*lit.*, '...believed apart from a purpose (or, 'without a cause in view')]."

The *present and future* aspects of salvation have to do with *the salvation of the soul* (*cf.* James 1:21; I Peter 1:4-9). The eternal salvation which we presently possess — *the salvation of the spirit*, wherein man passes "from death unto life" (*cf.* John 3:36; 5:24) — *places man in a position where he can realize the salvation of his soul. And these two aspects of salvation MUST ALWAYS be kept completely separate, one from the other.* 

The thought of Christians *holding fast* to those things in the message being proclaimed can be seen in the second and fourth warnings

in the Book of Hebrews. The same word appearing in the Greek text of I Cor. 15:2 appears twice in the second warning (3:6, 14) and once in the fourth warning (10:23).

Holding fast in the second warning is with reference to "the heavenly calling" and "the hope" set before Christians (vv. 1, 6); and holding fast in the fourth warning is with reference to this same hope — "the profession of our faith [lit., 'the confession of the hope']" (vv. 23-25).

Then, the thought of Christians *believing without a purpose (or cause)* is a reference to the fact that a person has been redeemed *for a revealed purpose* — a purpose seen, in its entirety, in the gospel of the glory of Christ. And that purpose is the same as the purpose surrounding man's creation in the beginning — "...let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26, 28).

Man has been redeemed with a view to his one day realizing the very purpose for his existence, which will be brought to pass through redeemed man occupying a position of power and authority with Christ in His kingdom; and this has to do with realizing the present aspect of salvation at a future date — the salvation of one's soul.

Believing without a purpose (or cause) in verse two leads a person NOWHERE. An individual has been saved for a purpose, which can be seen and understood ONLY through believing the gospel which Paul referred to in the previous verse; and this is a purpose which can one day be realized ONLY through governing one's life accordingly, set forth in verse two.

Thus, in I Cor. 15:1, 2, Paul referred to his previous proclamation of the gospel of the glory of Christ. But, beginning with verse three, he referred to another matter entirely — that which had made his proclamation of the gospel of the glory of Christ possible.

#### 2) I Corinthians 15:3, 4

Note the way verse three begins. The fact that what Paul is about to say is not the same as that which he had previously said is really *self-explanatory*. Paul states this in so many words.

Verse three begins, "For I delivered unto you FIRST of all that which I also received..." That which he is about to reference is something which he had delivered unto them FIRST (prior to delivering the good news to which he had previously referred, in vv. 1, 2), and

this is something which he had *ALSO* received (that is to say, he had received this *in addition to* the good news referred to in vv. 1, 2).

The message which Paul delivered unto those in Corinth *FIRST* can be seen by going back to I Cor. 2:1, 2:

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Paul, when he *FIRST* went to Corinth, *COULDN'T* begin with a message surrounding the gospel of the glory of Christ, referred to in I Cor. 15:1, 2 (and also in I Cor. 2:1, preceding, as in I Cor. 15:1, 2, a reference to the gospel of the grace of God [2:2; 15:3b]).

When Paul *FIRST* went to Corinth, he found a city filled with unsaved Gentiles. And he *had to FIRST* minister to those in Corinth as an evangelist. He *had to FIRST* proclaim the simple message surrounding the gospel of the grace of God unto them. He *had to begin* with "Jesus Christ and him crucified." *He COULDN'T begin at any other point*.

But, once individuals had believed, once individuals had passed "from death unto life," *THEN* Paul could move beyond this message.

And this is *EXACTLY* what he did. Paul spent one and one-half years in Corinth "teaching the word of God among them [among those who had been saved under the preaching of the simple message surrounding the gospel of the grace of God]" (Acts 18:11; *cf.* I Cor. 2:3ff).

And this is why Paul, in I Cor. 15:1, 2, could allude to these things through simply calling their attention to "the gospel ['the good news'] which I preached unto you…"

They would know EXACTLY what he meant, for he had previously spent an extensive period of time teaching them things pertaining to this gospel.

And they would, as well, UNDERSTAND the distinction in verse three when he referred to the gospel of the grace of God which he, of necessity, had proclaimed to them at the very beginning.

### The Mystery — Moses and Paul

"The mystery" revealed to Paul, "hid in God" from the beginning (the beginning of the ages), of necessity, formed an integral part of the Old

Testament Scriptures. There is *nothing* in the New Testament that does not have its roots in one or more places in the Old Testament. The New is simply an opening up and unveiling of that drawn from foundational material previously set forth in the Old, *drawn mainly from the types* (*cf.* Luke 24:25-27, 44; I Cor. 10:6, 11; Eph. 3:9-11; Col. 1:16-18, 25-27).

And the New Testament has to do *mainly* with one major facet of Old Testament revelation, aside from the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

It has to do mainly with the various things surrounding the heavenly sphere of the coming kingdom — first, as these things pertained to Israel; and then, as these things presently pertain to the new creation "in Christ."

"The mystery" was revealed to Moses first, though remaining *a mystery*, remaining *veiled*.

Then, some fifteen centuries later, God took Paul aside (to Arabia, the same country to which he had previously taken Moses to reveal things surrounding the theocracy [though Paul, like John on Patmos, as previously noted, was taken from Arabia into the third heaven to receive this revelation]); and, in the person of His Son, God *opened up and unveiled* various things which He had previously revealed to Moses and other Old Testament prophets (*cf.* Luke 24:25-27).

Progressive revelation of this nature can be seen in Peter's reference to angels desiring "to look into" things surrounding the salvation of the soul, things which the Spirit moved him to write about, and things intimately associated with the mystery revealed to Paul (I Peter 1:3-11). These angels could only have previously seen, in the Old Testament types, that which was being opened up and unveiled to Paul, Peter, and others. These were things which angels desired to know more about; but, apart from the later revelation, which opened up and provided additional light on these things, the saving of the soul in connection with sufferings and glory — part of the mystery — could be little understood.

Thus, "the mystery" revealed to Paul was simply an opening up and an unveiling of that previously set forth in numerous parts of Old Testament typology.

No other conclusion can be reached than to simply say that God, instructing Paul through His Son, used the same means by which He had previously revealed Himself, His plans, and His purposes to man.

God could only have drawn from previously established types, which He Himself had established in the beginning, wherein the roots of all Biblical doctrine lie.

And, of necessity, He would have had to draw mainly from those types setting forth spiritual truths pertaining to the bride of Christ, the one destined to ascend the throne with Christ as consort queen.

And the various types which deal with the bride of Christ, and thus "the mystery," *do so in different ways.* 

For example, Genesis chapter two deals with the bride being removed from the body; Genesis chapter twenty-four deals with the bride being taken from the family; Genesis chapter forty-one and Exodus chapter two deal with the bride being taken from the Gentiles. And there are numerous other types which deal with different facets of the matter.

Further, "the mystery" has to do with revealed truth surrounding believing Jews and Gentiles — forming a new creation "in Christ" (where there is neither Jew nor Gentile) — being heirs together, "of the same body" (Christ's body). It has to do with "Christ in you [lit., 'Christ being proclaimed among you'], the hope of glory" (cf. Eph. 3:1-11; Col. 1:24-28).

And a type which, among other things, would have to do with Jews and Gentiles together in one body would be the record of Caleb and Joshua's experiences, beginning in Numbers chapter thirteen and extending through the Book of Joshua.

The name "Caleb" means *dog*, and the name "Joshua" means *salvation*. It was the "Gentiles" who were looked upon by the Jews as *dogs*, for whom salvation was provided *through the Jews* (John 4:22).

And Gentiles, with Jews, are destined to *realize an inheritance to-gether* in a heavenly land, just as Caleb and Joshua *realized an inheritance together* in an earthly land (*cf.* I Cor. 9:23-10:11).

And though God, in the beginning, designed various Old Testament types to reveal these things, once He had called *the new creation* "in Christ" into existence and Israel had rejected the re-offer of the kingdom, *these things had to be opened up and further revealed to those comprising this new creation*. Apart from such an opening and unveiling, God's purpose for the present dispensation and the place which the Gentiles would occupy in this purpose could not be properly understood (*cf.* Acts 10:45-48; 11:15-18; 15:12-18).

This is the reason that the Lord took Paul aside shortly after his conversion and provided extensive instruction concerning this whole overall matter, for these things comprised *the heart of the message* which he was to carry to those out in the Gentile world.

And this is the reason that Paul's ministry dealt mainly, not with the gospel of the grace of God, but with the gospel of the glory of Christ. And this is also the reason that the emphasis *in all of his epistles* is, likewise, on the gospel of the glory of Christ rather than the gospel of the grace of God.

(A "mystery [Gk., musterion, meaning, 'a hidden thing,' 'a secret']" in the New Testament is usually defined as something previously hidden but now revealed [cf. Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:4, 5]. This definition though is not to be thought of as a reference to something not found at all in previous revelation, for, again, there is nothing in the New Testament that does not have its roots in one or more places in the Old Testament.

Rather, a "mystery" pertains to something previously revealed [seen mainly in the types] but not opened up [or fully opened up] to one's understanding until a later point in time [seen mainly in the antitypes]. And the opening up and unveiling of a mystery [such as the mystery revealed to Paul] could occur only through Divine intervention. Only the same person Who had previously established the mystery [via revelation, through one or more of the Old Testament prophets] could open up and explain the mystery [via revelation, to one or more of the New Testament writers].

And, in Paul's case, this can be seen through that which he himself testified concerning how he came into possession of a knowledge of the message which he had been called to proclaim among the Gentiles. The Lord moved Paul into His presence, in heaven, and personally taught him, *One-on-one*, the message which he, in days ahead, was to proclaim to individuals [Christians] and groups of individuals [Churches] out among the Gentile nations.

Paul was moved from Arabia into the Lord's presence in heaven. And the Lord opened up and explained things which had previously been revealed through Moses and the prophets [Gal. 1:11-18; Eph. 3:1-11; Col. 1:20-28; *cf.* Luke 24:25-27]; and Paul had been called to take these truths and proclaim them to *the one new man* "in Christ" out in the Gentile world, in both verbal and written form.

And Paul, already knowing the "letter" of Scripture, allowed the Lord to not only teach but use Paul after the preceding manner.)

## The Gospel

Paul's use of the word "gospel," meaning *good news, MUST AL-WAYS be understood contextually,* as previously illustrated in I Cor. 15:1-4. Paul, far more often than not, used this word in a manner quite different than it is used, almost without exception, in Christian circles today — as a reference only to the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul used the word, time after time, as a reference to the good news which had been delivered to him by the Lord, after he had gone into Arabia, then into the third heaven.

Paul used the word "gospel," far more often than not, as a reference to the main crux of his ministry — the good news surrounding that encompassed within the mystery, which had been delivered to him, which he, in turn, had been called to deliver to Christians throughout the Gentile world.

And the Christians to whom Paul ministered would easily understand his use of the word "gospel" from the context of that which he either had said or had written.

Paul began his epistle to the Christians in Rome after this fashion, referring to "the gospel of God," "the gospel of his Son," "the gospel," and "the gospel of Christ" (1:1, 9, 15, 16).

And Paul, writing to these Christians, expressed a desire to travel to Rome in order to preach THIS gospel to them (vv. 11-15).

Paul sought to proclaim THIS gospel to individuals whose FAITH was "spoken of throughout the whole world" (v. 8).

Thus, understanding the message which Paul sought to proclaim to the Christians in Rome as the gospel of the grace of God *CANNOT possibly be correct*. They had long since heard, understood, and accepted this message.

"The gospel of Christ" (v. 16), which Paul sought to proclaim to Christians in Rome, understood contextually, can ONLY be a reference to the gospel of the glory of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:1, 9, 13, 15, 17ff [the word epignosis ('mature knowledge') appears in the Greek text of v. 28—ref. the apostates in relation to the message surrounding the Word of the Kingdom in II Peter and Jude]).

"The gospel of Christ [the good news concerning Israel's Messiah, the One Who would rule and reign]" was a message pertaining to *the* 

kingdom of the heavens, which was still being proclaimed "to the Jew first," though it was now "also to the Greek [Gentile]."

And comparing Paul's use of the expression, "the gospel of Christ," in this passage with his use of this same expression elsewhere in his epistles will *clearly* reveal this to be the case, apart from question (*e.g.*, Gal. 1:7, 11, 12; Phil. 1:27, 28; I Thess. 3:2, 3).

Then, a similar type reference to the gospel of the glory of Christ can be seen *over and over* in Paul's epistles (*e.g.*, Rom. 2:16; 16:25; I Cor. 9:22-27; II Cor. 4:3, 4; Gal. 2:5, 7; Eph. 3:6; Phil. 1:5, 7, 12; Col. 1:5, 23; I Thess. 2:2-4; II Thess. 2:14; I Tim. 1:11; II Tim. 1:8; 2:8).

And a failure to recognize how Paul, far more often than not, used the word "gospel" throughout his epistles has resulted in a mistake of major proportions in Biblical interpretation — something which negatively reflects not only on one's understanding of the Pauline epistles but Scripture as a whole.

Christians throughout the Churches of the land today understand practically NOTHING about the true nature of Paul's ministry — things having to do with that which the Lord taught him after taking him to Arabia, then into the third heaven, opening the Old Testament Scriptures to his understanding before he ever embarked on the ministry to which he had been called.

And, resultingly, they see the word "gospel" in the Pauline epistles and think of *only ONE thing, which is invariably wrong*.

They invariably think of *the gospel of the grace of God* and begin dealing with the text in relation to this facet of the gospel, committing mayhem in Biblical interpretation.

And though man may, at times, present a clear message surrounding the gospel of the grace of God from texts which do not deal with this facet of the gospel (usually accomplished through superficially dealing with the texts and contexts), he invariably does so at the expense of doing away with truths which the texts actually do deal with.

God has structured His Word after a PARTICULAR fashion; and within this structure He has placed PARTICULAR truths, revealed PARTICULAR ways, at PARTICULAR places, for PARTICULAR purposes.

And man, through "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:9-13), is *ALWAYS* to take these truths and proclaim them *EXACTLY* as God has revealed them.

# 9

## Lo, We Turn to the Gentiles

A Third and Final Time During the Re-offer

"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 [age-lasting] life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

And when Silas and Timothy were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he 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.

Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves" (Acts 13:46, 47; 18:5, 6; 28:28, 29).

Paul, ministering outside the land of Israel in the Gentile world during the time covered by the Book of Acts, *ALWAYS*, without exception, went to the Jewish people FIRST in every city which he entered.

So long as the re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens remained open to Israel (from 33 A.D. to about 62 A.D.), *Paul ALWAYS carried out his ministry completely in accordance with God's specified order* — "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Paul had been called to carry the message concerning the kingdom of the heavens to the Gentiles; but, as long as the re-offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel, the Jewish people held a God-ordained priority.

This is the reason that Paul, throughout the Book of Acts, is so often seen going to the synagogues to proclaim the message when first entering a city.

The synagogues were where Israel's religious leaders could be found; and Paul went to the synagogues to proclaim the message to these religious leaders FIRST.

ONLY AFTER the message had been proclaimed to and rejected by the Jews was Paul free to also carry the message to the Gentiles in any locality where he ministered (e.g., Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 2, 10, 17; 18:1-4, 19; 19:1-8).

Three recorded times during his ministry, AFTER he had carried the message to Israel's religious leaders, experiencing rejection at their hands, Paul told the rejecting Jews that he was going to the Gentiles with the message.

The FIRST recorded time Paul told the Jews that he was going to the Gentiles with the message was in Antioch, while Barnabas still accompanied him in his ministry (Acts 13:46-48).

The SECOND recorded time Paul told this to the Jews was a few years later in Corinth, with Silas and Timothy helping him in his ministry (Acts 18:5, 6).

The THIRD and last recorded time Paul told this to the Jews was at the end of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel, in Rome, where he was ministering alone (Acts 28:28, 29).

Though Paul had discipled many individuals during the course of his ministry — some becoming lifelong fellow-workers (*e.g.*, Timothy, Titus, Philemon) — most of those to whom he had ministered had withdrawn from him by the time his ministry was nearing completion. And, aside from the nature of the message in and of itself, this was undoubtedly due, in no small part, to the false teachers which he had so often warned against (*e.g.*, Acts 20:29-31; ITim. 1:18-20; IITim. 4:1-5).

Paul's last recorded words, written to Timothy, relate, "all they which are in Asia be turned away from me," and "no man stood with me, but all men forsook me" (II Tim. 1:15; 4:16; *cf.* 4:10-15).

But Paul knew, though "all men" had forsaken him, that the Lord "stood" with him and "strengthened" him, in order that "all the Gentiles might hear" the message which had been committed to his trust (cf. Acts 26:19, 20; Col. 1:24-28; I Tim. 1:11; Titus 1:3).

And Paul also knew something else. He knew that the Lord would deliver him "from every evil work" and bring him safely to "his heavenly kingdom [*lit.*, '...he will save me with respect to his heavenly kingdom']" (II Tim. 4:18; *cf.* vv. 6-8).

Paul was a driven man throughout the course of his ministry. He was driven by that which had been committed to his trust.

Knowing the gravity of the message and the outcome of the matter, Paul refused to be associated with someone who wouldn't remain with him in the ministry (Acts 15:38-41); and he refused to let anything stand in the way of his being able to complete the task to which he had been called (*cf.* Acts 9:16; II Cor. 11:23-28; Gal. 6:17; Phil. 1:27-29).

Completing this task carried him not only through the several decades in which the re-offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel but also into the first few years of that time when the kingdom was no longer proffered to Israel. And the Lord had allowed Paul, while in Rome, the center of Gentile world power in that day, to be the one to announce the close of this offer.

From the time John the Baptist appeared on the scene with the message, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand" (Matt. 3:2), up to the time Paul announced to the Jews in Rome — a third and closing announcement — that he was going to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28), the offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel. At any time during this period (from about 30 A.D. to about 62 A.D.), had Israel, as a nation, repented, Messianic blessings would have been ushered in.

And to realize such blessings, *Israel's Messiah had to be present, in the nation's midst* (Joel 2:27-32). Before Christ's ascension, He was already present; but Israel wouldn't repent. Following Christ's ascension, He could and would have returned; but Israel still wouldn't repent.

After this complete time had run its course — time covering both the original offer and the re-offer of the kingdom — the nation was set aside; and to realize Messianic blessings beyond this time, the nation had to *await* the completion of God's work among the Gentiles. Israel had to *await* "the fulness of the Gentiles" being brought to pass (Rom. 11:25, 26).

God's prophesied work among the Gentiles was that which Paul had been called to introduce and lay the groundwork for; and after Paul's announcement in Acts 28:28, the nation of Israel, in order to again see her Messiah's face, with all the attendant blessings to follow, had to await God removing from the Gentiles "a people for his name" (Acts 15:14-18).

And this would require a separate and distinct dispensation within the framework of God's dealings with man, which would last two of the six days foreshadowed in Genesis chapter one -2,000 years.

### The Complete Period — Israel, the Church

The parable of the fruitless fig tree, given by Christ during His earthly ministry (Luke 13:6-9), had to do with both the original offer and the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel (ref. Chapter I in this book, "Continuing from the Gospels").

Christ, though, later in His ministry, gave another parable covering an even broader scope of the matter — the parable of the marriage feast in Matt. 22:1-14. This parable covers not only the original offer and the re-offer to Israel but also the subsequent offer to the new creation "in Christ," along with a judgment of the new creation at the end of the dispensation.

The parable of the marriage feast is the last of three parables which Christ gave shortly after He cursed the fruitless fig tree (Matt. 21:18, 19) — an act which pointed to *fruitless, unrepentant Israel*, showing the nation's destiny (in relation to the kingdom of the heavens) because of the nation's spiritual condition (*cf.* Matt. 21:15; 23:38, 39).

And these three parables, contextually, could only have been given to help explain Christ's action in relation to the fig tree at this time.

(The word "parable" is an Anglicized form of the Greek word, *parabole* [a compound word comprised of *para*, "alongside" and *bole*, "to cast"]. Thus, the meaning of the word is "to cast alongside."

Through the meaning of the word itself, "a parable" refers simply to additional truth placed alongside of previous truth to help explain the previous truth. In this respect, the parables which Christ gave following His cursing the fig tree would have direct bearing upon this act, helping to explain the various things involved.)

#### 1) The First and Second Parables

The first of these three parables given following Christ cursing the fruitless fig tree deals with Israel's unwillingness to repent (21:28-32).

Then, the second parable deals with Israel's rejection of the prophets, and last of all, God's Son, Who had been sent unto them; and this would, again, show why the fig tree was fruitless and had been cursed, providing additional information (21:33-39). And it was at the end of this parable that Christ announced to Israel through the nation's religious leaders:

"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (v. 43).

It was at this point that Christ announced the removal of the kingdom from Israel (anticipated since the events of Matt. 12, 13), and this announcement was with a view to *the new creation* "in Christ" being brought into existence (previously referred to by Christ in Matt. 16 ["...I will build my Church..."]).

And, though the new creation "in Christ" was brought into existence about two months later on the day of Pentecost, there was also a corresponding re-offer of the kingdom to Israel beginning at this same time as well (Acts 2:1ff).

## 2) The Third Parable

Then the third parable, the parable of the marriage feast (22:1-14), was given to help explain, in a slightly different respect, a number of things related to or having to do with Christ cursing the fruitless fig tree. This parable was given to shed additional light on the immediately preceding parable and Christ's announcement concerning the kingdom being taken from Israel.

That is to say, the parable of the marriage feast was placed alongside that which had preceded to help those hearing Christ better understand that which had been said and done.

In the parable of the marriage feast, verses three through seven encompass that time extending from the beginning of the offer of the kingdom to Israel under John the Baptist to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This part of the parable has to do with events covering four decades — forty years, a complete number of years, evidently showing, in this instance, completion relative to Israel's unbelief concerning the proffered kingdom, with judgment, beginning at Jerusalem, then following.

Verse two introduces the matter, continuing from the preceding chapter; and verse three has to do with the original offer under John, Jesus, and His disciples:

"The kingdom of the heavens is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come" (vv. 2, 3).

Then verses four through seven have to do with the re-offer of the kingdom under the apostles (et al.), along with the destruction of Jerusalem following the completion of this re-offer:

"Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.

But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city" (vv. 4-7).

Then verses eight through ten have to do with the offer being extended to *the new creation* "in Christ" following the setting aside of Israel:

"Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests..." (vv. 8-10).

And the remainder of the parable pertains to God's dealings, through His Son, with those from the latter group at the judgment seat of Christ after the dispensation has run its course:

"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

For many are called, but few are chosen ['called out']" (vv. 11-14).

(Note that all of the preceding verses have to do with *marriage festivities*, not with the actual marriages. The marriages in view [both God remarrying Israel and God's Son marrying His bride] occur as a result of the redemption of the inheritance during and immediately following the Tribulation.

For information regarding these marriage festivities and marriages, refer to Chapters VIII, IX, XXX in the author's book, *The Time of the End.*)

Thus, it is textually evident that the parable of the marriage feast has to do with and is inseparably connected with the preceding parable and Christ's announcement concerning the kingdom being taken from Israel; and this parable MUST be understood within its contextual setting, exactly where and why Christ gave it.

ONLY through this means can this parable, the preceding two parables, or any of the other parables in Scripture be properly understood.

These three parables have to do with issues pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens, NOT to eternal verities; they have to do with God's dealings with the saved, NOT with the unsaved; and they have to do with wedding festivities in connection with two marriages.

And a failure to understand and proclaim them in relation to their contextual setting and the subject matter at hand *can ONLY add* to an already existing confusion throughout Christendom pertaining to the message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens.

#### Before and After Acts 28:28

Signs, wonders, and miracles were inseparably connected with the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel (both in the original offer and the re-offer).

*In the gospel accounts* (in the original offer), these manifestations of supernatural power *were more evident* prior to Israel's climactic rejection of the message and Christ's departure from the house (Matt. 12:22-32; 13:1), though *seen throughout the period*.

And in Acts (in the subsequent re-offer), these manifestations of supernatural power were, once again, more evident prior to Israel's climactic rejection and the introduction of Paul to carry the message to the Gentiles (Acts 7:51-58; 9:1-15), though, as in the original offer, they were seen throughout the period (ref. Chapters I, II in this book, "Continuing from the Gospels" and "Restoration of the Kingdom").

And there was a definite, revealed reason for the particular type manifestations of supernatural power — something which would not be true at all beyond that time when the offer was removed from Israel and the nation set aside, awaiting "the fulness of the Gentiles."

These signs, wonders, and miracles were not only inseparably connected with the offer of the kingdom to Israel (a connection established in the Old Testament Scriptures) but they spoke volumes in and of themselves. These manifestations of supernatural power reflected directly on Israel's spiritual condition—past, present, and future—something dealt with throughout the Old Testament.

In this respect, before Israel's climactic rejection in both the original offer and the re-offer, it was ONLY NATURAL for these signs, wonders, and miracles to be very prevalent.

However, once these climactic points had been reached, in each instance, it was also ONLY NATURAL for the signs, wonders, and miracles to become less prevalent, though still in evidence because the offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel.

Then, once the offer had been withdrawn (about 62 A.D.), it was not ONLY NATURAL but ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY that these signs, wonders, and miracles cease altogether.

They HAD TO cease at this time. They would have been COMPLETELY out of place beyond this point.

And this can be seen from a Scriptural standpoint entirely apart from referencing I Corinthians chapter thirteen — a section of Scripture in which Paul stated that they would cease, giving both the time and the reason.

Paul's reference to this matter in his first letter to those in Corinth was made necessary because the Church in Corinth was a Gentile Church

in which signs, wonders, and miracles were being manifested, with a view to provoking Israel to jealousy (Rom. 10:19; 11:11-14; cf. Acts 13:44, 45).

And Paul, viewing that which was occurring in the light of the Old Testament Scriptures, called their attention to *the time* and *the reason* when these manifestations of supernatural power would cease (I Cor. 13:8-10).

### 1) Purpose for Signs, Wonders, and Miracles

Most of the manifestations of supernatural power during the ministry of Christ and the apostles (during the periods covered by both the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts) centered around *bodily healings*. This was the manner in which they were introduced during Christ's ministry (Matt. 4:23-25), and this was the manner in which they were brought to a close about three and one-half decades later during Paul's ministry (Acts 28:7-9).

(And along with bodily healings, *death* was no longer irreversible [Mark 5:35-43; John 11:1-47; Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12], *material needs* were miraculously supplied [food, drink, etc. (John 2:1-11; 6:1-14; Acts 5:19-23; 16:26)], there was *deliverance from demonic spirits* [Matt. 12:22; Acts 5:16], and *angelic ministry* was abundantly available [Matt. 4:11; Acts 12:7, 8, 23].)

The signs, centering around bodily healings (though including other related things), reflected on and had to do with a dual aspect of one thing — the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel — an existing condition (shown prior to the healings) and a future condition (shown following the healings). And deliverance for the nation after the fashion set forth by the signs was contingent on national repentance, followed by baptism (cf. Matt. 3:1-11; 4:17, 23-25; 10:5-8; Acts 2:37, 38; 3:19-21).

The signs, wonders, and miracles were the credentials of the messengers of the gospel of the kingdom, depicting Israel's spiritual condition both *before* and *after* the manifestation of supernatural power (necessary to bring the signs to pass). And this would be the same manifestation of supernatural power which could and would — contingent on Israel's repentance — bring to pass that of which the signs spoke, *i.e.*, *Israel's future supernatural healing* (accompanied by God's supernatural provision for the nation in all areas of life, dealt with in all the other various signs).

Israel's spiritual condition prior to God's miraculous healing is revealed numerous places in Scripture. But note Isaiah's description of the nation in this respect:

"Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

Why should ye be stricken anymore? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (1:4-6).

This was the way Isaiah introduced Israel at the very beginning of his prophecy; but he didn't remain at this point, depicting Israel's spiritual condition during his day (a condition which has continued to the present day). Isaiah went on, at the beginning, to relate the main subject matter of his prophecy.

Israel was sick, but Israel COULD and one day WOULD be cured of this sickness. And that is what Isaiah went on to also relate. Israel's condition was NOT permanent. The nation WOULD one day be healed.

But there was *a CONDITION:* "If ye be willing and obedient..." (1:19a; *cf.* v. 18). *ONLY THEN* would the Lord turn His hand, purge the nation, and restore her rulers (1:25, 26). *ONLY THEN* would redemption occur, and *ONLY THEN* would the kingdom with all its glory be restored to Israel (1:27-2:5).

BUT, when will Israel repent, allowing healing to occur?

The answer is provided numerous places in Scripture, but note Hosea's prophecy where the matter is dealt with in so many words.

In Hosea 5:13-6:2 Israel is pictured as *sick*, having *a wound* (near the end of the nation's time of sickness, during the coming Tribulation), with the Assyrian (Antichrist) being unable to provide a cure (5:13).

Help though is available, but it MUST come from the SAME source which Isaiah or any of the other prophets foretold.

It MUST come from the Lord (5:14-6:1).

Israel's sickness was brought about by the Lord because of the nation's refusal to obey that which the Lord had commanded. And

the SAME One Who brought about Israel's condition is also the ONLY One Who can effect a change in the nation's condition.

And a reversal of the nation's condition after this fashion is dependent on a reversal of the nation's attitude and action regarding the Lord's commandments (cf. Ex. 2:23-25; 3:7-12; 4:19, 20).

Note Hosea 6:1, 2 in this respect:

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.

After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight."

The Jewish people, during the time of the coming Great Tribulation, are going to seek the Lord "early" (Hosea 5:15). Under the reign of Antichrist, because of the worldwide anti-Semitism which will exist, conditions will deteriorate into a chaotic state unparalleled in the history of the human race. Conditions will become such that apart from the Lord's intervention through shortening those days, man would literally destroy himself (Matt. 24:21, 22).

It will be during those days that the Israelites, as the Israelites in the brickyards and fields of Egypt under the reign of the Assyrian during Moses' day (Ex. 2:23), are going to turn to and call upon the Lord; and the Lord, as during Moses' day, is going to hear His people, remember His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and have respect unto them (Ex. 2:24, 25).

These things will occur "after two days," after two thousand years. It will be "in the third day," in the third one thousand-year period, that Israel will be raised up to live in the Lord's sight (Hosea 6:2; II Peter 3:8).

The time designated by the two days covers, not the present dispensation (the two-day, the 2,000-year, Christian dispensation), but the past Jewish dispensation (the two days, the 2,000 years, extending from the birth of Abraham to the kingdom, with seven years yet to transpire).

(Note that the restoration of Israel and the restoration of the theocracy to Israel occur at the end of the Jewish dispensation [Dan. 9:24-27].

God stopped the clock [so to speak] counting time during the Jewish dispensation seven years short of completion and began to work with an entirely separate group of household servants [which are neither

Jewish nor Gentile] for a dispensation — the present dispensation.

And once God has completed His work among this separate group of household servants, He will remove them from the earth and deal with them in relation to past faithfulness, with a view to the future theocracy.

Once this has been done, God will then turn back to Israel and complete the last seven years of the Jewish dispensation, with the kingdom being ushered in following the completion of these final seven years.)

Thus, Christ will remain in heaven until the full two days of the Jewish dispensation, the full two thousand years, have transpired; and at the end of this time He will return. Then, on the third day, the third one-thousand-year period, Israel is going to be raised up to occupy her proper place in the Lord's sight.

That is, at the end of two days, two thousand years (time in which God deals with the Jewish people [seven years required to complete the two days, the 2,000 years, are still future]), Israel is going to finally realize the reason for the nation's inception during the days of Moses almost 3,500 years ago.

As God worked six days to restore a ruined creation in the beginning and then rested the seventh day (Gen. 1:1-2:3), so is He presently working six more days (6,000 years) to restore a subsequent ruined creation (ruined man), with a view to resting the seventh day (the seventh 1,000-year period).

And all subsequent sections of Scripture, such as Hosea 6:1, 2, merely rest upon and provide additional light for the foundational framework — showing the septenary structure of Scripture — set forth at the very beginning.

Then, with all of the preceding in mind, note Isaiah chapter fiftythree. This chapter outlines Israel's confession in that coming seventh day, *following the healing of the nation*:

"Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed..." (vv. 1, 4, 5).

It was this future condition of Israel which Isaiah (along with the other prophets) dealt with so extensively. And it was this future condition of Israel which the miraculous signs throughout Scripture pointed to, whether during Moses and Joshua's day, during Elijah and Elisha's day, or during the days of Christ and the apostles (both preceding and following the events of Calvary).

(*The central thought* when the Spirit of God closed the Old Testament Canon pertained *to Israel being healed* [Mal. 4:2, 3], and this was likewise *the central thought* when the heavens were once again opened over four centuries later [Matt. 3:1, 2; 4:17, 23-25]. The New is simply a continuation and unveiling of that which has lain in the Old *from the beginning*.

Do you want to understand the New? *Then study the Old.* Do you want to see Israel or the Christ of the New? *Then view Israel or the nation's Messiah in the eyes of the Old.*)

### 2) Cessation of Signs, Wonders, and Miracles

Paul, in I Cor. 13:8-10, referred to a day when the miraculous signs being manifested at that time would cease. And it is evident that the WHOLE panorama of spiritual sign-gifts (ch. 12) would be alluded to by the three which Paul singled out — prophecies, tongues, and knowledge.

ALL of the spiritual sign-gifts would have to be looked upon together — as a unit, comprised of different parts — simply because of their interrelated purpose. ALL of the signs existed for EXACTLY the same purpose. And when the Lord saw fit to bring His purpose surrounding these gifts to a close, they (ALL of them together, delineated by the three in I Cor. 13:8), would/could NO longer exist.

Prior to Acts 28:28, Paul had the power to effect bodily healings (portending Israel's healing), for the offer of the kingdom was still open to Israel (Acts 28:8, 9). But after this time, when the offer of the kingdom was no longer open to the nation — when healing for Israel was set aside with the nation, with the corresponding cessation of signs, wonders, and miracles — Paul no longer possessed this power.

After this time, Paul instructed Timothy, "...use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (I Tim. 5:23); and he later left Trophimus "at Miletum sick" (II Tim. 4:20).

In I Cor. 13:8-10, two expressions are used in opposite senses — "in part," and "perfect":

"Charity ['Love'] never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

In these verses, "in part" has to do with *incompleteness* (from *ek meros*, meaning "out of a part [pl. in the Greek text of vv. 9, 10, 'out of parts']," and "perfect" has to do with *completeness* (from *teleios*, meaning "complete," "bringing to an end") Thus, *ek meros* and *teleios* are used in antithetical senses.

And both expressions, since they have to do with either the continuance or the end of the manifestations of supernatural signs, are INSEPARABLY CONNECTED with either the CONTINUANCE or the END of the offer of the kingdom to Israel.

In this respect, *incompleteness* (shown by *ek meros*) has to do with that time *PRIOR* to God finishing His work pertaining to the offer of the kingdom to Israel (with signs, wonders, and miracles still in evidence).

And *completeness* (shown by *teleios*) has to do with that time *FOL-LOWING* God finishing His work pertaining to the offer of the kingdom to Israel (with signs, wonders, and miracles no longer in evidence).

(The original offer and the subsequent re-offer of the kingdom to Israel is *the ONLY thing* that "the signs," along with the corresponding and inseparable thought of *incompleteness* and *completeness*, could possibly have to do with.

Incompleteness of the time when a message attended by "signs" would be carried to Israel is one thing; the completeness of this time was another. And, from a contextual standpoint, taking the whole of the matter into account, the preceding is the ONLY possible way that the matter can be correctly understood.)

Thus, the thought set forth by Paul in I Cor. 13:8-10, contextually, is something quite easy to see and understand so long as the proper connection with the manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles is made.

BUT, remove this key, and the whole matter becomes impossible to properly see and understand.

Verse nine teaches that Paul and others were exercising *supernatural spiritual gifts*. And they were exercising these gifts *DURING* a *time of* "incompleteness," i.e., they were exercising these gifts *DURING* the period prior to the time God would "complete" His work with Israel relative to the proffered kingdom.

Verse ten then goes on to state that the time was coming when God would "complete" His work surrounding the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel. THEN, the things being done during the time of "incompleteness" (during the time when the offer of the kingdom remained open to Israel, prior to God completing His work in this respect) would "be done away" with.

And this is *EXACTLY* what occurred when the offer of the kingdom was withdrawn from Israel, with a view to God removing from the Gentiles "a people for his name." The manifested signs, wonders, and miracles *ceased*.

And this was *in complete keeping* with their usage in the Old Testament (pertaining to Israel and the kingdom), *in complete keeping* with their usage during the time covered by both the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts (again, pertaining to Israel and the kingdom), and *in complete keeping* with that which they portended (Israel's spiritual condition, both present and future).

When Paul told the Jews for the third and last of the three recorded times that he was going to the Gentiles with the message which they had rejected (Acts 28:28) — with God then setting Israel aside for the remainder of the dispensation — signs, wonders, and miracles HAD TO CEASE until such a time as God would once again resume His dealings with Israel relative to the kingdom.

This is a truth drawn from the Old Testament, the gospel accounts, and the Book of Acts which, from a Biblical standpoint, CANNOT be denied.

And that's where we are today — living during a time in which Israel has been set aside awaiting "the fulness of the Gentiles" being brought to pass (Rom. 11:25).

We're living during a time when signs, wonders, and miracles can have NO part within the framework of God's plans and purposes, for any such manifestation of supernatural powers would portend God dealing with Israel in relation to the nation's spiritual condition and the theocracy during the present time, something which He is NOT doing at all.

# 10

## Central Message The Pauline Epistles

Paul's Gospel, NOT the Gospel of Grace

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction" (II Peter 3:15, 16).

The Books of I, II Peter, as all of the other New Testament epistles, both Pauline and general (Hebrews will be included among the general epistles in this chapter), deal extensively with one subject — the salvation of the soul (I Peter 1:4-9; II Peter 1:2-11). THIS is the CENTRAL message throughout all of the New Testament epistles, with each presenting the matter after a different fashion, from a different standpoint.

And if *THIS* is not recognized at the outset, when studying any New Testament epistle, it will, accordingly, be impossible to PROPERLY understand the message in that particular epistle.

Peter, in his first epistle, dealt with *the salvation of the soul* in relation to testings, trials, and sufferings (1:5-11; 2:21-24; 4:12, 13, 19).

And in his second epistle, Peter opened with thoughts pertaining to *maturity in the faith* and the importance of always keeping the message surrounding the salvation of the soul uppermost in one's thinking (1:2-19; *cf.* James 1:21).

But then, after opening in this manner in this second epistle, Peter took a different turn and began to warn against *false teachers*, paralleling, to a large extent, the content of Jude's epistle, which also forms a warning against false teachers (2:1-3:8; *cf.* Jude 4-19).

And both epistles have to do with false teachers pertaining to the Word of the Kingdom, part and parcel with the saving of the soul.

Then, the warnings in both Peter's and Jude's epistles would have to do with the same false teachers whom Paul so often warned about in his ministry, seen in his epistles (*e.g.*, Acts 20:29-31; I Tim. 4:1-3; II Tim. 3:1-8; 4:3, 4).

All three writers dealt with the same subject matter (the Word of the Kingdom, the saving of the soul), and all three warned about the SAME false teachers who would arise (those who would teach contrary to that which Paul, Peter, and Jude taught in their ministry — again, things pertaining to the Word of the Kingdom, the saving of the soul).

Then note that Peter ended his second epistle by calling attention to Paul's writings. Peter, at the conclusion of that which he wrote, called attention to the fact that *Paul had previously written about the SAME things which he had just finished writing about.* And Paul had written after this fashion "in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things..." (II Peter 3:16a).

Paul, "in all his epistles," had dealt with *EXACTLY the same things* which Peter dealt with in his two epistles. Paul had dealt with the same salvation (3:15) and the same warnings about false teachers (3:16b, 17).

Peter dealt with this message, Jude dealt with this message, Paul dealt with this message, and the writers of the other New Testament epistles (the writers of Hebrews, James, and I, II, III John) also dealt with various aspects of this message.

This is a message pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens and a salvation to be realized therein.

This salvation was offered to Israel prior to the events of Calvary and re-offered to the nation following the events of Calvary. And, throughout the present dispensation, this salvation has been and is being offered to *the new creation* "in Christ."

The message surrounding salvation in relation to the kingdom of the heavens is the CENTRAL message of the New Testament, introduced in the Old Testament.

This is the message seen *in the gospels* at the beginning of the New Testament, leading into the finished work of Christ at Calvary; this is the message which continues *in Acts*, following Christ's finished work at Calvary; and this is the message which continues on *into the epistles and the opening four chapters of the Book of Revelation* (where God completes His dealings with *the one new man* "in Christ," allowing Him

to once again turn and complete His dealings with Israel [chs. 6-19a]).

In this respect, *correctly understanding* the correlation between that which is taught in the four gospels, the Book of Acts, the twenty-one epistles which follow, and the opening four chapters of the Book of Revelation (which, for the Church, climaxes that which precedes and anticipates the marriage festivities, Christ's return, and Christ's millennial reign [chs. 19, 20]) is dependent on *ONE THING*:

It is dependent on understanding basics pertaining to the message surrounding salvation in relation to the kingdom of the heavens — the salvation of the soul.

The whole of the New Testament *CENTERS* around this message — first as it pertains to *Israel*, and then as it pertains to *the new creation* "in Christ." And that carries a person from the beginning of Matthew's gospel to the book of Revelation, with the conclusion of the matter seen toward the end of the book.

Thus, the IMPORTANCE of properly understanding this message can hardly be overemphasized. This is a message which pervades the whole of Scripture, beginning, not in the opening chapters of Matthew's gospel, but in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis.

It is a message introduced in the Old Testament (as Christ's finished work at Calvary is introduced in the O.T. [Gen. 3, 4, 22; Ex. 12; Num. 21]), and it is a message which must be understood in the eyes of the Old Testament prophets (as Christ's finished work at Calvary must be understood in the eyes of these same prophets [Luke 24:25-27, 44]).

Understand the former (the message in the O.T.), and you can understand the latter (the message in the N.T.); but ignore or misunderstand the former, and you will not possess the information which God has provided to help you understand the latter.

The new is simply a continuation of and an unveiling of that which has lain in the bosom of the Old from the beginning.

(Foundational material pertaining to the message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens — particularly as it relates to the progression of the message through the gospels and then through Acts [with events in Acts occurring during the time several of the epistles were written] — has been set forth different places throughout the first nine chapters of this book. And these nine preceding chapters contain, in a respect, the necessary foundational material which will allow one to go

on from this point and properly view *the central message* in the Pauline epistles, *the same central message* in the general epistles, and *the goal and climax* of the matter in the Book of Revelation.

The present chapter in this book will concern itself with the message pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens in the Pauline epistles, the next chapter [Ch. XI] will concern itself with this same message in the general epistles, and the concluding chapter [Ch. XIII] will concern itself with the goal and climax of the matter in the Book of Revelation.)

### **Distinguishing Traits**

Each of the individuals whom God, through His Spirit, used to pen the words of the New Testament Canon exhibited certain individual qualities and characteristics in that which they wrote. This was true relative to both their use of the Greek language and their use of different words, terms, or expressions.

The thought is not at all that the Spirit of God, in a mechanical fashion, moved men as they wrote. If this had occurred, there would not be the noticeable differences in styles, words, terms, or expressions used in the different epistles. There would be uniformity in this respect. But uniformity exists only in the thread of teaching throughout *THAT WHICH they wrote*, not in *HOW they wrote*.

It is evident that the Spirit of God used different men within the framework of all their own individual qualities and characteristics as they penned the Word, which would take into account all their prior experiences in life. And this is something which falls within the scope of God's sovereign control of all things, not only in the different writers' generations but in all the preceding generations from which the writers' particular and peculiar hereditary traits were derived as well.

NOTHING occurs in a haphazard manner within the scope of God's plans and purposes.

The Spirit of God, using different men to pen particular parts of the Word of God, at the same time, allowed these men to use their own individual language style, words, terms, and expressions as they wrote; and, through this process, the Spirit guarded them from error in everything which they wrote.

And within the Spirit's control after this fashion, the structure

of the Word of God and the intricate fashion in which it was put together moved *completely beyond* man's finite wisdom and ability. Those whom the Spirit of God used to pen the Word of God, though being allowed to write within the framework of their own individual traits, wrote *strictly* as "they were moved ['borne,' 'carried,' 'led'] by the Holy Spirit" (II Peter 1:21).

And *the end result* of the Spirit's work in this respect — preceded by God's sovereign control in matters throughout not only the different writers' generations but prior generations as well — *was always the same*.

That which these men wrote was NOT just their words BUT the VERY Word of God, down to the individual words which they used and the individual letters comprising each of these words.

(This Word, written by man after this fashion, is *inseparably identified with God*. And *this SAME Word* became flesh in the person of God's Son — the Word, God, manifested in the flesh [John 1:1, 2, 14].)

Can man *understand* these things surrounding the inspiration of Scripture? No, but man can *believe* these things.

And, because of *the clear statements* in Scripture and *the evident nature* from Scripture concerning how things were brought to pass, *belief (faith) is EXACTLY that which God expects* (Heb. 11:6).

#### 1) Paul and the Gospel

The manner in which God revealed His Word to man has been briefly covered for a reason. The epistles (Pauline and general epistles) were written by at least five—probably six—different men (the author of Hebrews being unknown), and certain individual distinguishing qualities and characteristics can be seen in their writings.

In Paul's case, his extensive use of the word "gospel" — how and why he used the word — forms a major trait which makes his writings different from those of any other writer of a New Testament book. Paul, for evident reasons, appeared almost *obsessed* with this word, using it *far more extensively* than any of the other writers. And he used the word both alone and through qualifying it various ways (*e.g.*, "gospel," "gospel of God," "gospel of Christ," etc.), usually referring to the same thing, though possibly with different emphases.

Paul's writings comprise slightly less than one-third of the New Testament, but of the one hundred thirty-two times that the word "gospel" appears throughout the New Testament — in both its noun and verb forms (*euaggelion* and *euaggelizo* respectively) — almost two-thirds of these occurrences are found in the Pauline epistles.

The word appears twenty-three times in the three synoptic gospels, seventeen times in the Book of Acts, eighty-three times in the Pauline epistles, six times in the general epistles, and three times in the Book of Revelation.

John didn't use the word in either his gospel or his epistles, though he used it three times in the Book of Revelation; the writer of Hebrews only used the word twice; James didn't use the word at all; Peter only used the word four times; and Jude didn't use the word in his epistle.

WHY did Paul use this word so extensively?

And, beyond that, WHAT was Paul referring to when he used this word? The word "gospel" simply means good news. WHAT was the good news to which Paul referred?

Invariably, people want to associate the word "gospel" with only one thing — the good news surrounding Christ's finished work at Calvary.

They see the word "gospel" in Scripture, and this is what invariably comes to mind. And, looking at the word after this fashion, they seek to understand any portion of Scripture where this word appears strictly in the light of the gospel of the grace of God.

And, interpreting Scripture after this fashion, they usually end up with a perversion, for the word "gospel" is used *far more often than not* — throughout the New Testament, gospels, Acts, epistles — referring to good news *other than Christ's finished work at Calvary*.

And erroneously understanding the word "gospel" to refer to Christ's finished work at Calvary in a text where it doesn't will not only *do away with* the teaching in the text but it will also often result in *a perversion* of the message surrounding the simple gospel of the grace of God.

An example of the preceding would be the manner in which I Cor. 15:1-4 is usually understood. The word "gospel" appears in the first verse, and all four verses are usually looked upon as referring to the same thing — the gospel of the grace of God. But both the text and the context reveal that such an interpretation is not correct at all.

Paul used the word "gospel" in connection with that which is stated

in verses one and two, but it is evident that this has no reference to the gospel of the grace of God. Salvation in these verses is spoken of as *an ongoing process* in the lives of those to whom he was writing, and it is also spoken of as something which *can be lost*. Neither would be true relative to the gospel of the grace of God which Paul had proclaimed to them "first," referred to in verse three (referred to apart from the use of the word "gospel"). Then there is verse four to consider, which contains further explanatory material on that seen in the opening two verses.

And when individuals combine these four verses and attempt to make everything pertain to the gospel of the grace of God, that spoken of in verses one, two, and four *is always done away with*, and that spoken of in verse three *is often corrupted* (through bringing elements [from vv. 1, 2, 4] over into the gospel of the grace of God which do not belong there).

And this same thing would be true numerous places in the Pauline epistles when the context is ignored and the word "gospel" is made to refer to something which the text doesn't refer to at all.

(For additional information on I Cor. 15:1-4, refer back to Chapter VIII in this book, "Paul's Gospel.")

Paul's extensive use of the word "gospel," particularly his extensive use of this word to refer to something other than the gospel of the grace of God, goes back to his experiences at the outset of his ministry. Before Paul ever launched out on the ministry to which he had been called — to carry the good news rejected by Israel to the Gentiles — the Lord took him aside and taught him all the various things about the message which he was to proclaim.

And after this, as Paul went about fulfilling his calling, it was only natural for him to use the word "gospel," meaning *good news*, to refer to the good news (taught to him by the Lord) which he had been called to proclaim to Christians throughout the Gentile world.

This "good news" had to do with *the mystery* revealed to Paul by the Lord after he had been taken into Arabia, then into Christ's presence in heaven (*cf.* II Cor. 12:1-7; Gal. 1:17).

It had to do with Jews and Gentiles being placed together in "the same body" as "fellowheirs ['joint-heirs']" with Christ (Eph. 3:1-11); and these Jewish and Gentile believers (Christians), *together*, possessed a "hope" relative to one day occupying positions of honor and glory

with Christ in "his heavenly kingdom" (cf. Col. 1:25-28; II Tim. 4:17, 18).

And Paul referred to *the good news* surrounding this message as "my gospel" (Rom. 16:25), "our gospel" (II Cor. 4:3), "the glorious gospel of Christ [*lit.*, 'the gospel of the glory of Christ']" (II Cor. 4:4), "the gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1; II Cor. 11:7), "the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:7), etc. Then, numerous times Paul simply used the word "gospel" alone to refer to this good news (Rom. 1:15; Gal. 1:6).

The fact that the mystery had been revealed to Paul, with Paul called to carry this message to Christians throughout the Gentile world, is evidently the reason why he used the word "gospel" so often in his epistles. It was only *natural* for him to refer to the message which he had been called to proclaim through the use of a word which meant, "good news," for *the message was good news*.

For the unsaved, Christ's finished work on Calvary was "good news." As unsaved individuals, THIS was the BEST news that they could ever hear.

BUT, once they had been saved, THEN, they were to hear the "good news" about WHY they had been saved. And, as saved individuals, THIS was the BEST news that they could ever hear.

And Paul's ministry centered around *the latter*, not the former. Paul's ministry centered around proclaiming that which the Lord had previously personally revealed to him. And the message contained therein was *the best news* redeemed man could ever hear, which was why Paul let nothing stand in the way of his proclaiming this message.

This "good news" had to do with the greatest thing God could offer redeemed man — positions as co-heirs with His Son, from a heavenly realm, in the coming kingdom. To use the words of the writer of Hebrews, it was "so great salvation" (Heb. 2:3).

And Paul's repeated reference to the message surrounding this offer as "good news" is one of the distinguishing characteristics of his writings.

### 2) Paul and the Faith

Christians at the beginning of the present dispensation, before they were ever called "Christians" (Acts 11:26), were known simply as those "of this way" (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). In each instance the word "way" is preceded by the definite article, and the expression could be better translated, "the way."

Those believing the message proclaimed on the day of Pentecost and afterwards were singled out through the use of this expression. They were believing Jews who followed *a way different* than that being followed by the remainder of the nation (which was looked upon by Israel's religious leaders as *a heretical way* [Acts 24:14]), and the expression was later used within Gentile circles as well, though by Jews (Acts 19:9).

The origin of this expression is rooted in believing the message being proclaimed to Israel relative *to salvation* in the first seven chapters of Acts, and this salvation had to do with *deliverance in the kingdom*, not with one's eternal destiny (*ref.* Chapters I-V in this book, "Continuing from the Gospels," "Restoration of the Kingdom," "Restoration of All Things," "Acceptance by Many," and "Rejection by the Nation"). Those "of the way" had believed the message being proclaimed, and they were seeking, through every means possible, to bring about belief (in the same message) on the part of an entire unbelieving nation, the nation of Israel.

Prior to his conversion, Paul was going about the country seeking to destroy that which he and numerous other Jews viewed as *a new, heretical Jewish sect* by doing away with those "of the way"; and, on his journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, he had his eyes opened to the truth rejected by Israel.

Resultingly, he became a follower "of the way" and subsequently exhibited the same urgency and zeal toward *proclaiming* "the way" as he had previously exhibited toward trying *to destroy* "the way."

Years later, writing to the Churches in Galatia, Paul described the message which he had sought to destroy by using the expression, "the faith" (Gal. 1:23). And not only did Paul use this expression writing to the Churches in Galatia (to refer to the message surrounding the King and the proffered kingdom, the message described simply as "the way"), but he used it numerous times throughout his ministry, referring to the same message (*e.g.*, Acts 14:22; Rom. 1:5, 8; Eph. 1:15; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:23; I Tim. 6:12, 21; II Tim. 3:8; 4:7 ["faith," in each reference, is articular in the Greek text]).

And Luke (writing Acts) used it the same way relative to events prior to Paul's conversion (Acts 6:7). And it was used this same way by those writing the other epistles (*e.g.*, Heb. 12:2; James 2:14; I Peter 5:9; I John 5:4 [also Rev. 2:13]; Jude 3).

Then going back behind both the epistles and the Book of Acts, it

was used this same way by Christ during His earthly ministry (Luke 18:8 ["faith," in each of the preceding references, is *articular* in the Greek text]).

In this respect, it can clearly be shown that "the faith" was a commonly used expression, seen throughout the New Testament, to refer to teachings surrounding the proffered kingdom. Those "of the way" in Acts were those who held to "the faith."

And though Paul used the expression, "the faith," extensively throughout his epistles after this fashion, he was far from alone in so doing. Other writers of Scripture are also seen using this expression in the same manner Paul used it.

Thus the expression, "the faith," refers, not to belief in general (i.e., as often expressed, "all the great Biblical doctrines of the faith [referring to the virgin birth, blood atonement, etc.]," but to belief in particular. This is what the article shows, used to point out something particular, something which would be evident by the context.

And to say that verses such as I Tim. 6:12, II Tim. 4:7, or Jude 3 (among many others) refer to holding to that which is looked upon as "all the great Biblical doctrines of the faith" is not only textually wrong but theologically destructive.

Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of Scripture, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:13); and when this is done, going back into the Book of Acts and carrying the matter through into the epistles, it can be clearly demonstrated exactly what the expression, "the faith," refers to.

And to misinterpret and teach contrary to that which Scripture clearly reveals about "the faith" not only *obscures* that which is taught in one realm but also invariably results in *false teachings* in another realm.

### 3) Paul and the Saving of the Soul

The Greek word *psuche*, meaning either "soul" or "life," is used different ways in Scripture, referring to things surrounding man's life in both the physical and spiritual realms. However, the word is NEVER used in Scripture after the fashion in which it is invariably used in Christian circles — associating the saving of the soul with one's PRESENTLY POSSESSED eternal salvation.

Rather, in Scripture, in the spiritual realm, the saving of the soul refers solely to a FUTURE salvation — a salvation presently being brought

*to pass* in the lives of the redeemed, but not realized until *a future time* (*cf.* I Cor. 1:18; Heb. 1:14; I Peter 1:9).

The writers of the four gospels and the writers of Hebrews, James, and I Peter all used the word *psuche*, soul/life, after the preceding fashion (*e.g.*, Matt. 16:25-27; Mark 8:35-38; Luke 9:24-26; John 12:25; Heb. 10:35-39; James 1:21; I Peter 1:4-9). And these same writers (with the exception of James) also used the word referring to the physical realm as well (*e.g.*, Matt. 6:25; Mark 3:4; Luke 12:22; John 10:11; Heb. 12:3; I Peter 3:20).

Paul used the word *psuche* thirteen times throughout the course of his epistles, and with the exception of two instances (II Cor. 12:15 [NASB]; I Thess. 5:23), he used the word referring only to the physical realm (*e.g.*, Rom. 11:3; Phil. 2:30). In the epistles, references, in so many words, to Christians either realizing or not realizing *the salvation of their souls* within the framework of the mystery revealed to Paul, are seen in the general epistles, not in the Pauline epistles.

"The salvation of the soul" is not really Pauline terminology, though it is correct terminology and Paul alludes to the matter in both II Cor. 12:15 [ref. NASB] and I Thess. 5:23. Paul, referring to things surrounding this future salvation, used two main expressions — "the gospel" and "the faith." Those writing the general epistles, referring to things surrounding this same salvation, used three main expressions — "the gospel," "the faith," and "the saving of the soul."

However, though the writers of the general epistles used the word "gospel" after the same fashion Paul used this word (e.g., Heb. 4:2, 6; I Peter 4:17), any extensive use of the word after this fashion was left to Paul.

The "good news" surrounding the mystery had been revealed to him, and he was the one who, logically, would continually reference this "good news."

In this respect, the terminology used by Paul and that used by the writers of the general epistles, referring to things surrounding the salvation to be realized by Christians in the coming kingdom, differs at times. But all the various things surrounding the message itself and the end of the matter remain the same.

It all goes back to how the Spirit of God used different men to pen the Word. All the writers of the epistles dealt with *EXACTLY the same thing*, though their emphases on different aspects of the matter were different, and their ways of expressing and saying certain things were, at times, different as well.

But because of God's sovereign control in matters surrounding these men's lives and the Spirit's work in the matter of guarding these men from error as they wrote, that which these men wrote was *EXACTLY*, in *EVERY DETAIL*, what God wanted man to possess in order to understand all the various things about His plans and purposes. It was the very Word of God, as stated in II Tim. 3:16, the Breath of God.

#### Ramifications of...

What are the ramifications of either *seeing* or *not seeing* the Pauline and/or general epistles after the fashion in which the different men wrote, along with correspondingly either *seeing* or *not seeing* the central subject matter of these epistles? The answer is *evident*.

At the outset, the former (*seeing*) will provide *a correct grid* and the latter (*not seeing*) *an incorrect grid* to work with. And, as individuals work their way through the epistles, they will either be building on that which is *correct* or on that which is *incorrect*, with the end result either being *in line* or *out of line* with that which each man wrote.

But a proper understanding of the epistles doesn't begin with the epistles themselves. Rather, such an understanding begins with "Moses and the prophets." It begins where God began, "In the beginning..." (Gen. 1:1ff; *cf.* Luke 24:27, 44).

If a person wants to properly understand a particular part of Scripture, at any point in Scripture, *there is NEVER an exception to one rule of interpretation:* 

THE PERSON MUST ALWAYS BEGIN WITH MOSES!

Begin with Moses and study forward. This is the way in which God has designed and laid out His Word, and this is the way in which He expects man to come into a knowledge of His revealed plans and purposes.

God has designed and laid out His Word in a dual fashion:

- 1) Through providing a foundational framework at the very beginning, upon which the whole of subsequent Scripture rests (Gen. 1:1-2:3).
- 2) Then, through providing all which rests upon the foundational framework, revealing the complete structure, as He would have man to see and to understand it (Gen. 2:4-Rev. 22:21).

In the foundational framework, everything pertaining to God's restoration of a ruined creation throughout six days (throughout the entirety of Man's Day) moves toward a seventh day of rest (the Lord's Day).

And the remainder of Scripture is simply a building upon this septenary structure, whether dealing with events during Man's Day or during the Lord's Day. The remainder of Scripture simply reveals God's work throughout 6,000 years (work to restore a ruined creation), with a view to the seventh 1,000-year period (the day of rest, following restoration).

And it matters not where a person is reading and studying in Scripture, this whole overall thought, established by God at the beginning, *MUST* be kept in mind. *This is foundational, fundamental, and primary (ref.* the author's book, *The Study of Scripture*, Chs. II-IV).

(As set forth at the beginning, {Gen. 1:1-2:3], Scripture deals with *time*, *with* 7,000 *years of time* — from the restoration of the earth and the creation of man to the end of the Messianic kingdom.

Aside from a few things which God reveals about His creation and government of the universe [e.g., Satan's fall, certain things about the Son (though all Scripture is about Him)], Scripture is silent about events during time preceding the 7,000 years. And aside from only a mention of the new heavens and new earth [e.g., Isa. 65:17], along with concluding statements in Rev. 20b-22, after all has been said and done during the 7,000 years, Scripture is equally silent about events beyond the 7,000 years. It has to be, for the limits of God's revelation regarding activities surrounding man and the reason for his creation were set in the opening thirty-four verses of Genesis.

This would establish a hermeneutic regarding Biblical study which *CANNOT* be violated. For example, the boundaries of reward or loss for the saved *CANNOT* be moved beyond the Millennium [i.e., there can be NO such thing as "eternal rewards" or "eternal loss" (which is why rewards or loss are ALWAYS dealt with as millennial in Scripture, NEVER as eternal)].

Aside from moving outside of established boundaries set at the beginning, to have "eternal rewards," there would also have to be "eternal loss" [in relation to rewards], which is associated with *death*.

The former CANNOT exist without the latter; and death CANNOT exist during the eternal ages [cf. Rom. 8:13; Rev. 21:4]. Thus, NEITHER can rewards be carried into this time.

Also, in this same respect, note that *it is NOT possible* to move events in Scripture such as those seen in Isa. 25:8 or I Cor. 15:50-57 [similar passages] to a time beyond the Millennium, as some attempt to do.)

And when a person begins to look at the New Testament epistles, this *has to be* kept in mind, for these epistles *MUST* all rest on the foundational framework which God set forth at the beginning of His Word. They *MUST* have to do, first and foremost, with God working six days, 6,000 years (to bring about the restoration of a ruined creation), with a view to God resting on the seventh day, the seventh 1,000-year period (following the completion of His work).

But the preceding is only foundational. In order to properly place the epistles in their correct perspective, there are numerous things which must be understood about God's work throughout the six days and His rest on the seventh day.

And uppermost in the matter would be properly understanding the message surrounding the proffered kingdom throughout both the gospels and the Book of Acts (and properly understanding the message in the gospels and the Book of Acts is contingent on properly understanding a number of things which precede, things previously revealed in "Moses and all the prophets").

This, in turn, would involve numerous things about Israel, allowing one to understand the Church being called into existence following God's dealings with Israel in the gospel accounts, necessitating the subsequent writing of the epistles.

The Church was called into existence to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected — *the kingdom of the heavens.* 

And solely from a Biblical standpoint, the existence of the Church and the Pauline and general epistles is INSEPARABLY connected with this kingdom, with Paul's gospel, with the saving of the soul, etc.

And a person can do one of two things when studying the New Testament epistles. He can either make a proper connection with preceding Scripture (begin in Genesis and work forward into the gospels and Acts) or he can make an improper connection with preceding Scripture (ignore or misunderstand that which precedes).

And these two approaches to Scripture parallel two related directions which can be taken in the Christian life — *the narrow way* and *the broad way* (*cf.* Matt. 7:13, 14; Luke 13:24). The former leads to "life," which is what the instructions in the epistles are about; and the latter leads to "destruction," which is what the warnings in the epistles are about.

And neither "life" nor "destruction" in these verses has anything to do with eternal verities. *Rather, millennial verities ALONE are in view.* 

# 11

## Central Message The General Epistles

The Saving of the Soul, the Life

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

The seven epistles extending from James through Jude are usually referred to as "the general epistles."

The Book of Hebrews is not normally included in the list, for many believe Paul wrote Hebrews and class the book among his epistles.

And others, though questioning the Pauline authorship, are usually inclined to leave the book in a category by itself — neither placed among the Pauline nor among the general epistles.

One thing which can be ascertained though is the fact that Paul didn't write the book. In the latter part of Heb. 2:3, the writer of this book clearly places himself among those who *had NOT* personally seen and heard the Lord; and Paul *had BOTH* seen and heard the Lord, particularly relative to the subject at hand in both the third and fourth verses (*cf.* Acts 9:3-6; 26:13-15; I Cor. 9:1; II Cor. 12:1-7; Eph. 3:1-11).

Then, aside from the preceding, internal evidence in the book itself would militate against a Pauline authorship (*e.g.*, the structure of and word usage in the Greek text, the sparse use of the word "gospel," and several references to "the saving of the soul").

Hebrews should really be looked upon as the first of the general epistles, not the last of the Pauline epistles or placed in a category by itself. The authorship of Hebrews is simply *UNKNOWN* and *CANNOT be ascertained*.

Thus, to simplify matters, as in the last chapter, Hebrews will be classed among the general epistles in this chapter as well.

*ALL* eight of the general epistles have to do with *the SAME subject matter*, which is *the SAME* as the subject matter dealt with throughout *ALL* of the preceding thirteen Pauline epistles.

The New Testament epistles, whether Pauline or general, have to do with different facets of the SAME subject matter dealt with throughout preceding Scripture — not only in immediately preceding Scripture (the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts), but also in Scripture preceding that as well (the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis). And the writing of the epistles was made necessary because of the existence of a completely new entity (the new creation "in Christ," the one new man [II Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:13-15]) to be the recipient of that which had been offered to, rejected by, and taken from Israel — the kingdom of the heavens.

The existence of this new entity — this *one new man*, completely separate from Israel and not under the Mosaic economy — *necessitated God supplying additional revelation which would have to do specifically with the message surrounding the proffered kingdom in relation to this new man.* 

And, in this respect, it could only naturally follow that the epistles would have to do with the SAME heavenly sphere of the kingdom which had previously been offered to Israel in the gospel accounts, re-offered to the nation in the book of Acts, and NOW offered to the new creation "in Christ."

However, neither *this additional revelation* nor *the new creation* "in Christ" could be looked upon as *completely new per se.* 

Rather, this additional revelation could only be looked upon as having its roots in the Old Testament Scriptures. It could only be looked upon as revelation which would open numerous parts of the Old Testament Scriptures to one's understanding, parts which had to do with *the new creation* "in Christ" and parts which would *remain closed* without this additional revelation.

And this additional revelation would bring about its intended purpose mainly through providing information *which would open* up the vast storehouse of previously established types, beginning with the writings of Moses.

God chose to begin opening the Old Testament Scriptures after this fashion by first taking *one man*, Paul, aside and revealing these things to him *alone* (similar to His creating only *one man* in the beginning [through whom His plans and purposes would ultimately be realized], or similar to His calling only *one man* out of Ur [through whom His

plans and purposes would ultimately be realized], or similar to the Church being looked upon collectively as *one new man* [through whom His plans and purposes would ultimately be realized]).

Then, after calling and placing Paul in a particular ministry, the Lord would use this *one man* to carry the message to others.

And this task would be accomplished through his traversing the land proclaiming the message, through his teaching "faithful men" who would "be able to teach others also" (I Tim. 1:18; II Tim. 2:2), and through his writing thirteen epistles to not only Christians of that day but epistles remaining with Christians throughout the entire dispensation.

(Note that the pattern for the God-ordained ministry of the *one new man* "in Christ" is set forth in Paul's calling and ministry [I Tim. 1:15, 16 9; *ref.* Chapter VI in this book, Paul's Conversion")].

Those comprising the *one new man* are to take the epistles [and other parts of Scripture], traverse the land, and teach "faithful men" who will "be able to teach others also." And the central message is, accordingly, to be the same as Paul's, seen throughout the epistles — *the good news surrounding Christians in relation to the coming glory of Christ.*)

God took Paul aside shortly after his conversion and revealed to him what is called in Scripture, "the mystery" (Eph. 3:1-11). And Paul took this revelation, which was simply an opening of numerous parts of the Old Testament Scriptures having to do with *the new creation* "in Christ," and began proclaiming this message in accordance with his calling.

This will explain Paul, following his conversion, singling out Peter and spending fifteen days with him on his second visit to Jerusalem.

Paul had gone to Jerusalem shortly after his conversion and spent time with the apostles, apparently *all eleven* (Acts 9:27, 28). But following his subsequently being taught the things surrounding the mystery by the Lord Himself, Paul went up to Jerusalem again, *specifically to see and to spend time with Peter*. And, on this trip to Jerusalem, Paul called attention to the fact that he didn't even see the other apostles, except James. He spent the time *with Peter alone* (Gal. 1:11-19).

And the reason is evident. Peter had been called to proclaim "the gospel" (referring to *the good news* surrounding the coming glory of Christ rather than *the good news* surrounding the grace of God) to "the

circumcision," and Paul had been called to proclaim this same gospel to "the uncircumcision" (Gal. 2:7). And *this good news* is that which the mystery revealed to Paul had to do with (*cf.* Rom. 16:25, 26; Gal. 1:11, 12; Eph. 3:1-6; Col. 1:25-29; I Tim. 1:11).

Paul, traveling to Jerusalem for the purpose of seeing Peter after the mystery had been revealed to him (after the Old Testament Scriptures pertaining to the matter at hand had been opened to his understanding) could only have had *one thing* in mind. He could only have had in mind *providing instruction* for Peter concerning matters in which he himself had been instructed, for Peter was *God's counterpart to Paul* insofar as the message being carried to Jewish believers was concerned.

The message which Paul was about to carry into the Gentile world, whether spoken or written, centered around the mystery revealed to him by the Lord. And this message would ultimately be proclaimed by Paul and others, during the course of their lifetime, "to every creature which is under heaven" (*cf.* Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:5, 6, 23).

Thus, the epistles written during this time—Paul's epistles extending from Romans through Philemon, and the general epistles extending from Hebrews through Jude (and also the seven epistles in Rev. 2, 3) — can ONLY be looked upon as having to do with this same message.

The *spoken* and *written* message of that day had to do with *instructions for Christians relative to their calling.* 

The new creation "in Christ" had been brought into existence to realize heavenly positions as co-heirs with Christ in the coming kingdom. And that which the Lord had taught Paul — which Paul, in turn, taught others and proclaimed throughout the Gentile world — had to do with this proffered kingdom. It had to do with the kingdom of the heavens, taken from Israel and now being offered to an entirely new entity — the new creation "in Christ," which was neither Jew nor Gentile (Eph. 2:11-15; 3:1-11).

The spoken and written message of Paul and others (Peter, James, John, *et al.*) provided *instructions and warnings for Christians relative to their calling*. And these instructions and warnings, in a new and different form, were made necessary because of the bringing into existence of a new and different entity, *the one new man*.

However, as previously stated, the epistles do not and cannot stand alone. EVERYTHING in the ministry of the apostles — verbal or written

— remained connected with that which preceded, going all the way back to the opening chapters of Genesis. And Christians today, seeking to properly understand the message as it is seen in the epistles, MUST go back behind the epistles and FIRST have at least some understanding of that part of God's revelation which leads into the epistles.

The epistles lie toward the end of Scripture, with only the Book of Revelation (which provides the capstone for all Scripture) following. And the place which the epistles occupy in Scripture and the information in the epistles *MUST* be understood in the light of that which precedes (that dealt with from Genesis through Acts) and that which follows (that dealt with in the Book of Revelation).

The epistles draw from that which *precedes*, and the consummation is seen in that which *follows*. *Thus, the MORE a person understands about surrounding Scripture, the BETTER equipped that person will be to understand the message of the epistles*.

#### Hebrews through Jude

The epistles, far more often than not, are viewed by Christians within *a completely incorrect framework*. They are looked upon *incorrectly*, they are taught *incorrectly*, and Christians in general have an *incorrect* understanding of the subject matter therein.

And it is a simple matter to see and understand why this is the case.

The present has NOT been properly aligned with the past and future. Consequently, there is little understanding all the way around of the preliminary data which one MUST possess in order to grasp the central message of the epistles.

And, resultingly, the picture which one sees, as it pertains to the whole of God's plans and purposes, can only be COMPLETELY out of focus.

The epistles have been SEVERED from those things which God gave to open up and explain the epistles, and the result has been mass confusion in Christian circles.

Accordingly, practically everything is being taught from the epistles EXCEPT the central teaching which the writers of the epistles dealt with.

The existing problem can be illustrated from any of the New Testament epistles; but, since this chapter has to do primarily with the general epistles, brief remarks on different things within these eight epistles will suffice to illustrate the matter at hand.

#### 1) Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews — as the remainder of the general epistles, or as all of the Pauline epistles — is a book which deals with *the saving of the soul (cf.* 4:12, 13; 6:18, 19; 10:35-39). This book is built around five major warnings, written to Christians. And the Spirit of God *drew these warnings ENTIRELY from different parts of Old Testament typology*.

These warnings have to do with *firstborn sons* (*cf.* 2:10; 12:16, 17). And with *sonship* in view, the subject matter surrounding these warnings can be clearly seen. These warnings simply have to do with different facets of teaching pertaining to Christians either realizing or not realizing the rights of the firstborn at a future time (which has to do with the salvation or loss of the soul), and the things taught in this book are drawn from the experiences of the Israelites (both national [chs. 2-4, 6] and individual [ch. 12]) as they either realized or failed to realize the rights of the firstborn in past time.

Israel has already been adopted in the type (Ex. 4:22, 23; Rom. 9:4), but Christians are awaiting the adoption in the antitype (Rom. 8:18-23). And the adoption *MUST occur prior to Christians ascending the throne with Christ*, for, in the human realm, *ONLY firstborn sons can rule in the kingdom* (unlike the angelic world where adoption does not exist and *sons* rule [ref. the author's books, *The Most High Ruleth* and *God's Firstborn Sons*]).

That which is in view throughout Hebrews has to do with Israel realizing the rights of the firstborn in *an earthly land* (in the type) and with Christians realizing the rights of the firstborn in *a heavenly land* (in the antitype). And, in this respect, the whole of the subject matter in the book moves *beyond* the events of Exodus chapter twelve (the sacrifice of the paschal lambs, the application of the blood, the vicarious death of the firstborn, and God's subsequent satisfaction).

But man, in his finite understanding of matters, far more often than not, fails to make the proper connection of the things in Hebrews with that which preceded. And he spends his time attempting to understand the book on the basis of events in Exodus chapter twelve (the death of the firstborn, the point of beginning) rather than going beyond the events of this chapter and looking at those Scriptures from which the things in the book are drawn (the rights of the firstborn, following a resurrection of the firstborn on the eastern banks of the Red Sea).

Man, in this respect, looks at the passage surrounding "so great salvation" in Heb. 2:3 and attempts to teach things pertaining to salvation by grace through faith from the passage. And, following this same line of thought, he does the same thing with the other warning passages, misapplying and misinterpreting Scripture in the process.

The passage in chapter six (vv. 4-6, the heart of the third of the five major warnings) which pertains to a falling away, with there being no possibility that the person who falls away can ever be renewed again to repentance, is often looked upon as one of the most difficult passages in Scripture.

However, the opposite is, in reality, true. The passage is not difficult at all. The basic overall understanding of the passage is actually quite easy to grasp and understand.

Difficulty comes when a person attempts to apply the passage to things surrounding the Christians' presently possessed salvation. And "difficult" is not really the proper word when this is done. Rather, attempting to read teachings surrounding salvation by grace through faith into Heb. 6:4-6 makes the passage "impossible" to understand, for that's not what this section of Scripture deals with.

However, on the other hand, if a person views the passage in the light of its context and has some understanding of the relationship of Hebrews (and all the other epistles as well) to that which has preceded, the passage will, in reality, interpret itself.

The passage, contextually, flows out of and draws from the typeantitype structure of the preceding warning (chs. 3, 4); and also, contextually, the passage pertains to that time when Christ will exercise the Melchizedek priesthood (to that future time when He will be the great King-Priest in Jerusalem [ch. 5]).

And the type-antitype structure, drawn from the previous warning, has to do with an overthrow relative to one's calling, with there being no possibility that God will change His mind (repent) relative to that which He has decreed concerning those overthrown.

This is seen in the type as it pertains to the *Israelites* and *an earthly calling* at Kadesh-Barnea, and *it MUST be equally true* as it pertains to *Christians* and *a heavenly calling* in the antitype.

The basic understanding of Heb. 6:4-6 is that simple and easy.

And so it goes with the remainder of the book or the remainder

of the general epistles. Understand the basics, and interpretation becomes *quite simple*; but misunderstand these basics, and interpretation becomes *difficult to impossible*.

(For additional information on Heb. 6:4-6, refer to Chapter V, "If They Shall Fall Away," in the author's book, *Let Us Go On.*)

#### 2) James

James' references to the saving of the soul (1:21; 5:19, 20), contextually, have to do with *crowned rulers realizing an inheritance with Christ in the coming kingdom* (1:12; 2:5). And this is *EXACTLY* the same subject matter seen throughout all the epistles.

In connection with the saving of the soul, James deals extensively with *faith* and *works* (2:14-26); and the key to understanding this section of James, which many expositors seem to home in on (along with certain cult groups, seeking to teach salvation via faith and works), is twofold:

- 1) The passage deals with Christians relative to faithfulness and the coming kingdom, not with the unsaved relative to eternal verities.
- 2) Works emanate out of faithfulness, something which cannot occur among those who have not passed "from death unto life," among those remaining spiritually dead.

*Faithfulness, works,* and *fruit-bearing* go hand-in-hand in this respect (I Cor. 3:11ff).

Faithfulness will result in works of value, likened to "gold, silver, precious stones" (which will endure the fire at the judgment seat); and such works, in turn, will result in fruitfulness (bringing about the salvation of one's soul).

But *unfaithfulness* will result in exactly the opposite. Any works involved will be valueless, likened unto "wood, hay, stubble" (which will be burned by the fire at the judgment seat).

And such works, in turn, will result in fruitlessness (bringing about *the loss of one's soul*).

There are two main errors which expositors usually make when approaching James:

- 1) They either relate the things in this epistle mainly *to basic* issues surrounding salvation by grace through faith.
- 2) Or they relate the things in this epistle mainly *to the present experience of Christians* (with little regard for or mention of the coming kingdom of Christ).

The epistle deals with *the former* only to the extent that a person must first pass "from death unto life" before he finds himself in a position to exercise faithfulness (*e.g.*, 1:18), and the epistle deals with *the latter* in a different respect than usually seen — that faithfulness during the present time will have *a DIRECT BEARING on the Christians' position in the coming kingdom of Christ* (*e.g.*, 1:12; 2:5).

Relative to the former, this is simply NOT the subject matter of the epistle. James' message pertains to the saved, NOT the unsaved. And relative to the latter, the epistle is being dealt with from a correct perspective as far as matters go. Exposition though is stopped far short of the revealed goal, which is NOT present BUT future, in the kingdom.

There MUST ALWAYS be a proper Biblical connection of the present experience of Christians with the future proffered kingdom. And, in this respect, dealing with faithfulness only in relation to the present experience of Christians from the Epistle of James is accomplishing little more than proclaiming a half-truth.

(For additional information on *faith and works* in James, or elsewhere in Scripture, refer to the author's book, *Salvation of the Soul* [2011 Rev. Ed., or website copy], Chapter V, "Faith Made Mature," and Appendix I, "Faith and Works.")

#### 3) I, II Peter

In his first epistle, Peter deals with an inheritance set before Christians (1:4, 5), which has to do with the goal of their faith, the salvation of their souls (1:9). And this salvation is connected with *the present* in the respect that it has to do with *present sufferings* (1:7, 11; 2:21; 4:12, 13), and it is connected with *the future* in the respect that it has to do with *future glory, resulting from present sufferings* (1:11, 13; 4:13; 5:4).

In his second epistle, Peter associates this inheritance, this salvation, with the greatest thing God could ever design for and offer to redeemed

man; and he further associates it with *Christ's greatest (regal) magnificence* (1:4, 16 [superlatives are used in both verses in the Greek text, with *greatest (regal) magnificence* the thought behind the superlative translated "majesty" in v. 16]).

And, in the process, Peter deals with *THE IMPORTANCE* of Christians understanding, receiving, and keeping the good news concerning this future salvation ever before them. *Peter, knowing THE IMPORTANCE of this matter, stated that he was going to keep on proclaiming these truths to the extent that those to whom he was writing could NEVER forget them, EVEN AFTER his decease* (1:12-15).

Then in the second and third chapters, Peter sounds a warning against false teachers — *teachers who would arise among Christians* and teach things contrary to the message which he so strongly proclaimed.

These false teachers would be saved individuals who had previously heard, understood, and evidently accepted the message (2:20 [epignosis, "mature knowledge," is used in the Greek text of this verse, indicating the false teacher's prior knowledge of the subject.]).

BUT, rather than remain within that which they had heard and understood, they would turn from and teach things contrary to this message (2:1, 2).

Then Peter began to bring his second epistle to a close by calling attention to a septenary structure of Scripture, which he had referred to in chapter one and upon which the whole of Scripture rests.

The kingdom of Christ is to be established *after six days*, *on the seventh day* (*cf.* Matt. 16:28-17:5; II Peter 1:16-18), which is a direct allusion back to Gen. 1:1-2:3 — verses forming a foundational framework at the very beginning, verses upon which the whole of subsequent Scripture rests. And the length of each of these days in subsequent Scripture, in complete keeping with Scripture both preceding and following the epistles, is revealed to be *1,000 years* (II Peter 3:8).

#### 4) I, II, III John

The trend of thought throughout John's three epistles takes a number of different turns, but the truths taught therein center around one thing — *Christians walking in the truth (cf.* I John 1:7; II John 4, 6; III John 3, 4). And a walk of this nature, set forth in either John's epistles or in any of the other epistles, is with a view to overcoming and receiving a full reward in the coming kingdom of Christ (cf. I John 2:28-3:3; 5:1-5; II John 8).

A central crux in John's first epistle has to do with Christ's present high priestly ministry (1:6-2:2), dealt with preceding the fourth of the five major warnings in Hebrews (ch. 10). And teachings surrounding Christ's high priestly ministry in John's first epistle reflect, as well, on teachings drawn from his gospel.

In John 13:4-12 there is the account of Christ taking a towel, girding Himself, taking a basin of water, and beginning to individually wash the disciples' feet. This was done to teach His disciples a spiritual lesson of vast importance; and, in so doing, Christ drew from the symbolism surrounding the priestly ministry in the tabernacle.

And this was also the place from which John drew when dealing with the same subject matter in his first epistle.

The high priestly ministry of Christ — ministering in the heavenly sanctuary on the basis of shed blood, after the order of Aaron — was in view in both instances (though still future when the events of John 13:4-12 occurred). Christ, throughout the dispensation, is exercising a ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, providing a cleansing for the kingdom of priests which He is about to bring forth (*the many sons* of Rom. 8:19 and Heb. 2:10 who will rule and reign with Him in the kingdom, *His co-heirs*).

And according to the teaching of both John chapter thirteen and I John chapters one and two — along with Hebrews chapter ten and other related passages — truths surrounding Christ's present high priestly ministry form an integral part of the Word of the Kingdom.

Drawing from the typology of the Levitical system, where the entire body of a priest was washed upon his entrance into the priesthood, Christians today (N.T. priests) receive a complete washing at the point of salvation (upon their entrance into the priesthood). And this washing, in both type and antitype, can never be repeated.

But also in keeping with the typology of the Levitical system, present defilement of the cleansed vessel through contact with the world requires subsequent partial washings — shown in the type through subsequent washings of parts of the body at the laver in the courtyard of the tabernacle. And, because of this, Christ, through His present high priestly ministry, is providing cleansing for Christians on the basis of His shed blood on the mercy seat in the heavenly tabernacle.

Christ, when washing the disciples' feet, not only drew from the typology of the tabernacle but He also reflected on His impending high priestly ministry. And Christ, to show the gravity of the matter, specifically told Peter:

"If I wash thee not [referring to a part of his body, his feet], thou hast no part with me" (John 13:8).

Peter had already been washed completely (v. 10), but unless Peter allowed the Lord to cleanse him from worldly defilement following this previous complete washing, he could have *NO part with Christ* in the coming kingdom.

John used the same teaching to which he had referred in his gospel to open his first epistle; and he directed the message, as in the gospel account, to saved people relative to present cleansing and the future kingdom.

And Christians can do one of two things relative to Christ's present high priestly ministry on their behalf:

- 1) They can either avail themselves of Christ's work as High Priest (receive cleansing from present defilement and look forward to having a part with Christ in His kingdom [cf. Heb. 10:32-39; I John 1:9; 2:28-3:3]).
- 2) Or, they can refuse to avail themselves of Christ's work as High Priest (not receive cleansing from present defilement and resultingly *one day be denied a position with Christ in His kingdom* [cf. Heb. 10:19-31; I John 1:6, 8, 10; 2:1-4]).

(Also in I John, note the ten usages of the expression, "born from above" in connection with the preceding [all relating to Christians, not the unsaved].

For material on this aspect of I John, along with how this expression is used elsewhere in the N.T. [in John's gospel, James and I Peter], refer to the author's book, *Brought Forth from Above*.)

#### 5) Jude

According to Jude's introductory remarks, he sought to write an epistle dealing specifically with salvation by grace through faith, but the Spirit of God constrained him and led him to write about something else.

Explaining the simple message of salvation by grace through faith was not the primary reason God gave the epistles. Adequate

information necessary to open the types dealing with the simplicity of eternal salvation, as set forth by Moses and the prophets, *had already been given prior to the writing of the epistles*.

Rather, God designed the epistles for those who were already saved, to provide instructions which would serve to open that part of the writings of Moses and the prophets pertaining to the Word of the Kingdom.

And, in keeping with the preceding thoughts, Jude, rather than being allowed to write an epistle dealing with salvation by grace through faith, was instead, as previously stated, constrained and led to write an epistle *exhorting Christians in the present race* and *warning Christians concerning false teachers*. And both the exhortation and the various warnings seen throughout the epistle pertain to "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (vv. 3ff).

(Again, note that *NONE of the epistles centers their message around salvation by grace*, though this message is often seen in the epistles. Rather, the central message in *ALL of the epistles has to do with different facets of the Word of the Kingdom.*)

The expression, "the faith," as it is used in Jude 3, is simply another way of referring to the things surrounding Paul's gospel (*ref.* Chapters IV, X in this book, "Acceptance by Many" and "Central Message — The Pauline Epistles"). Jude's exhortation had to do with earnestly striving in the present race, with "the faith" in view; and his warnings — closely paralleling the warnings in Peter's second epistle — had to do with false teachers arising and proclaiming things among Christians contrary to "the faith."

And that's the way in which the New Testament epistles are brought to a close — an exhortation to strain every muscle of one's being in the present race of "the faith," and warnings against false teachers proclaiming perverse things concerning "the faith."

(For additional information on Jude 3, refer to Chapter II, "Contending for the Faith," in the author's book, *Jude*.)

#### Ramifications of...

What are the ramifications of either *seeing* or *not seeing* the Pauline and/or general epistles in their correct setting relative to Scripture

both preceding and following? Such ramifications are *evident*. All one has to do is compare conditions existing in the first-century Church with conditions existing in the Church today.

Christians in the first-century Church knew that the letters (epistles) being sent to them had to do with the same message being proclaimed throughout the Churches by the apostles and others — a message having its roots in preceding revelation.

And this message pertained to *a completely new entity* (separate and distinct from Israel) and with *a proffered kingdom*.

This new entity had been called into existence to be the recipient of heavenly positions with Christ in the kingdom, and the message being proclaimed had to do with *faithfulness during the present dispensation* with a view to *glory during the coming dispensation*.

These things were consistently taught throughout the first-century Church. Christians during that day understood these things; and, understanding these things, they governed their lives accordingly.

But these things are not being taught at all in the twentieth-century Church, except in isolated instances. Christians during the present day know little to nothing about these things, and their lifestyle often negatively reflects this fact.

Everything begins in the past — actually in the eternal council chambers of God before the ages began — and moves toward *a set goal*. And this *set goal* — whether seen in Moses, the Psalms, the prophets, the gospels, Acts, or the epistles — is *ALWAYS* revealed to be *the SAME*.

It is *the SAME set goal* seen throughout the first nineteen chapters of the closing book of Scripture, then realized in the twentieth chapter. It is *ALWAYS* revealed to be *the seventh day*, *the seventh millennium*, *the Sabbath rest awaiting the people of God*.

Viewing the epistles within their correct setting will allow one to look upon the content therein from a correct perspective. Scripture in the epistles can be interpreted and applied correctly; and, through so doing, Biblical interpretation throughout the epistles will be perfectly in line with all other parts of Scripture.

But erroneously viewing the epistles apart from their correct setting can only produce the opposite results. A correct interpretation, application, and alignment with other Scripture will be sadly lacking, resulting in the true message of the epistles being all but lost.

# 12

### From Jerusalem to Rome

Turning from Israel to the Gentiles

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came unto him,

Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:28-31).

The Book of Acts details a story which *BEGINS* in *Jerusalem* and *ENDS* in *Rome*.

It *BEGINS* in the capital of Jewry, *in Jerusalem*, with the message pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens going *to the Jews first;* and it *ENDS* in the capital of the Gentile world of that day, *in Rome*, with the message subsequently going *to the Gentiles, apart from a preference in the order continuing to be given to the Jews*.

Paul made his announcement to this effect at the END of the most unique period which has ever existed in Jewish history (Acts 28:28; ref. Chapter IX in this book, "Lo, We Turn to the Gentiles") — a period experienced by one single generation of Jews, the generation living on both sides of Calvary and being the recipients of both the offer (before Calvary) and the re-offer (following Calvary) of the kingdom of the heavens.

This was a saved generation of Jews which had rejected Christ as *King* (*ref.* Chapters III, IV in this book, "Restoration of All Things" and "Acceptance by Many"). And once this generation had passed off the scene — which was rapidly occurring during the time Paul was in Rome at the end of Acts — *an entirely DIFFERENT situation would exist throughout the remainder of the dispensation*.

Once the generation of Jews to whom the offer and re-offer of the kingdom of the heavens was made had passed off the scene, there would NO LONGER be a generation of Jews in existence to whom this offer could be extended. And, accordingly, the message pertaining to the kingdom of the heavens could NO LONGER be carried to the Jewish people at all.

Thus, ONCE Israel's religious leaders had climactically rejected the offer of the kingdom — which occurred in Rome, near the closing days of the existence of the generation to whom the offer and re-offer of the kingdom was extended — God did three things (Luke 19:41-44; Rom. 11:25, 26):

- 1) He set Israel aside.
- 2) He then allowed the nation's capital city to be destroyed (by the Romans).
- 3) And, following this, He uprooted the Jewish people from their land and scattered them to the ends of the earth, awaiting "the fulness of the Gentiles" being brought to pass.

Then, as previously stated, throughout the remainder of the dispensation it would be *IMPOSSIBLE* for a saved generation of Jews to exist to whom the offer of the kingdom could be extended.

God was no longer dealing with Israel on a national basis, the Jewish people had been uprooted from their land and scattered among the nations, and Jews saved during this time would simply become part of the body of Christ rather than part of a saved Israeli nation.

Jews appropriating the blood of the Paschal Lamb (through believing on the Lord Jesus Christ) would relinquish their national identity (with Israel) and become part of the one new man "in Christ," where there was no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Beyond Paul's announcement in Acts 28:28 (about 62 A.D.), extending throughout the remainder of the dispensation, the message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens was *SOLELY for those comprising the body of Christ*. It was a message, not for Jews, not for Gentiles, but *for Christians alone*—the one new man "in Christ," comprised of individuals taken from both the nation of Israel and the Gentile nations.

The message was for saved people ALONE (as it had been when offered [in the gospels] and re-offered [in Acts] to Israel); and Israel, beyond the generation to whom the offer and the re-offer of the kingdom was

extended, *NOW existed in an unsaved state* (not to mention the fact that the kingdom had been taken from Israel [Matt. 21:43; Acts 28:28]).

The Jewish people were *NOW*(*beyond Acts* 28:28) *exactly as the Gentile nations in relation to the possession or nonpossession of spiritual life*. They were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), and spiritual life had to *FIRST* be generated *BEFORE* spiritual promises could be extended.

The offer of the kingdom of the heavens, beyond Acts 28:28, was *SOLELY for those comprising the body of Christ*.

It was for JEWS who had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, relinquishing their national identity and becoming part of the body of Christ, where there was "neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]"; and it was for GENTILES who had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, relinquishing their national identity and becoming part of the body of Christ, where there was "neither Jew nor Greek [Gentile]" (cf. Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:1-3:11).

*THESE* were the changes inherent in Paul's announcement at the end of the Book of Acts.

Attention at THIS point in Scripture, in relation to the kingdom of the heavens, ceased to be directed toward Israel. At THIS point in Scripture, the new creation "in Christ" became the SOLE recipient of the proffered kingdom.

(Note a major problem in the preceding respect with what is called "Messianic Judaism" today — saved congregations of Jews [Jews having believed in "Jesus ('Yeshua')]," seeking to see themselves, not as a part of *the one new man* "in Christ," not as having relinquished their national identity with Israel, but as still a part of the former creation in Jacob [Isa. 43:1]. They view themselves as a saved part of the nation of Israel, in effect, a first fruit of the nation.

The preceding outlook by advocates of Messianic Judaism is, of course, *IMPOSSIBLE*. But this is how confusing matters have become in Christendom today, with numerous Christians ascribing to the matter.)

#### **God's New Witness**

ISRAEL had been God's witness, called into existence to carry the message of the one true and living God to the ends of the earth (Isa. 43:1-10); and the people comprising this nation were supposed to have been the ones to carry the message concerning the King and His kingdom from Jerusalem to Rome during the first century.

THEY had been the ones in view in the commission which Christ gave to His disciples during the forty days of His post-resurrection ministry (one commission, given in different parts at different times) — beginning in Jerusalem, progressing into Judaea, then into Samaria, and then into the uttermost parts of the earth (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8).

The Jewish people were to be reached with the message — "beginning at Jerusalem" — and THEN carry this message to the Gentiles.

A converted nation, in fulfillment of its calling (Isa. 43:9, 10), was to then take this message to the ends of the earth (*ref.* Chapter II in this book, "Restoration of the Kingdom").

But Israel, as Jonah when called to go to Nineveh, wanted *NOTH-ING* to do with the matter; and, also as Jonah, Israel eventually ended up in the sea (scattered among the Gentile nations); and, also as Jonah, Israel is going to remain there for two days (2,000 years).

And, also as Jonah, on the third day (the third 1,000-year period), Israel is going to be raised up to live in God's sight (*cf.* Hosea 5:15-6:2); and, also as Jonah, Israel will *THEN* carry the message of the one true and living God to the Gentiles, worldwide (*cf.* Gen. 45:26; Isa. 53:1ff).

But lying between *Israel's disobedience* and *Israel's obedience* is the two-day (2,000-year) period, seen in Jonah, in which *Israel remains* spiritually alienated from God, scattered among the Gentile nations. This is a period in which God, through Israel, has NO witness.

There was NO witness through Jonah during the two days in the type, and there can be NO witness through Israel during the two days in the antitype.

The nation throughout this period remains, as Jonah, dead, in the sea. God though, with Israel set aside during these two days, has not left Himself without a witness (cf. Acts 14:17). Rather, He has called a completely new entity into existence to carry His message to the ends of the earth during this time — though NOT in fgulfillment of the commission given TO Israel, which awaits fulfillment BY Israel.

God has called *a new creation* into existence, *the one new man* "in Christ." And this *new man*, through his positional standing in Christ, is not only reckoned as "Abraham's seed" but is also reckoned as the one in line to inherit "the promise [a reference to that which the lineal seed of Abraham rejected, heavenly promises and blessings]" (Gal. 3:29).

The ministry of this *new man*—of Christians, comprising the Church

— is that to which Christ referred after He had departed the house and sat down by the seaside in Matthew chapter thirteen, during the original offer of the kingdom to Israel (*cf.* Matt. 16:18). Christ left the house (referring to Israel), went down by the seaside (referring to the Gentiles), and gave four parables, beginning with the parable of the Sower.

This first parable outlined both *the purpose for* and *the ministry of the Church which He was about to bring into existence.* 

Then the remaining three parables revealed that which would occur relative to the Church in this respect throughout the dispensation.

(For an exposition of these first four parables in Matthew chapter thirteen, refer to the author's book, *Mysteries of the Kingdom.*)

And the revealed reason for God turning from *the old creation* "in Jacob" to *the new creation* "in Christ" was given by Isaiah over seven centuries prior to this time (Isa. 6:9, 10):

"And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Matt. 13:14, 15).

Isaiah's prophecy, within the scope of its fulfillment, actually spans the centuries. It is a prophecy which could have been applied to Israel numerous times in the nation's rebellious history.

And because of the nature of the prophecy, Christ referred to it in Matthew chapter thirteen, the Spirit of God led John to refer to it in his gospel (12:39-41), and the Spirit of God also led Luke to refer to it at the end of the Book of Acts (28:25-27).

The contextual use of the prophecy is the same in all three instances — *Israel's rejection of the signs portending the nation being healed.* 

The Jewish people had seen but had not seen; they had heard but had not heard. They had stopped their hearing; they had closed their eyes; they had hardened their hearts. And, consequently, there was NO conversion of and healing for the nation.

The prophecy and its context in Matthew chapter thirteen and in Acts chapter twenty-eight should be studied and understood in the light of one another. In connection with the quotation from Isaiah in Matthew there is a parabolic prophecy concerning the Church (which would exist only because of and following Israel's disobedience). And that outlined in the parabolic prophecy began to be fulfilled in its fullness in connection with the quotation from Isaiah in Acts (at the time when the kingdom ceased to be offered to Israel, with the nation being set aside for the remainder of the dispensation).

In Matthew chapter thirteen, Christ referred to individuals being sown out in the world, with a view to their bringing forth fruit for the kingdom (the parable of the Sower [and it is evident that the individuals in view could NOT have been a reference to those in the house of Israel, for Christ was outside the house and down by the seaside at this time; aside from that, Israel's condition and destiny relative to fruit-bearing was later shown by the fruitless fig tree — Matt. 21:19, 20]).

Then, in Acts chapter twenty-eight, Luke referred to that time when the sequence of events shown by the parable of the Sower would begin in its fullness (it had already been occurring, but, with Israel set aside and God's attention [relative to fruit-bearing] directed solely toward *the one new man* "in Christ," it could now [beyond Acts 28:28] *occur in its fullness*).

In Matthew though, Christ went far beyond the simple statement by Paul following the reference to Isaiah's prophecy. In the first four parables in this chapter, Christ covered *the history of Christendom throughout the dispensation*.

And the history covered by these four parables *MUST* be understood as having to do with *the message pertaining to the Word of the Kingdom,* for that, textually (the manner in which these four parables begin and continue), *is the subject matter at hand.* 

In this respect, a MAJOR error has occurred over the years by individuals attempting to interpret these parables in the light of the gospel of the grace of God rather than in the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Contextually, fruit-bearing (vv. 8, 22, 23) and the Word of the Kingdom (vv. 19-23) are in view. Both have to do with saved individuals and the gospel of the glory of Christ, and the parables MUST be so understood and interpreted.

In the parable of the Sower, most of those sown out in the world failed to bring forth fruit; and in the succeeding three parables, the reason was given. The work of Satan, through seeking to put a stop to the proclamation of the message, had produced gradual corruption.

The false teachers which men such as Paul, Peter, and Jude had warned the people about were already present (second parable); their work within Christendom would result in the spread of heresies of a nature which would bring about an abnormal growth in the Church, allowing those teaching false doctrine to be readily accepted (third parable); and this would have its end in the whole of Christendom being corrupted (fourth parable).

That is, conditions would change in Christendom throughout the dispensation to such a degree that the message which the Church had been called into existence to proclaim worldwide — which was proclaimed throughout all Christendom at the beginning of the dispensation (Rom. 10:18; Col. 1:5, 6, 23) — would NOT be proclaimed at all by the Church at the end of the dispensation. Rather than the Church proclaiming the message at the end of the dispensation, there would, instead, be complete apostasy within Christendom in this respect, resulting in conditions being EXACTLY as Christ revealed in Luke 18:8.

In this respect, the Church at the end of the dispensation will be in the SAME condition Christ found Israel at His first coming — a people without hearing and without sight insofar as the message surrounding the proffered kingdom is concerned. And, as a result, the Son of Man, at the time of His return, will be unable to find "faith ['the faith'] on the earth."

And, in keeping with the same analogy, the Church will be both Pharisaical and Sadducean, both fundamental (so-called) and liberal.

But in either instance, the message pertaining to the Word of the Kingdom will be absent. Christians will NOT want anything to do with this message.

That's the downward path upon which Christendom has been traveling for centuries — a path which, insofar as the proclamation of the Word of the Kingdom is concerned, will lead to TOTAL corruption.

And *NOTHING* can be done to change, alter, or reverse the course of events. This is the manner in which conditions were *prophesied* to exist at the end of the dispensation, and the matter was *SET* when the woman placed leaven in the three measures of meal (Matt. 13:3-33; Rev. 2, 3).

#### **A Brief History**

As previously stated, *apostasy* in Christendom began when the offer of the kingdom was still open to Israel (*e.g.*, Acts 20:29-31), and warnings to Christians about this *apostasy* constituted a major part of the message being proclaimed throughout the Churches shortly after Paul's announcement in Acts 28:28 (*cf.* I Tim. 1:18-20; 4:1-3; II Tim. 2:15-3:8; II Peter 2:1-3:9; Jude 3-25).

Then, because of this *apostasy* and the conditions which it would ultimately produce in Christendom, the Spirit of God led John to close the Canon of Scripture by outlining a succinct history of the Church throughout the dispensation, using existing conditions in seven different Churches of that day (Rev. 2, 3).

And the end result revealed by John is *EXACTLY the SAME as that previously revealed by Christ in the first four parables of Matthew chapter thirteen, before the Church was ever called into existence (cf. Luke 18:8; Rev. 3:14-21).* 

Viewing the matter from either the standpoint of Scripture alone or the standpoint of secular Church history alone, EXACTLY the SAME trend and outcome can be seen. Scripture sets forth the existence of corruption early in the dispensation, ending with the whole of Christendom being corrupted; and, looking back in secular Church history (something which those living at this end of the dispensation have the advantage of doing), EXACTLY the SAME sequence of events can be seen.

A great persecution of those of "the way" (believing Jews) had occurred in Jerusalem not too long after the beginning of the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 8:1ff). And, at the termination of this re-offer, Christians became the target of a great persecution in Rome as well.

And this latter persecution probably began about two years after Paul's announcement in Acts 28:28 (*cf.* vv. 30, 31).

It was about 62 A.D. when Paul made his announcement in Rome, recorded in Acts 28:28. Then, according to secular history, Rome burned in 64 A.D., with the Christians in Rome being accused of arson. This sparked a local persecution, setting a precedent for a persecution of Christians which eventually extended throughout the Empire.

Over the next two hundred and fifty years, ten Roman emperors spread the persecution of Christians into all parts of the Empire; and, as a result of this persecution, Christians, during this time, were slain

in all types of grotesque fashions.

Persecution though, as during the persecution of the Israelites in Egypt preceding and during Moses' day (Ex. 1:8-12; 2:11), only served to spark a growth in Christianity. And, as the persecution of believing Jews in Jerusalem following Stephen's death had served to spread "the way" throughout the land, the persecution of Christians which began in Rome served to spread "the way" throughout the Empire.

By the year 200 A.D., Christians could be found in all parts of the Empire; and by the year 250 A.D., it is estimated that Christians constituted between five and twelve percent of the population of the Empire, which totaled about 75,000,000. This phenomenal growth of Christianity under persecution is what led Tertullian, one of the early Church fathers living during that time, to say, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

But even during the time of Roman persecution, though Christianity experienced phenomenal growth, not all was well within the Church.

False teachers had appeared (among saved Jews and Christians) during the time between the persecution in Jerusalem during Stephen's day and the persecution in Rome during Paul's day. And these false teachers had centered their attack on the message being proclaimed — the Word of the Kingdom. They had centered their attack at the heart of the matter and undoubtedly set the stage for all the various offshoots of false teachings which would later be found in the Church.

For example, with the spread of Christianity throughout the Empire, *Gnosticism* (a synthesis of various philosophies, different false religions, and Christianity) and *the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes* (a priestly class elevated to a position over the common people [cf. Rev. 2:6, 15]) appeared in the Church.

Then, in the first part of the third century, Origen's *allegorical interpretative methods* (with an inherent amillennial eschatology) found ready acceptance. And these things, along with other false ideologies of the day, could only have moved Christians further and further away from the truth of Scripture, ultimately allowing an acceptance within Christendom of that which was about to occur.

After Constantine the Great (the first of the so-called Christian emperors) came into power during the opening part of the fourth century, he had the edicts of the last of the persecuting emperors (Diocletian) repealed. And Christianity then became recognized as simply another religion in the countries over which Rome ruled.

From there, a sequence of events began which resulted in Theodosius I, in the year 380 A.D., issuing an edict that made Christianity *the exclusive state religion*. Then, in the year 395 A.D., that which would have been unthinkable to the Christians in Rome in 64 A.D. (and elsewhere in the Empire for many years following) occurred. Christianity was recognized as *the official and only religion of the Roman Empire*.

Where the persecuting emperors had failed, the so-called Christian emperors succeeded. Christianity found itself enmeshed within a world system under Satan's control, *completely out of line* with God's plans and purposes for *the new creation* "in Christ."

Rather than Christianity fulfilling its calling through carrying the true message of the gospel of the grace of God to individuals in the world and then the gospel of the glory of Christ to Christians in the Church, the world was allowed to carry a false message to Christendom, instilling this false message within the Church.

Resultingly, the one-thousand-year period often referred to as "The Dark Ages" in Church history followed. And, though the Reformation under Martin Luther is usually looked upon as closing this period, in reality the period continued beyond the Reformation into the present day and time.

The Reformation centered on a recovery of truths pertaining to the Biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith, with little to no understanding being shown concerning the true reason for one's salvation. The Reformation centered on the truth of teachings seen in Exodus chapter twelve (the death of the firstborn), not on the truth of teachings seen beyond this chapter (Ex. 13-Josh. 24).

And, though men later began to look into these things (especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, building on the work of men going back several centuries prior to that time), their work was (and remains today) largely ignored or spoken against.

Insofar as an interest in the Word of the Kingdom was concerned, Christianity never (and hasn't today) recovered from where the Church found itself at the end of the fourth century.

Once the mustard bush had become "a tree" (an abnormal growth, caused by the false teachers in the second parable), with "the birds

of the air" allowed to lodge in its branches (the false teachers which had brought about this condition, finding ready acceptance within), the leaven which the woman placed in the "three measures of meal" would see to it that *deterioration* not only continued but was brought to completion as well. The leaven would continue *a deteriorating work* until "the whole" had been leavened (Matt. 13:4-33).

#### **Conditions Today**

Corruption seen in the first four parables in Matthew chapter thirteen and in the letters to the seven Churches in Revelation chapters two and three has to do SPECIFICALLY with a departure from "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), NOT to a departure from Biblical doctrine in general.

In Matthew's gospel, specific reference is made to "the kingdom of the heavens" and / or to "the word of the kingdom" (vv. 11, 19, 24, 31, 33). And in the Book of Revelation, all seven letters, structured after an identical fashion, center around the present works of Christians, with a view to Christians overcoming and occupying positions with Christ in the kingdom (2:2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19, 26, 27; 3:1, 2, 5, 8, 11, 12, 15, 21).

Thus, a corruption of Christendom seen in both Matthew chapter thirteen and Revelation chapters two and three pertains to a departure from truths surrounding the proffered kingdom — the kingdom offered to Israel in the gospel accounts, re-offered to Israel in Acts, and offered to the one new man "in Christ" in the epistles (though having begun in Acts).

It is a corruption of that which Scripture teaches pertaining to works emanating out of faithfulness, with a view to the glory lying out ahead.

The Church, at the end of the dispensation, will exist *EXACTLY* as seen in the final outcome of matters set forth in both Matthew's gospel and in the Book of Revelation.

The Church, in relation to the message surrounding the proffered kingdom, will find itself in *a state of total corruption, completely "leavened"* (Matt. 13:33); it will find itself in *a state described as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked"* (Rev. 3:17).

(Matthew chapter thirteen and Revelation chapters two and three are the only two places in the New Testament where a history of the Church throughout the dispensation is given. Both present this history from different perspectives, though both center this history around the same subject — *the Word of the Kingdom*.

This would be in complete contradistinction to the different histories of the Church written by man down through the years, for man *never* deals with this aspect of Church history. And even if a particular historian could and did deal with it, people wouldn't understand what he was talking about. The leaven has done its work too well.)

#### 1) A Work of Satan

At the end of the dispensation there will be a COMPLETE departure from the central message which was proclaimed throughout Christendom at the beginning of the dispensation. This was a message which had to do with the reason for the very existence of the Church, a message around which all of the epistles directed to the Church were built, and a message which was supposed to have been proclaimed throughout all Christendom for the duration of the dispensation.

However, because of Satan's hatred for this message (note that the message has to do with a change in the governmental administration of the earth — Satan and his angels being put down and Christ and His co-heirs taking the reins of power and authority), he sought very early in the dispensation *to COUNTER* that which God had begun through the Church (*cf.* Eph. 3:9-11; 6:11-18).

And the manner in which Satan undertook this task *followed a previously established pattern seen in the opening chapters of Genesis*, where the first account of his attempting a work of this nature is recorded.

The opening chapter of Genesis records the account of God creating Adam to rule the earth, in Satan's stead (vv. 26-28); and the third chapter of Genesis then goes on to reveal that which Satan did in an effort *to counter* God's plans and purposes in this respect (vv. 1ff).

Satan, knowing full-well why Adam had been created, immediately set about to bring man into a state in which he could no longer be found qualified to rule the earth.

Satan brought this to pass through *introducing a CORRUPTING AGENT*. He introduced *sin* into the human race. He brought about man's fall, through sin, in an effort *to counter* God's plans and purposes.

And this forms *a first-mention principle* in Scripture, showing the manner in which Satan would act at any subsequent time when seek-

ing to achieve this same goal.

And this is exactly what can be seen in Satan's work relative to the message surrounding the proffered kingdom very early in the present dispensation. He sought to do away with the message through *corruption*. He brought in *the false teachers* and placed *a CORRUPTING AGENT within*. He placed leaven within, and this leaven would work until it had corrupted the entire mass.

Apart from the work of Satan, the message surrounding the proffered kingdom would have gone unhindered throughout the dispensation. It would have remained uppermost in the minds of Christians throughout the past two millenniums, and it would continue to be the central message proclaimed throughout the Churches of the land today — as during the first several decades of the existence of the Church in the first century.

But, because of the work of Satan, things relating to the proclamation of this message have gradually moved 180 degrees out of phase.

Rather than a progressive proclamation of the message occurring throughout the dispensation, there was, instead, a GRADUAL departure; and today, for all practical purposes, there is a TOTAL departure from any proclamation of this message.

The Word of the Kingdom was proclaimed throughout Christendom during the first century; but today, except in isolated instances, it is not being proclaimed at all.

That's how COMPLETE the leaven has done its damaging work.

#### 2) A Further Veiling of the Truth

When Christ was on earth the first time there were two major religious parties in Judaism — *the Pharisees* and *the Sadducees*.

*The Pharisees* were the fundamental legalists. They believed the Law to the very letter. They believed in a future resurrection, in angels, and in spirit realities.

The Sadducees though were more liberal in their theology. They rejected any thought of a future resurrection, and they didn't believe in angels or in spirit realities (Acts 23:8).

But the Pharisees and the Sadducees did have *ONE thing in common.* Neither would have ANYTHING TO DO with the message pertaining to the proffered kingdom (Matt. 16:1-6).

And EXACTLY the same thing can be seen in Christendom today. There are two major segments — the fundamentalists and the liberals. And though these two segments have major differences in their outlook on Scripture (as the Pharisees and Sadducees had), they do have ONE thing in common (as also the Pharisees and Sadducees had). Neither will have ANYTHING TO DO with the message pertaining to the proffered kingdom.

And fundamentalism, in this respect, becomes *quite deceptive*, for it claims, by its very name, something of itself *which is NOT true at all*. Fundamentalism portends *an adherence to the fundamentals of the faith*, which translates into *a return to exactly what Scripture states, as Scripture was proclaimed during the early years of the first-century Church.* 

And fundamentalism, as it is seen in Christendom today, has NOT wrought a return to such a position; NOR will it in days ahead; NOR can it in days ahead.

There is a cry today among a number of those who look upon themselves as fundamentalists for a return to what is called "historic Biblical fundamentalism." But there's a major problem.

The groups echoing this cry have NO understanding of "historic Biblical fundamentalism." They DON'T understand what was taught in the first-century Church, and they CANNOT return to a position which they DO NOT know anything about.

A return to "historic Biblical fundamentalism" is nothing short of a return to proclaiming, as central, the Word of the Kingdom throughout the Churches, exactly as Scripture states the matter, for that's what was done by those proclaiming the message in the first-century Church, in both verbal and written form.

And we have a written record of *EXACTLY* what was taught in those days, *EXACTLY* as God would have Christians possess the record; and *UNTIL* there is a return to an adherence to the contents of that record, there can be NO return to "historic Biblical fundamentalism."

BUT, a return of this nature is NOT going to occur, except possibly in isolated instances, for such a return would be a reversal of the leavening process.

Rather, conditions are going to continue in the same deteriorating process until the dispensation is brought to a close by the Son of Man returning and being unable to find "faith ['the faith'] on the earth" (Luke 18:8).

## 13

### The Goal The Book of Revelation

The Goal Realized in the Messianic Kingdom

"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 seashore; 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" (Gen. 22:17, 18).

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ [lit., 'The kingdom of this world has become that (the kingdom) of our Lord and of his Christ']; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

The Book of Revelation, through the first twenty chapters, provides a climax to all which has preceded; and this climax has to do with events occurring at the end of six days (at the end of 6,000 years) and during and at the end of the seventh day (during and at the end of the seventh 1,000-year period), bringing to a conclusion all things within a septenary structure of time UNCHANGEABLY ESTABLISHED at the beginning of Scripture (Gen. 1:1-2:3).

Then, the last two chapters of the book move beyond the seven days, beyond the 7,000 years, into the eighth day (pointing to a new beginning, with some things in these two closing chapters alluding back to events having to do with the preceding 1,000-year Lord's Day).

After *ALL things* throughout *Man's Day* (lasting 6,000 years) and *the Lord's Day* (lasting 1,000 years) have been completed, the Book of Revelation, in the last two chapters, moves into *the Day of God* (which will continue throughout an unending succession of ages).

This is how Scripture closes. The Lord chose to close His revelation to man by providing a climax to all which He had previously revealed, beginning with Moses (chs. 1-20). And then He chose to go beyond this climax and, very briefly, reveal conditions and events during the following eternal ages which follow (chs. 21, 22).

The first twenty chapters of this book deal with events at the end of and beyond Man's Day, events occurring at a future time, during the Tribulation and the subsequent Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10ff). And these events have to do with judgment in which the Lord will exercise supremacy in ALL things. It encompasses the Lord's judgment in ALL matters pertaining to:

- 1) His people (both the living and the dead).
- 2) The unsaved (both the living and the dead).
- 3) Satan and his angels.

And the Lord's Day ends with the destruction of the present heavens and earth (after *ALL* other matters have been attended to), which is when the Day of God begins (an event occurring, chronologically, between chs. 20 and 21 [cf. I Cor. 15:24-28; II Peter 3:10-13]).

*Judgment*, according to Scripture, *MUST begin* "at the house of God" (I Peter 4:17). God will judge ALL of *His people FIRST*, preceding the Millennium (the Church, Israel, O.T. saints preceding Israel's existence, Tribulation martyrs, and saved Gentiles coming out of the Tribulation).

*ONLY THEN* will God judge the unsaved (at the Great White Throne [Rev. 20:11-15]), which will not occur until after the Millennium.

*ALL* of the saved will be judged before the Millennium, for the results of their judgment will have to do with the Millennium.

The unsaved though will not be judged until after the Millennium, for the results of their judgment will have *NOTHING* to do with the Millennium, *ONLY* with the ages following the Millennium.

Events in the Book of Revelation begin at a time immediately following the present dispensation; and the first of numerous events dealt with in the book has to do with judgment awaiting the Church, along with the results of this judgment (chs. 1-4). The book then continues with the introduction of the seven-sealed scroll and judgment awaiting Israel, a judgment which will bring the prior dispensation to a close (seven years yet remain to be fulfilled in this dispensation [Daniel's unfulfilled Seventieth Week]). During this time, judgment will befall the Gentile nations as well; but Israel, with respect to judgment, will, of necessity, occupy a position in the forefront among the nations.

Israel, during the Tribulation, *MUST come under judgment FIRST* (chs. 6-19a). Again, judgment *MUST* begin at "the house of God." The Gentile nations will enter into this judgment mainly in relation to their association with Israel (*e.g.*, their geographical proximity to the present Jewish nation in the Middle East, or their past and/or present attitude toward and treatment of the Jewish people).

Then, when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation, He will conclude His dealings with His people in judgment *FIRST* before concluding His dealings with the saved from among the Gentiles, along with the destruction of the final form of Gentile world power at that time (chs. 19b-20a; *cf.* Ezek. 20:34-38; Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 19:11-21).

And, going on into the Messianic Era itself, this same principle *MUST* still hold true. This era will consist of 1,000 years of judging; and this judgment, of necessity, for a purpose, will have to do with the saved *FIRST*, then with the unsaved.

The Messianic Era is a 1,000-year period during which Christ and His co-heirs will rule the earth with "a rod of iron," with a view to bringing *order* out of *disorder*, for a purpose to be realized in the eternal ages beyond.

The *saved* are the ones who will enter into the eternal ages beyond the Millennium and occupy positions of power and authority of a universal nature in God's kingdom, not the unsaved (Rev. 21:3, 4; 22:1-5). And Israel's evangelistic efforts among the nations will result in the salvation of millions of Gentiles, undoubtedly billions. And these Gentiles will be among those allowed to partake of the tree of life during the ages beyond the Millennium, with fruit from this tree providing the wisdom and knowledge to rule and to reign (Rev. 22:2).

(For information on the tree of life in the preceding respect, refer to Chapter V in the author's book, *Judgment Seat of Christ*.)

Thus, it will be *ALL* of the saved to whom Christ will turn His attention at this time, with a view to preparations being made for the endless ages beyond the Millennium.

During the present dispensation, the Spirit of God is in the world calling out *a bride for God's Son*, to reign with the Son during the coming dispensation. In this respect, the Spirit is in the world today acquiring the rulers to reign as *co-heirs with the Son* during the Millennium.

In this same respect, Israel will go out to the nations during the Millennium, reaching the Gentiles with the message of the one true and living God (Isa. 53:1ff), with a view to acquiring the additional rulers needed for a universal rule within God's government of the universe, with power *THEN* emanating from "the throne of God and of the Lamb," from the new Jerusalem, on the new earth (Rev. 22:1, 3).

Numerous unsaved Gentiles though, even during that coming millennial day, will hear and reject this message. Scripture deals with these Gentiles with respect to their being cut off at the end of what could be described as a probationary period (one hundred years [Isa. 65:20]), then appearing at the Great White Throne (following the Messianic Era) to be judged.

The unsaved in that day (as today [Eph. 2:1, 12]) will be completely outside the scope of the reason for man's creation in the beginning (to rule and reign [Gen. 1:26-28]), they can have no part in the eternal ages lying beyond the Millennium (in which man will occupy positions of power and authority extending out into the universe [Rev. 22:1-5]), and those having rejected the salvation message will evidently be cut off at the end of this one-hundred-year period.

And insofar as a judgment of Satan and his angels is concerned, they will be cast out of heaven (onto the earth) shortly before the middle of the Tribulation and will be cast into the abyss (a section of *Hades* [Isa. 14:15]) at the end of the Tribulation, before the Messianic Era begins.

Then, at the end of the Messianic Era, following their having been loosed for a short period, they will be cast into the lake of fire, where they will reside throughout the endless ages which follow (Rev. 12:7-12; 20:7-10; *cf.* Matt. 25:41).

(Thus, as can be seen, dealing with the Book of Revelation is not only dealing with the whole of preceding Scripture but also with the eternal ages which lie beyond. And attempting to deal with the contents of the Book of Revelation to any depth in this concluding chapter of this book would, of course, not be possible.

[For material on numerous parts of the Book of Revelation, refer to the author's book, *The Time of the End* (a thirty-six-chapter book on the Book of Revelation)].

But remaining within the subject matter at hand — concluding this book, *From Acts to the Epistles*, with an overview of the Book of Revelation — can be accomplished in a somewhat simple fashion by briefly calling attention to how the book deals with judgment as it relates to the Church and to Israel [which, of necessity, will include the nations], *ALL with a view to the Messianic Era*.

This is really the crux of matters seen in the Book of Revelation throughout the first twenty chapters. And things revealed in this book relating to the Church and Israel [including the nations], with a view to the Messianic Era, are things which must be understood before anything else in the book can be understood in its proper perspective. These things are fundamental and primary.)

#### **Judgment Awaiting the Church**

The Book of Revelation opens, after several brief statements (1:1-8), with the Lord taking John, removing him from Man's Day, and placing him not only in the Lord's Day but at a time almost 2,000 years in the future (1:9, 10). And the first thing which the Lord shows John is a scene depicting seven Churches appearing before Christ in judgment (Christ is presented as Judge, with the Churches in His presence), after the dispensation has run its course and the Church has been removed from the earth into heaven (1:11ff).

"Seven" is a complete number, showing *the completion of that* which is in view. In this instance, *the Church* is in view; and the seven Churches (seven existing Churches in Asia during the first century, during John's day) would have to represent *the complete Church*.

And from John's vantage point in this future time, in the Lord's Day, these seven Churches would have to be viewed as representing the complete Church existing throughout the preceding dispensation — All Christians (the dead raised, the living removed) in Christ's presence, beyond the dispensation having to do with the Church, in the Lord's Day.

Thus, after several brief statements, the Book of Revelation opens at a time after the present dispensation has run its course and the

Church has been removed from the earth into heaven.

And, if the three-fold division of the book seen towards the end of the first chapter (v. 19) is viewed from this perspective — from the perspective of John being present at a future time in the Lord's Day — chapters two through four can be viewed correctly in relation to that which John was shown in chapter one.

John had been placed at this future time beyond the present dispensation, in the Lord's Day, when he was told:

"Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter ['after these things']" (1:19).

And this fact *must* be kept in mind, else one will miss the central teaching throughout the first three chapters.

(Note that God can move a man either forward in time or back in time. In this respect, "time" is *relative*, not a constant.

For example, God moved Ezekiel back in time and John forward in time [Ezek. 8; Rev. 1]. Ezekiel, having been moved back in time, saw things occur which had already occurred; and John, having been moved forward in time, saw things occur which are yet to occur. And the very fact that the things which John saw have already occurred, alone, guarantees that they will yet occur at a future time. One simply CANNOT change history.

Then there is something else. *John saw ALL Christians in Christ's presence at this future time, being judged.* In short, John saw you and me there. *We have ALREADY been there*, which, alone, guarantees our presence there at *a yet future time*. Again, history *CANNOT* be changed.)

#### 1) First and Second Divisions of the Book

The first division of the book, "the things which thou hast seen," is evident. These things have to do with the Church removed from the earth and standing before Christ in judgment (1:11-18).

And, with this in mind, the second division of the book, "the things which are," should also be evident. "The things which are" in Rev. 1:19 could only have to do with things occurring during a time which was "present" with respect to John during that future time, in the Lord's Day, not things occurring during the time from which he had been removed (which to John in the Day of the Lord, at a future time,

would have been time in the preceding dispensation).

Thus, "the things which are," from John's perspective, can only have to do with the same things John had just seen — the Church appearing before Christ in judgment. And that is exactly what can be seen as one continues on into chapters two and three.

That revealed in chapters two and three simply continues the thought from chapter one relative to a judgment of Christians in the Day of the Lord. John saw seven Churches which had existed in Asia during a time in the dispensation from which he had been removed. John though saw these seven Churches, *NOT back in Asia during preceding time, BUT from his vantage point at a future time, in the Lord's Day.* 

In chapter one, John saw these Churches standing before the Lord in judgment; and in chapters two and three he saw that which was stated about each Church within the framework of that judgment. That would be to say, chapters two and three depict the judgment introduced in chapter one.

And this would be perfectly in line with the manner in which each epistle in chapters two and three is structured. *Each is structured EXACTLY the SAME way. Each has to do with the works of Christians, with a view to overcoming and occupying positions as co-heirs with Christ in the kingdom*—things in perfect keeping with that which Scripture reveals concerning issues surrounding and following the future judgment of Christians (2:2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17, 19, 26, 27; 3:1, 2, 5, 8, 11, 12, 15, 21).

In this respect, the first three chapters of the Book of Revelation have to do, *FIRST and FOREMOST*, with the Church appearing before Christ *in judgment*, in the Lord's Day, following the conclusion of the present dispensation.

But there is another facet to the revelation which the Spirit of God built into chapters two and three. These seven Churches, as previously shown, were seven existing Churches in Asia during the first century (1:4, 11). And these epistles are structured after a fashion which, as well, depict events occurring during the time which John had left, *i.e.*, events occurring during the present dispensation, preceding the appearance of the Church at the judgment seat.

Thus, these epistles, along with depicting the complete Church before the judgment seat in heaven during the future Day of the Lord, also depict the complete Church on earth during the present dispensation as well. With respect to the present dispensation, the complete Church shown by the number "seven" would have to encompass the Church throughout the entire dispensation (as the same number also depicts the complete Church, at the end of the dispensation, in the future Day of the Lord), else the Church could not be looked upon as complete in these chapters.

And viewing the Church and the dispensation in this all-inclusive fashion, it would only be natural to look for these chapters to cover a history of the Church during the dispensation — beginning with Ephesus (which left her "first love" [2:4]) and ending with Laodicea (which was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" [3:17]).

And to see that a history of this nature is presented in these chapters, one need only compare the downward path of the Church (during the dispensation) seen in Revelation chapters two and three *with* the same downward path of the Church (during the dispensation) revealed elsewhere in Scripture (*cf.* Matt. 13:1-33; Luke 18:8 [*ref.* Chapter XII in this book, "From Jerusalem to Rome"]).

Then, with respect to the Church during this time, in the Lord's Day, the complete Church existing throughout the dispensation is seen appearing before Christ in judgment at the end of the dispensation. And this occurs at one time and place, leaving no room for any type teaching concerning a selective resurrection and/or rapture of Christians.

### 2) Third Division of the Book

Then the third division of the book, "the things which shall be hereafter [lit., 'after these things']," begins with chapter four. This chapter opens with the words, "After this [lit., 'After these things']..." And this verse closes with the words, "...come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter [lit., 'things which must be after these things']."

Revealing the third division of the book, God began at the SAME place that He had begun when revealing the first two divisions — by showing John being removed from the earth, into heaven, and finding himself at a future time, in the Lord's Day (cf. 1:9, 10; 4:1, 2). However, beginning this third division of the book, John is shown something different pertaining to the Church during this future time, something which will occur AFTER Christians have been judged (previously shown in chs. 1-3).

(Beginning at the same place again in subsequent Scripture to show additional truths, as has been done at this point in the book, is something seen quite often as one progresses through the Book of Revelation [e.g., note things stated about the 144,000 in chs. 7, 14; note the repeated references to the same events in different parts of ch. 12, with additional information following each of the references; note references to events at the time of Christ's return at the end of both chs. 14 and 19 [ref. also chs. 10, 11]; or note the numerous things stated about the climactic days and end of Israel's harlotry in chs. 17-19a].

Beginning again at the same point of reference and moving in a different direction from that point, presenting different truths than before, is simply one of the ways in which this book has been structured.)

The Spirit of God moving John to begin chapter four after this fashion brings out another truth often denied today. Calling attention once again to John being removed from the earth at this point in the book — and viewing chapters two and three from the perspective of the complete Church throughout the present dispensation (a textual and numerical necessity) — would show the complete Church being removed from the earth prior to the introduction of the seven-sealed scroll and God resuming His dealings with Israel (5:1ff). The Church will be removed "after these things," i.e., after the present dispensation, prior to the Tribulation.

But the central teaching surrounding that which is revealed to John at this time, after calling attention once again to his being removed from the earth into the Lord's Day at a future time, has to do with a continuation of the central thought seen in the preceding three chapters. The things which John now sees have to do with events following the issues and determinations surrounding the judgment seat — events which will occur after the events seen in the preceding chapters, events which will occur "after these things [after the things in chs. 1-3]."

Opening this third section of the book, God first reveals His concluding dealings with the Church (ch. 4) preceding the marriage festivities (ch. 19) and the Messianic Era which follows (ch. 20) — dealings based on issues and determinations surrounding the previous judgment (chs. 1-3). And these concluding dealings, following events at the judgment seat, have to do with *crowned rulers*, both past and future.

Then, between God's concluding dealings with the Church (ch.

4) and the marriage festivities (ch. 19a), things having to do with the redemption of the inheritance and God's dealings with Israel and the nations are seen (chs. 5ff).

#### 3) Crowns Before the Throne

If a person *DOESN'T* view chapters one through three from the perspective of John being removed into a future time, in the Lord's Day, then seeing the complete Church in Christ's presence, with Christ appearing as Judge — *i.e.*, *DOESN'T* view these chapters as having to do with all Christians appearing before Christ in judgment at a future time beyond the present dispensation — he really *CANNOT* understand the significance of that which John was subsequently shown in chapter four.

And the reasoning for this is quite simple. Events in chapter four are *inseparably connected* with events in the preceding three chapters. Events in chapter four are *CLIMACTIC* to events in the preceding three chapters. Thus, understanding events in chapter four is *contingent upon* understanding previous events surrounding the judgment of Christians seen in chapters one through three. And events in all four chapters have to do with events which will occur *PRECEDING* the introduction of the seven-sealed scroll and the Tribulation (chs. 5-19).

Chapter four describes a scene surrounding God's throne in heaven; and attention is focused on twenty-four crowned elders, seated on thrones, who take their crowns and cast them before God's throne.

And, UNLESS this is understood within context, a person will be left to the same guesswork that so many of the expositors have relegated themselves to at this point in the book.

First, go back into the first three chapters and note that which the future judgment of Christians will center around. It will center around showing (by works, which emanated out of faithfulness; or no works, or worthless works which resulted from or emanated out of unfaithfulness) whether an individual *had overcome* or, instead, *was overcome*, with the Messianic Era in view.

From the positive side of matters, the judgment seat of Christ will center around *a setting forth of the overcomers*, those who will rule as co-heirs with Christ during the coming age. It will center around *revealing the identity of the crowned rulers who will ascend the throne with Christ in that day (cf.* Matt. 25:19-30; Luke 19:15-24).

Now, with that in mind, note another facet of the matter. *Christ and His co-heirs will rule the SAME kingdom, from the SAME heavenly sphere, which Satan and his angels presently rule.* 

Satan is *the present messiah* (the "anointed" one [Ezek. 28:14; Luke 4:6]) in relation to the government of this earth. He is the one whom God appointed ruler over this earth in the beginning, and he has a great host of appointed angels ruling with him.

However, Satan and his angels have disqualified themselves, and God is about to bring forth *a new order of rulers to occupy the positions which they presently occupy and to rule the domain which they presently rule*.

Christ will rule in Satan's stead and Christians will rule in the stead of the angels presently ruling with Satan.

Thus, the coming kingdom will be ruled by Christ and His co-heirs rather than by Satan and his angels (cf. Isa. 14:12-15; Rom. 8:18-23; Heb. 2:5-10). And, in this respect, note two things:

- 1) Two-thirds of the angels originally ruling with Satan refused to participate with him in his rebellious act and have not ruled with him for millenniums (*cf.* Isa. 14:12-15; Rev. 12:3, 4).
- 2) A principle of Biblical government necessitates that an incumbent ruler continue wearing his crown until his replacement is on the scene and ready to ascend the throne (*cf.* I Sam. 15:1-16:13; 31:1-6; II Sam. 1:7-10; 2:4; 5:3-5).

Thus, even though most of the angels originally ruling with Satan have not ruled with him for millenniums, they *MUST* retain their crowns until their replacements are on the scene and ready to ascend the throne.

And that is *the setting* for what is revealed in Revelation chapter four. At this point in the book, *The Christians who are to ascend the throne with Christ will have been brought forth and shown worthy* (through preceding decisions and determinations made at the judgment seat [chs. 1-3]).

They, at this point in the book, will have been identified and will be present and ready to ascend the throne; and for the first time in the entire history of the earth, those crowned angels, originally ruling with Satan but refusing to participate in his rebellious act, can relinquish their crowns, with

a view to others — Christians having previously been shown qualified at the judgment seat — wearing these crowns.

And this is EXACTLY what they are seen doing in Rev. 4:10.

The Book of Revelation abounds in numerics. "Twelve" is the number of *governmental perfection*, and those who cast their crowns before God's throne are identified contextually, by their actions, and through the use of *two sets of twelve*, representing two-thirds of the angels who refused to follow Satan.

Those who followed Satan, continuing to rule with him, would be represented by *a third set of twelve*, to form a triad ("three" is the number of *divine perfection* [cf. Rev. 12:3, 4]) within the way God would have originally established the government of the earth under Satan.

In this respect, the structure of Satan's government was originally established *perfect* by God (shown in the symbolism of *three sets of twelve rulers*), though it has not existed this way since his rebellion against God's supreme power and authority.

Two-thirds of Satan's original rulers will relinquish their crowns willingly, but Satan's crown and the crowns worn by the angels continuing to rule with him will have to be taken by force. The "many crowns" which Christ will wear at the time of His return (Rev. 19:12) will undoubtedly be the crowns cast before God's throne in Rev. 4:10.

After the Father has positioned the qualified rulers in His Son's kingdom, Christ will give these crowns, plus the crowns which He will have taken by force from the angels presently ruling with Satan (crowns worn by the ENTIRE original triad of rulers), to His co-heirs (previously having been shown qualified at the judgment seat) immediately preceding their ascending the throne together.

And also, prior to ascending the throne, Christ will have taken the crown which Satan presently wears, for He is to wear this crown during the coming age (ref. Chapter VIII in this book, "Paul's Gospel").

(There are two Greek words used for "crown" in the N.T. One is *stephanos* [used referring to a crown worn by an individual not actually reigning], and the other is *diadema* [used referring to a crown worn by an individual ready to ascend the throne, or to an individual actually reigning]. In this respect, crowns being offered to Christians today are referred to through the use of the word *stephanos*, for it is not yet time for Christians to ascend the throne.

Crowns presently worn by Satan and the angels continuing to rule with him would be referred to through the use of the word *diadema* [Rev. 12:3], but crowns presently worn by those angels who refused to participate in his rebellion could only be referred to through the use of the word *stephanos* [Rev. 4:10]. These angels, at one time, wore *diadems*; but once they vacated their ruling positions with Satan, their crowns could no longer be referred to as *diadems*, though they had to continue retaining these crowns until their successors appeared on the scene. Thus, *stephanos* is the word used in Rev. 4:10 to describe these crowns.

However, in Rev. 19:12, assuming that these are the same crowns [for these are not crowns which Christ will wear in that coming day, and there are no other crowns with which they could be associated], they are referred to through the use of the word *diadema*, not *stephanos*.

At this point in the book, the Son will have received the kingdom from His Father [Dan. 7:13, 14], and He and His co-heirs will be ready to ascend the throne. Thus, these crowns which would have originally been referred to through the use of the word *diadema*, but could only have been referred to for millenniums through the use of the word *stephanos*, can, in that coming day, be referred to once again through the use of the word *diadema*.)

#### **Judgment Awaiting Israel**

After the twenty-four elders have cast their crowns before the throne, with their announcement concerning the Lord being worthy "to receive glory and honour and power," the third section of the book moves away from God's dealings with the Church.

At this point in the book, the only other revealed activities involving the Church preceding Christ's return to the earth at the end of the Tribulation are those surrounding *the marriage festivities*. And these activities will occur in heaven at the end of the Tribulation, immediately preceding Christ's return in all His "glory and honour and power" (Rev. 19:7-9).

Thus, after events in chapter four, attention in the book can be directed toward the seven-sealed scroll and toward Israel, anticipating the completion of Daniel's Seventy-Week prophecy.

Seven years of this prophecy yet remain to be fulfilled, and these seven years must come to pass before Israel *can be raised up to live in* 

God's sight (cf. Dan. 9:24-27; Hosea 5:15-6:2).

These last seven years of Daniel's prophecy form a time during which Israel will pass through the most intense period of suffering in the nation's history. This period is referred to as "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). And the trouble which Israel, along with the Gentile nations, will undergo in that day will become so intense that the Lord will have to shorten those days, else "there should no flesh be saved" (Matt. 24:15-22; *cf.* Joel 1:15; 2:1, 2, 10, 11, 31-3:17).

The Book of Revelation provides the most lengthy, detailed, single account in Scripture of events as they will transpire during this time. From the beginning of chapter six to the opening part of chapter nineteen the book reveals numerous sequences of events, exactly as they were shown to and recorded by John.

Viewing the numerical structure of the book once again, all of God's judgments in the book are seen within the scope of seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven vials (6:1-16:21).

The seven trumpets and seven vials form the judgments seen when the seventh seal is broken (8:1, 2; 11:15-19; 15:1ff).

Thus, in this respect, *ALL* of the judgments are seen within the scope of the seven seals. And this is the reason that the seven-sealed scroll *ALONE* is in view in chapter five when a search is made for someone worthy to break the seals.

(The breaking of these seven seals has to do with God's redemptive terms relative to the inheritance over which Christ and His co-heirs are to rule and reign. And God's redemptive terms have to do with *judgment*.

For a comprehensive discussion of the seven-sealed scroll in Revelation chapter five and the redemption of the inheritance in chapters six through nineteen, refer to Chapters VIII, IX, and XIX in the author's book, *The Time of the End*.

For more information on the seven trumpet and seven vial judgments, refer to Chapters XVI-XVIII in the same book.)

God, revealing His works, has an affinity for numbers; and He has chosen to use a triad of sevens, removing two sets of sevens (the trumpet and vial judgments) from the first set, the seventh seal of the seven-sealed scroll (similar to the separation of two sets of twelves

from an original triad, leaving one remaining, as seen in chapters four and twelve).

Again, the number "seven" shows the completeness of that which is in view, which, in this case, would be judgment; and "three sets of sevens [seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven vials]" would show Divine perfection within that judgment, i.e., Divine perfection within the redemption of the inheritance.

Remaining within the sequence of Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks, the Sixty-Ninth Week ended with Israel crucifying her Messiah (Dan. 9:25, 26a); and, at that point, the clock, marking off time in this prophecy, stopped.

When time resumes by the breaking of the first seal, Israel, in relation to time in this prophecy, will be placed in the position of having just crucified her Messiah.

(Note that the passage of generations changes *nothing* relative to Israel's guilt concerning Messiah's crucifixion, along with the blood of the prophets, and others [Matt. 23:34-39; Luke 13:33, 34].

The generation of Jews alive 2,000 years ago, which crucified their Messiah, were not only guilty of the blood of their Messiah [Acts 2:23, 36; 3:14, 15; 7:52] but declared guilty of the blood of the prophets, along with "all the righteous blood shed upon the earth," going all the way back to Abel.

And exactly the same thing has been true of any generation of Jews living since that time, is true of the generation of Jews in the world today, and will be true of the generation of Jews alive during the Tribulation [undoubtedly the same generation alive today].

Israel, presently unclean through contact with the dead body of the nation's Messiah, along with the prophets, among others, cannot be cleansed of this defilement until the third and seventh days — the third and seventh one-thousand-year periods, counting from two starting points, from Christ on the third and from Abel on the seventh [Num. 19:11-22].)

And because of this, the Jewish people will enter into a time of trouble without parallel in history. God will allow the Israelites to be misled by a false messiah (Dan. 9:27; John 5:43), who will seek, by every means possible, to bring about the nation's destruction. Then, when all appears lost, during the nation's darkest hour, the One Whom

the nation crucified seven years earlier (in relation to Daniel's prophecy) will return to save the very nation which had slain Him.

In that day the Jewish people will look upon the One "Whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10). The generation of Jews alive in that day will be seen *JUST AS GUILTY* of crucifying their Messiah as the generation which actually committed this act 2,000 years ago.

Then, while gazing upon Him, they will notice His hands; and someone will ask, possibly almost afraid to ask:

"What are those wounds in thine hands?" (Zech. 13:6a).

And Israel's long-rejected Messiah will respond:

"Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (13:6b).

In that day the Jewish people will realize the truth about and the significance of that which occurred seven years before in one respect, two millenniums before in another; and the nation will mourn after a fashion yet to be seen in the house of Israel (Zech. 12:11-14).

In that day, repentance will exist nationwide among the Jewish people scattered throughout the Gentile nations, the one thing which God requires before *He turns back to Israel and remembers* "his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex. 2:23-3:10).

Then, Israel's Messiah will appear to a repentant and believing nation, Israel will realize her national Passover, exactly as seen in the type in Exodus — Moses sent to deliver the Jewish people, followed by the institution and keeping of the Passover.

In that coming day, exactly as in the type, the Jewish people, with their Deliverer in their midst, will appropriate the blood of the Paschal Lamb, and a nation will be "born at once" (Isa. 66:8).

#### The Messianic Era

During the Messianic Era there will be a dual aspect to the kingdom — *heavenly* and *earthly* spheres. Both spheres were dealt with in the beginning by Moses (*e.g.*, Gen. 14:19, 22; 22:17,

18), though Moses dealt more extensively with the earthly sphere than with the heavenly (*e.g.*, Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18-21; 26:3, 4; 28:3, 4, 12-14; Ex. 3:6-8).

Essentially, *both spheres* of the kingdom are introduced at the beginning of Scripture. Then, the Old Testament deals mainly with *the earthly*, and the New Testament (through the gospels, Acts, and the epistles) deals mainly with *the heavenly*. And then, *both spheres* are brought together in full reality toward the end of Scripture through events outlined in the Book of Revelation.

During the Messianic Era, *Christ and His co-heirs* will occupy positions of power and authority *from a heavenly sphere* — the same sphere presently occupied by Satan and his angels. Christ will be seated on His Own throne, and His co-heirs will exercise power over the nations of the earth from this throne with Him (Rev. 2:26, 27; 3:21).

*Israel*, in that day, will dwell *in the land covenanted to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, within a theocracy. Israel will be positioned at the head of the nations, and the nations will be ruled by and blessed through Israel (*cf.* Gen. 12:1-3; Ex. 4:22, 23; 19:5, 6).

Christ, in the dual scope of His reign, along with sitting on His Own throne in the heavens with His co-heirs, will also sit on David's throne on the earth in the midst of His people, Israel (Joel 2:27; Luke 1:31-33); and *the Jewish people*, in the antitype of Joseph's brethren after Joseph had revealed himself to them, will realize their calling as God's witness to the ends of the earth.

In that day, Christ's brethren, the Jewish people, will go throughout the earth with the message that *Jesus is alive, and He is governor over the entire earth (cf.* Gen. 45:26; Isa. 53:1ff).

And this carries one into the fulfillment of the first part of Revelation, chapter twenty (vv. 1-6), into the seventh day, into the seventh millennium, set forth in the original framework of events in Gen. 2:1-3.

This carries one into that period which will fulfill that to which the WHOLE of preceding Scripture points, anticipating concluding events at the end of the Millennium and continuing events in the eternal ages which follow (Rev. 20:7-22:5).

# Scripture Index

| <i>c</i> ·           | 2 7 12 125                      | 7.77'                 |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Genesis              | 3:7-12125                       | I Kings               |
| Chapters 1-439       | 4:1-97                          | 17:15                 |
| 1:1142               | 4:1-9, 29-316                   |                       |
| 1:1-537              | 4:1979                          | II Vinos              |
|                      |                                 | II Kings              |
| 1:1, 26, 28170       | 4:19, 2044, 125                 | 2:135                 |
| 1:1-2894             | 4:22, 2397, 99                  |                       |
| 1:1-2:336, 38, 125   | 150, 189                        | II Chronicles         |
| 143, 154, 173        | 4:29-315, 8                     | 7:1428                |
| 1:239, 60            |                                 | 10 = 12               |
|                      | 7:105                           | 10:5, 1280            |
| 1:2, 24, 41102       | Chapter 124, 34                 |                       |
| 1:26-2890, 108, 176  | 39, 43, 133                     | Esther                |
| 2:4ff142             | Chapters 12-1430                | 4:1680                |
| Chapters 3, 437      |                                 |                       |
| Clapters 3, 4        | 12:168                          | 5:180                 |
| Chapters 3, 4, 22133 | 12:1341, 49                     |                       |
| 3:1ff94              | 12:40, 4165                     | <i>Job</i>            |
| Chapter 434          | Chapters 13ff168                | 1:6-1293              |
| 12:1-3189            | Chapters 14ff107                | 2:1-793               |
|                      |                                 | 2.1-/93               |
| 12:1-465             | 19:5, 6189                      |                       |
| 14:17-222            | 25:21, 2240                     | Psalms                |
| 14:19, 22188         | 29:1-3447                       | 8:4-671               |
| 15:13-1665           | 31:1840                         | 110:170               |
| 15:18-21189          | 40:2040                         |                       |
|                      | 40:2040                         | 110:1, 2, 432         |
| 17:18-22107          |                                 |                       |
| 19:1752              | Leviticus                       | Isaiah                |
| 19:3051              | 16:6, 10, 1140                  | 1:4-6, 18, 19124      |
| 21:9-12107           | 16:16, 18-2040                  |                       |
|                      | 10.10, 10-2040                  | 1:25-2:5124           |
| Chapter 2234, 39     | 3.7 1                           | 6:9, 10162            |
| 22:17, 182, 173, 188 | Numbers                         | 14:12-15183           |
| 26:3, 4189           | 13:1-268                        | 14:13, 14103          |
| 28:3, 4, 12-14189    | 19:11-22187                     | 14:15176              |
| Chapter 3734, 39     | Chapter 21 122                  |                       |
|                      | Chapter 21133                   | 25:8143               |
| 37:18-2067           | -                               | 28:10, 1131           |
| 40:13, 2080          | <i>Deuteronomy</i><br>16:1-1615 | 32:15-2019            |
| 41:56-42:667         | 16:1-16                         | 38:7, 85              |
| 45:168, 79           | 1011 10                         | 43:197                |
| 45:2679              | Ioshua                          |                       |
|                      |                                 | 43:1-1023, 25, 29, 80 |
| 162, 189             | 3:75                            | 43:9, 10162           |
|                      | 10:12-145                       | 44:3-519              |
| Exodus               |                                 | 52:468                |
| 1:8-12167            | I Samuel                        | 53:1162, 176, 189     |
| Chapter 2102         | Chambana 1566 02                |                       |
|                      | Chapters 15ff93                 | 53:1, 4, 5126         |
| 2:11167              | 15:1-16:13183                   | 65:17143              |
| 2:1468               | 30:12, 1380                     | 66:8188               |
| 2:23-25125           | 31:1-6183                       |                       |
| 2:23-3:10188         | 5111 5100                       | Inomial               |
|                      | II C1                           | Jeremiah              |
| 3:25                 | II Samuel                       | 30:7186               |
| 3:2-1244             | 1:7-10183                       |                       |
| 3:6-8189             | 2:4183                          | Ezekiel               |
| 3:7-1068             | 5:3-5183                        | Chapter 8178          |
| 3.7 1000             | 5.5 5105                        | Chapter o170          |
|                      |                                 |                       |

| 10:4, 1871         | 4:23-25123   | 21:20-2470   |
|--------------------|--|--|
|                    |  |  |
| 11:22, 2371        | 5:22, 29, 3051   | 21:28-39119  |
| 20:34-38175        | 6:25141  | 21:33-4262   |
|                    |  |  |
| 28:14183           | 7:13, 14143  | 21:33-43   |
|                    |  | 21:33-43   |
| 28:14-1993         | 8:17   | 21.452, 26, 32   |
| 39:28, 2919        | 8:11, 1252   | 62, 119, 161   |
|                    |  | 22 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1                               |
| 43:1-571           | 9:671  | 22:1-14118, 119  |
|                    | 0.27 24  | 22:2-10120   |
| D 11               | 9:27-348   |  |
| Daniel             | 10:5, 696  | 22:11-1452, 120  |
|                    | 10.50 1.550 100  | 22.11 11   |
| 3:19-255           | 10:5-81, 7, 70, 123                                    | 23:1, 13   |
| 4:17-3294          | 10:67  | 23:1360  |
|                    |  | 25.1500  |
| 5:17-2194          | 10:2371  | 23:15, 3351  |
|                    |  | 22 24 27   |
| 7:13, 1471, 185    | 10:2851  | 23:34-372  |
| 9:24-27125, 186    | 11:1971  | 23:34-3863   |
|                    | 11.1//1  |  |
| 9:25-27187         | Chapters 12, 13119                                     | 23:34-39187  |
|                    |  | 23:38, 39118   |
|                    | 12:871   |  |
| Hosea              | 12:10-1560   | 24:15-22186  |
| F 10 ( 0 104       |  | 24.21  |
| 5:13-6:2124        | 12:14-328  | 24:2144  |
| 5:15-6:280, 125    | 12:2214, 123   | 24:21, 22125   |
| 3.13-0.200, 123    |  |  |
| 162, 186           | 12:22-323, 34, 96                                      | 25:19-30182  |
|                    |  |  |
| 6:1, 2126          | 102, 122   | 25:31-46175  |
|                    | 12:22-24, 28, 31, 3260                                 | 25:41176   |
| T 1                |  |  |
| loel               | 12:38-4034   | 27:50, 5145  |
| 1:15186            |  |  |
| 1:15180            | 12:38-4561   | 27:6380  |
| 2:1, 2, 10, 11186  | 12:39-41163  | 28:18-2022, 25   |
|                    |  | 20.10-2022, 23   |
| 2:4, 16-2131       | 12:4035, 80  | 28:19, 2028, 29  |
| 2:2715, 189        | Chapter 1318, 164                                      | 30, 162  |
| 2.27               | Chapter 1516, 104                                      |  |
| 2:27-321, 16       | 13:161, 62, 102, 122                                   |  |
| 10 20 117          | 10.1   | Maule  |
| 19, 20, 117        | 13:1-33180   | Mark   |
| 2:31-3:7186        | 13:3-33165   | 3:4141   |
|                    |  |  |
| 2:3230             | 13:4-33169   | 5:34-43123   |
| 2.02               |  |  |
|                    | 13:8, 19-23164   | 8:3180   |
| Ionah              | 13:11, 19, 24169                                       | 8:35-38141   |
|                    | 10.11, 17, 24107                                       |  |
| 1:1780             | 13:14, 1561, 163                                       | 9:43, 45, 4751   |
| 1:17-2:105         | 12.1( 17 10 25 (2                                      |  |
| 1.17-2.10          | 13:16, 17, 18-3562                                     | 16:1525, 26, 27  |
|                    | 13:24, 25, 3852  | 16:15-1822, 23   |
| 7 1 1              | 10.21, 20, 00  |  |
| Zechariah          | 13:31, 33169   | 24, 29, 162  |
| 12:10-14188        | 13:3319, 57  |  |
| 12.10-14100        |  | 7 1  |
| 13:6188            | 13:36-5062   | Luke   |
| 13:6-979           |  |  |
| 13:0-9/9           | 13:37-4171   | 1:1557   |
|                    | 15:247   | 3:3894   |
| λ I -11.:          |  |  |
| Malachi            | Chapter 16119  | 4:3-795  |
| 4:2, 3127          | 16:1-420   | 4:6183   |
| 4.2, 012/          |  |  |
|                    | 16:1-6171  | 6:53-5611  |
| Matthew            |  |  |
|                    | 16:13-1671   | 9:24-26141   |
| 2:235              | 16:1885, 102, 163                                      | 10:13-249  |
|                    | 10.1005, 102, 105                                      |  |
| 3:116, 100         | 16:18, 2162  | 11:29-329  |
| 3:1, 2127          | 16.21 80   | 12:551   |
|                    | 16:2180  |  |
| 3:1-634            | 16:24-17:555   | 12:22141   |
| 0.1 0              | 16.21 17.0   | 12.60 2.101.110  |
| 3:1-11123          | 16:25-27141  | 13:6-92, 101, 118  |
| 3:213, 117         | 16:28-17:5153  | 13:24143   |
|                    |  |  |
| 3:2-6100           | 17:592   | 13:33, 34187   |
|                    |  | 10.0 57 120 175  |
| 3:111, 10          | 17:22, 2362, 80  | 10:0   |
| 3:1792, 94         | 18:1951  | 18:857, 139, 165<br>166, 172, 180                                    |
|                    |  | 10 10 20   |
|                    |  |  |
| 4:194              | 19:264   | 18:18-3052   |
|                    | 19:264   |  |
| 4:3-892            | 20:17-1962, 80   | 19:15-24182  |
| 4:3-892            | 20:17-1962, 80   | 19:15-24182  |
| 4:3-892<br>4:3-995 | 20:17-1962, 80<br>21:5, 8, 9, 1535                     | 19:15-24182<br>19:41-44160   |
| 4:3-8              | 20:17-1962, 80<br>21:5, 8, 9, 1535<br>21:15, 18, 19118 | 19:15-24       182         19:41-44       160         23:43       90 |
| 4:3-8              | 20:17-1962, 80<br>21:5, 8, 9, 1535<br>21:15, 18, 19118 | 19:15-24       182         19:41-44       160         23:43       90 |
| 4:3-8              | 20:17-19   | 19:15-24   |
| 4:3-8              | 20:17-19   | 19:15-24       182         19:41-44       160         23:43       90 |
| 4:3-8              | 20:17-1962, 80<br>21:5, 8, 9, 1535<br>21:15, 18, 19118 | 19:15-24   |

| 24:25-27, 44133, 110  | 2:30-3635               | 7:5515             |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 24:25-3167            | 2:36-38, 4324           | 7:57-5986          |
|                       |                         |                    |
| 24:2654               | 2:3733                  | 7:58-8:374         |
| 24:27, 44142          | 2:37, 3825, 123         | Chapters 8, 1084   |
| 24:46-4922            | 2:389, 10, 23, 29       | 8:1166             |
|                       | 24 40 52 69 100         |                    |
| 24:4725               | 34, 48, 53, 68, 100     | 8:1-546            |
| 24:47-49162           | 2:4043, 53              | 8:347              |
| 24:49-5121            | 2:41, 4745              | 8:514, 84          |
| 21.17 0121            | 2.41.47                 |                    |
| T 1                   | 2:41-4733               | 8:633              |
| John                  | 2:4313                  | 9:1102             |
| 1:29, 3634, 35        | 3:19                    | 9:1, 247, 87       |
| 2:1-11123             | 3:1, 19-2126            | 9:1, 376           |
|                       |                         |                    |
| 2:18-2534             | 3:1-4:1323              | 9:1-573            |
| 3:134                 | 3:12-2616               | 9:1-1514, 122      |
| 3:1, 27               | 3:13-152                | 9:1-3087           |
| 3:2, 3, 5, 14-1835    | 3:14, 1533, 187         | 9:2138             |
| 2.2006                | 0.14, 10                | 9.2130             |
| 3:22ff7               | 3:1942                  | 9:3-6145           |
| 3:36107               | 31, 53, 123             | 9:980              |
| 4:22111               | 3:19-2668               | 9:1584, 101, 104   |
| 5:24104, 107          | 3:2143                  | 9:1674, 117        |
|                       |                         |                    |
| 5:43187               | 4:1ff26                 | 9:1713             |
| 6:1-14123             | 4:1-2216                | 9:17, 1811, 81     |
| 10:11141              | 4:102                   | 9:20, 2292         |
| 11:1-47123            | 4:10, 16-3033           | 9:20-2291          |
| 11.6 7 42 44 90       |                         |                    |
| 11:6, 7, 43, 4480     | 4:14-16, 3113           | 9:20-2487, 95      |
| 12:10, 118            | 4:29-339                | 9:26-2996          |
| 12:25141              | 5:1ff26                 | 9:27, 28147        |
| 13:4-12155            | 5:12ff9                 | 9:36-42123         |
| 13:8, 10156           | 5:12-3333               | 10:188             |
|                       |                         | 10.11 14 20 20 70  |
| 16:13-1577            | 5:12-4216               | 10:11-14, 28, 2970 |
| 19:14-1935            | 5:1445                  | 10:34-4884         |
| 20:3023               | 5:16, 19-23123          | 10:4511, 16        |
|                       | 5:28-302, 33            | 10:45-48112        |
| Acts                  | 5:30, 3135              | Chapters 11-1384   |
|                       |                         |                    |
| 1:3, 510              | 5:3446, 91              | 11:15, 1611, 16    |
| 1:3, 617              | 6:1, 745                | 11:15-18112        |
| 1:3-6, 81             | 6:3, 5, 815             | 11:2415            |
| 1:4, 518              | 6:5, 864                | 11:26138           |
| 1:511                 | 6:753, 139              | 12:7, 8, 23123     |
|                       |                         |                    |
| 1:619, 43             | 6:89, 46                | 13:288             |
| 1:7, 821              | 6:8-1533                | 13:5, 14116        |
| 1:814, 22, 23         | 6:8-7:5316              | 13:911, 13         |
| 25, 96, 162           | Chapters 7, 8, ,9, 1375 | 13:44, 45123       |
|                       | 7:1ff26                 | 13:46, 47115       |
| 1:1510                |                         |                    |
| Chapter 228           | 7:1-6096                | 13:46-4896, 116    |
| 2:110, 119            | 7:2-4364                | 14:1116            |
| 2:1-389               | 7:9-1367                | 14:17:17162        |
| 2:2-4                 |                         | 14:22139           |
| 2.2-4,1,11,13         | 7:9, 23-2865            |                    |
| 2:2-4323              | 7:23, 30, 54, 5814      | 14:22, 2354        |
| 2:4                   | 7:23, 3667              | 15:12-18112        |
| 2:4-3825              | 7:44-5265               | 15:14104           |
| 2:6-13, 16-21, 4312   | 7:51, 5263              | 15:14-18102, 118   |
| 2:12-24, 30-3532      | 7:51-532                | 15:38-41117        |
|                       |                         |                    |
| 2:14-211              | 7:51-5626               | 16:554             |
| 2:15-4116             | 7:51-5859, 73, 122      | 16:26123           |
| 2:1620                | 7:51-5016               | 16:30, 31,         |
| 2:2130                | 7:5233, 187             | 17:1, 2, 10, 17116 |
|                       | 7:54101                 | 17:1-496           |
| 2:21, 38, 40, 4330    |                         |                    |
| 2:227                 | 7:54-5871               | 18:1-696           |
| 2:23-362, 33, 39, 187 | 7:54-6046, 64           | 18:1-6, 19116      |
|                       |                         |                    |

| 18:5, 6115                         | 11:11, 149                 | 1:7, 11, 12114        |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 18:11109                           | 11:11-14123                | 1:11, 1292, 148       |
| 19:1-8116                          | 11:1384, 104               | 1:11-1888, 89         |
|                                    |                            |                       |
| 19:896                             | 11:13, 1614                | 101, 112              |
| 19:9139                            | 11:25129                   | 1:11-19147            |
| 19:9, 23138                        | 11:25, 2680, 117, 160      | 1:17137               |
| 20:7-12123                         | 11:25-2770                 | 1:23139               |
| 20.7-12123                         |                            |                       |
| 20:2483                            | 11:32-3621                 | 2:2, 7104             |
| 20:24-32105                        | 15:16104                   | 2:5, 7114             |
| 20:25:3284                         | 16:25114, 138              | 2:714, 84             |
| 20:29-3156, 116                    | 16:25, 26148               | 101, 148              |
|                                    | 10.25, 20140               | 27.0                  |
| 132, 166                           | 10 111                     | 2:7, 888              |
| 22:347, 91                         | I Corinthians              | 3:17, 1865            |
| 22:4138                            | 1:18140                    | 3:26-2911, 92         |
| 22:4, 587                          | 1:228                      | 98, 104, 161          |
| 22:547                             | 2:1, 2109                  | 3:288, 104            |
|                                    |                            | 3.20, 104             |
| 22:19, 2074                        | 2:283                      | 3:29162               |
| 23:1-4, 6-847                      | 2:3109                     | 4:4, 539              |
| 23:8171                            | 2:9-1310, 114              | 6:17117               |
| 24:14, 22139                       | 2:9-3:277                  | 0.17                  |
|                                    |                            | Tulessians            |
| 26:1095                            | 2:13140                    | Ephesians             |
| 26:10-1287                         | 3:11ff152                  | 1:7105                |
| 26:13-15145                        | 9:1145                     | 1:15139               |
| 26:13-2084                         | 9:7, 8, 2756               | 1:15-1883             |
| 26.10-20                           | 0.00.07                    |                       |
| 26:19, 20117                       | 9:22-27114                 | 2:1105, 161           |
| 28:7-9123                          | 9:23-10:11111              | 2:1, 12104, 176       |
| 28:8, 9, 28127                     | 9:24-2755                  | 2:1-3:11161           |
| 28:17-2896                         | 9:24-10:1138, 107          | 2:228                 |
| 28:17-29100                        | 10:6, 11110                | 2:5-13                |
|                                    |                            |                       |
| 28:25-27163                        | Chapter 12127              | 2:8-1027              |
| 28:2817, 118, 121<br>127, 129, 159 | Chapters 12-149            | 2:11-1517, 148        |
| 127, 129, 159                      | 12:1311                    | 2:1292                |
| 160, 161, 164                      | 13:8-10123, 127, 128       | 2:13-15104, 146       |
|                                    |                            |                       |
| 28:28, 29115, 116                  | 15:1, 2107                 | 3:1-6105, 148         |
| 28:28, 30, 31166                   | 15:1-4106, 108             | 3:1-1185, 89, 92, 111 |
| 28:28-31159                        | 109, 113, 136              | 112, 137, 145, 147    |
|                                    | 15:2107                    | 3:6114                |
| Domano                             |                            |                       |
| Romans                             | 15:3, 483                  | 3:9-11110, 170        |
| 1:1, 8-17, 28113                   | 15:480                     | 5:1813, 14            |
| 1:1, 15, 16138                     | 15:24-28174                | 5:18-2011             |
| 1:5101, 104                        | 15:45-4794                 | 6:11-18170            |
| 1:5, 8139                          | 15:50-57143                | 0.11 10               |
| 1.0, 0                             | 15.50-57145                | Dhilinnian            |
| 1:1613, 70, 76                     | H C ' 41'                  | Philippians           |
| 88, 96, 115                        | II Corinthians             | 1:5, 7, 12, 27, 28114 |
| 2:9, 1014                          | 3:6-1864                   | 1:27139               |
| 2:16114                            | 3:14-1680                  | 1:27-29117            |
| 5:10, 1140                         | 4:3, 4114, 138             | 2:30140               |
|                                    |                            |                       |
| 5:1239                             | 5:1711, 17, 92             | 3:7-2183              |
| 8:13143                            | 98, 104, 146               |                       |
| 8:18-2398, 150                     | 5:18-2140                  | Colossians            |
| 8:19155                            | 5:2137                     | 1:5, 6, 23148, 165    |
|                                    |                            | 1.5, 0, 25140, 105    |
| 8:2997                             | 11:7138                    | 1:5, 6, 20-2386       |
| 9:326                              | 11:23-2883, 117            | 1:5, 23113            |
| 9:497, 150                         | 12:1-4, 790                | 1:15, 1897            |
| 10:13, 1430                        | 12:1-788, 89               | 1:16-18, 25-27110     |
| 10:1764                            | 137, 145                   | 1:20-28112            |
|                                    | 10.15 140 141              |                       |
| 10:18148, 165                      | 12:15140, 141              | 1:20-2989             |
|                                    |                            |                       |
| 10:199, 123                        |                            | 1:23139               |
| 10:199, 123                        | Galatians                  |                       |
|                                    | <i>Galatians</i> 1:6, 7138 | 1:23                  |

| 1.25.29 57.105.127  | 1:14140  | 4.17 141 174      |
|---|--|-------------------|
| 1:25-2857, 105, 137   |  | 4:17141, 174      |
| 1:25-29148  | 2:2-4, 6, 10150  | 4:19131           |
|   |  |                   |
| 1:27104   | 2:385, 138, 145  | 5:1-454, 153      |
| 2:9104  | 2:5-1071, 102  | 5:9139            |
|   |  | 0.7107            |
| 3:9-11104   | 2:10155  |                   |
| 3:16, 1711  | Chapters 3-5151  | II Peter          |
| 5.10, 1711  | Chapters 5-5151  |                   |
|   | Chapters 3-638   | 1:2-19131         |
| T TT 1 1 1 1  | 2.1 2.1.4  | 1.2 17            |
| I Thessalonians   | 3:1, 6, 14108  | 1:3, 456          |
| 2:2-4114  |  |                   |
| 2.2-4114  | 4:1-938  | 1:4, 12-18154     |
| 3:2, 3114   | 4:2, 6141  | 1:12-1557         |
|   |  |                   |
| 5:23104, 140, 141   | 4:3, 439   | 1:1792            |
| , ,   | 4:12, 13150  | 1:21135           |
|   |  |                   |
| II Thessalonians  | 6:4-6151   | 2:1, 2, 20154     |
|   |  |                   |
| 2:14114   | 6:18, 19150  | 2:1-3:8131        |
|   | Chapters 7-1040  | 2:1-3:9166        |
| T (TT)1   |  |                   |
| I Timothy   | 9:4, 2640  | 2:7, 852          |
| 1.10.20   |  |                   |
| 1:10-2082   | 9:22-2839  | 2:19-2156         |
| 1:1127, 114   | Chapter 10154  | 3:1, 257          |
|   | Chapter 10   |                   |
| 117, 148  | 10:1, 4, 1240  | 3:8125, 154       |
|   | 10:19-31156  | 3:10-13174        |
| 1:11-2083   | 10.19-31130  |                   |
| 1:15, 1676, 82, 147   | 10:23-25108  | 3:15, 16131       |
|   |  |                   |
| 1:18147   | 10:32-39156  | 3:15-17132        |
| 1:18-2056, 116, 166   | 10:35-39141, 150   |                   |
| 1.10-20   |  | T T 1             |
| 2:427   | 11:6135  | I John            |
|   |  |                   |
| 4:1-3132, 166   | 11:8-162   | Chapters 1, 2154  |
| 5:23127   | 11:1738  | 1:6, 8-10156      |
|   |  |                   |
| 6:1255, 140   | Chapter 12150  | 1:6-2:2155        |
|   | 12.2 04 120  |                   |
| 6:12, 21139   | 12:284, 139  | 2:1-4156          |
|   | 12:3141  | 2:28-3:3156       |
| II Timothy  |  |                   |
|   | 12:16, 17150   | 5:1-5154          |
| 11 1 111101114  |  |                   |
| 11.0 11.0 11.0 11.0 11.0 11.0 11.0 11.0   | 12:10, 17  |                   |
| 1:8114  | 12:2398, 102   | 5:4139            |
| 1:8114  | 12:2398, 102   |                   |
| 1:8114<br>1:1383, 86  | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437  | 5:4139            |
| 1:8114  | 12:2398, 102   |                   |
| 1:8114<br>1:1383, 86<br>1:1572, 116   | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437  | 5:4139<br>II John |
| 1:8   | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br>James   | 5:4139            |
| 1:8   | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br>James   | 5:4139<br>II John |
| 1:8.  | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br>James<br>1:12, 21152  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     55   | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br><i>James</i><br>1:12, 21152<br>1:12, 18153  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     55   | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br><i>James</i><br>1:12, 21152<br>1:12, 18153  | 5:4               |
| 1:8   | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br><i>James</i><br>1:12, 21152<br>1:12, 18153<br>1:21107, 131, 141   | 5:4               |
| 1:8   | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br><i>James</i><br>1:12, 21152<br>1:12, 18153  | 5:4               |
| 1:8   | 12:23       98, 102         12:24       37         James       1:12, 21         1:12, 18       153         1:21       107, 131, 141         2:5       153  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br>James<br>1:12, 21152<br>1:12, 18153<br>1:21107, 131, 141<br>2:5153<br>2:5, 14-26152   | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:2398, 102<br>12:2437<br>James<br>1:12, 21152<br>1:12, 18153<br>1:21107, 131, 141<br>2:5153<br>2:5, 14-26152   | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     55       2:15-26.     56       2:15-3:8.     166       2:25.     56       3:1-8.     56, 132   | 12:23       98, 102         12:24       37         James       1:12, 21       152         1:12, 18       153         1:21       107, 131, 141         2:5       153         2:5, 14-26       152         2:14       139                      | 5:4               |
| 1:8     114       1:13     83, 86       1:15     72, 116       2:2     147       2:8     114       2:10-12     55       2:15-26     56       2:25     56       3:1-8     56, 132       3:8     139  | 12:23       98, 102         12:24       37         James       1:12, 21       152         1:12, 18       153         1:21       107, 131, 141         2:5       153         2:5, 14-26       152         2:14       139         3:6       51 | 5:4               |
| 1:8     114       1:13     83, 86       1:15     72, 116       2:2     147       2:8     114       2:10-12     55       2:15-26     56       2:25     56       3:1-8     56, 132       3:8     139  | 12:23       98, 102         12:24       37         James       1:12, 21       152         1:12, 18       153         1:21       107, 131, 141         2:5       153         2:5, 14-26       152         2:14       139         3:6       51 | 5:4               |
| 1:8     114       1:13     83, 86       1:15     72, 116       2:2     147       2:8     114       2:10-12     55       2:15-26     56       2:15-3:8     166       2:25     56       3:1-8     56, 132       3:8     139       3:16     142  | 12:23       98, 102         12:24       37         James       1:12, 21       152         1:12, 18       153         1:21       107, 131, 141         2:5       153         2:5, 14-26       152         2:14       139                      | 5:4               |
| 1:8     114       1:13     83, 86       1:15     72, 116       2:2     147       2:8     114       2:10-12     55       2:15-26     56       2:25     56       3:1-8     56, 132       3:8     139  | 12:23       98, 102         12:24       37         James       1:12, 21       152         1:12, 18       153         1:21       107, 131, 141         2:5       153         2:5, 14-26       152         2:14       139         3:6       51 | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-3:8.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-3:8.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-3:8.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-3:8.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       .72, 116         2:2.       .147         2:8.       .114         2:10-12.       .55         2:15-26.       .56         2:15-3:8.       .166         2:25.       .56         3:1-8.       .56, 132         3:8.       .139         3:16.       .142         4:1-5.       .116         4:1-8.       .72         4:3, 4.       .132         4:6-8, 18.       .117         4:7.       .55, 139, 140         4:7, 8.       .54, 84         4:10-16.       .116   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       .72, 116         2:2.       .147         2:8.       .114         2:10-12.       .55         2:15-26.       .56         2:15-3:8.       .166         2:25.       .56         3:1-8.       .56, 132         3:8.       .139         3:16.       .142         4:1-5.       .116         4:1-8.       .72         4:3, 4.       .132         4:6-8, 18.       .117         4:7.       .55, 139, 140         4:7, 8.       .54, 84         4:10-16.       .116   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-3:8.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117       4:7.     .55, 139, 140       4:7, 8.     .54, 84       4:10-16.     .116       4:14-18.     .72   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       72, 116         2:2.       147         2:8.       114         2:10-12.       55         2:15-26.       56         2:15-3:8.       166         2:25.       56         3:1-8.       56, 132         3:8.       139         3:16.       142         4:1-5.       116         4:1-8.       72         4:3, 4.       132         4:6-8, 18.       117         4:7.       55, 139, 140         4:7, 8.       54, 84         4:10-16.       116         4:14-18.       72         4:17, 18.       137  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       72, 116         2:2.       147         2:8.       114         2:10-12.       55         2:15-26.       56         2:15-3:8.       166         2:25.       56         3:1-8.       56, 132         3:8.       139         3:16.       142         4:1-5.       116         4:1-8.       72         4:3, 4.       132         4:6-8, 18.       117         4:7.       55, 139, 140         4:7, 8.       54, 84         4:10-16.       116         4:14-18.       72         4:17, 18.       137  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-3:8.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117       4:7.     .55, 139, 140       4:7, 8.     .54, 84       4:10-16.     .116       4:14-18.     .72   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       72, 116         2:2.       147         2:8.       114         2:10-12.       55         2:15-26.       56         2:15-3:8.       166         2:25.       56         3:1-8.       56, 132         3:8.       139         3:16.       142         4:1-5.       116         4:1-8.       72         4:3, 4.       132         4:6-8, 18.       117         4:7.       55, 139, 140         4:7, 8.       54, 84         4:10-16.       116         4:14-18.       72         4:17, 18.       137  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-38.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117       4:7.     .55, 139, 140       4:7, 8.     .54, 84       4:10-16.     .116       4:14-18.     .72       4:17, 18.     .137       4:20.     .127   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       .72, 116         2:2.       .147         2:8.       .114         2:10-12.       .55         2:15-26.       .56         2:15-3:8.       .166         2:25.       .56         3:1-8.       .56, 132         3:8.       .139         3:16.       .142         4:1-5.       .116         4:1-8.       .72         4:3, 4.       .132         4:6-8, 18.       .117         4:7.       .55, 139, 140         4:7, 8.       .54, 84         4:10-16.       .116         4:14-18.       .72         4:17, 18.       .137         4:20.       .127  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       .72, 116         2:2.       .147         2:8.       .114         2:10-12.       .55         2:15-26.       .56         2:15-3:8.       .166         2:25.       .56         3:1-8.       .56, 132         3:8.       .139         3:16.       .142         4:1-5.       .116         4:1-8.       .72         4:3, 4.       .132         4:6-8, 18.       .117         4:7.       .55, 139, 140         4:7, 8.       .54, 84         4:10-16.       .116         4:14-18.       .72         4:17, 18.       .137         4:20.       .127  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-38.     166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117       4:7.     .55, 139, 140       4:7, 8.     .54, 84       4:10-16.     .116       4:14-18.     .72       4:17, 18.     .137       4:20.     .127   | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-38.     .166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117       4:7.     .55, 139, 140       4:7, 8.     .54, 84       4:10-16.     .116       4:14-18.     .72       4:17, 18.     .137       4:20.     .127       Titus       1:3.     .117       Hebrews       1:1, 2.     .102  | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       .72, 116         2:2.       .147         2:8.       .114         2:10-12.       .55         2:15-26.       .56         2:15-3:8.       .166         2:25.       .56         3:1-8.       .56, 132         3:8.       .139         3:16.       .142         4:1-5.       .116         4:1-8.       .72         4:3, 4.       .132         4:6-8, 18.       .117         4:7.       .55, 139, 140         4:7.       .8.       .54, 84         4:10-16.       .116         4:14-18.       .72         4:17, 18.       .137         4:20.       .127         Titus         1:3.       .117         Hebrews         1:1, 2.       .102         1:6.       .97 | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.       114         1:13.       83, 86         1:15.       .72, 116         2:2.       .147         2:8.       .114         2:10-12.       .55         2:15-26.       .56         2:15-3:8.       .166         2:25.       .56         3:1-8.       .56, 132         3:8.       .139         3:16.       .142         4:1-5.       .116         4:1-8.       .72         4:3, 4.       .132         4:6-8, 18.       .117         4:7.       .55, 139, 140         4:7.       .8.       .54, 84         4:10-16.       .116         4:14-18.       .72         4:17, 18.       .137         4:20.       .127         Titus         1:3.       .117         Hebrews         1:1, 2.       .102         1:6.       .97 | 12:23  | 5:4               |
| 1:8.     114       1:13.     83, 86       1:15.     .72, 116       2:2.     147       2:8.     114       2:10-12.     .55       2:15-26.     .56       2:15-38.     .166       2:25.     .56       3:1-8.     .56, 132       3:8.     .139       3:16.     .142       4:1-5.     .116       4:1-8.     .72       4:3, 4.     .132       4:6-8, 18.     .117       4:7.     .55, 139, 140       4:7, 8.     .54, 84       4:10-16.     .116       4:14-18.     .72       4:17, 18.     .137       4:20.     .127       Titus       1:3.     .117       Hebrews       1:1, 2.     .102  | 12:23  | 5:4               |

| 2:7, 9, 11, 13169, 179 2:13139 2:17, 19, 26, 27169 2:26, 27189 3:1, 2, 5, 8169, 179 3:11, 12, 15, 21169 | 5:1ff                 | 13:8 |
|---|-----------------------|------|
|   | 12:4103<br>12:7-12176 |      |
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