

ALL TRUTH

By

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ALL TRUTH

OR

THAT WHICH GOD WOULD MAKE
KNOWN TO HIS SAINTS.

J. EUSTACE MILLS

**“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come,
he will guide you into all truth: He shall glorify Me:”**

JOHN 16:13-14

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FOREWORD

The title “**ALL TRUTH**” has been taken from the promise made by the Lord: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into **all truth** (JOHN 16:13). This promise we have sought to trace; first as to its fulfillment through the revelation which was given to complete the Word of God, and then in its application to each believer who is guided into that which God would now make known to His saints.

The chapter headings have been taken from COLOSSIANS 1:24-29. The connection of this passage with the Lord’s promise of guidance into all truth will be seen in the opening chapter. The plan of this work will become evident as it is read: each chapter has been designed to pave the way for the one that follows, thus only by reading the chapters consecutively will their purpose be properly appreciated.

May the God of all grace be pleased to guide us by His Spirit to the “all truth” that has been revealed, and we be permitted to enter into the understanding of that which He would now make known to His saints. As this truth is seen may we also be enabled to believe it and act upon it, and by this means be led increasingly into the fuller knowledge of Him and of His Son. our exalted Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I

ALL TRUTH

**“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come,
he will guide you into all truth: . . .”
(JOHN 16:13)**

These were among the last words spoken by the Lord to His disciples before He went forth to give His life a ransom for all. The other gospels bring their record of this conversation to a close after the Supper was ended and Judas had been identified as the traitor (MATTHEW 26:20-30, MARK 14:17-26, LUKE 22:14-38); but John continues to narrate the private communings of the Lord with the disciples that followed. These occupy chapters 13 to 16 and are brought to a conclusion with the Lord’s prayer for His own in chapter 17.

The Lord had gradually broken the news to the disciples concerning the death He was to suffer at Jerusalem, but now the time was at hand He told them plainly that He must leave them.

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (JOHN 16:7).

“The Comforter” was indeed a title suited to the occasion. The Spirit of truth is referred to as “another Comforter.” The Lord Himself had been their Comforter, and He was still to be, for this title occurs in 1 John 2:1, R.V. marg. The other Comforter, however, was to be with them. They were assured of the provision that had been made for their future:

“And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;” (JOHN 14:16).

Standing at the end of the pathway that had been given Him to tread, the Lord reviewed the things that He had taught. Had His teaching been limited? If we were to put this query to ourselves we might answer, No; for He “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” may well be esteemed to have known no limitations. The Lord, however, reveals that He had been limited in the things which He had spoken — not of Himself, but by reason of the state of His hearers and the time during which they lived. Some things could not have been spoken

until this occasion: “And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you” (JOHN 16:4). Other things still had to remain unsaid, but the promise was given that “All Truth” should be revealed by the Spirit of truth that was to come.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth: for he shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak: and he shall declare unto you the things that are to come. He shall glorify Me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you” (JOHN 16:12-14, R.V.)

Thus the Lord does not refer back to His own words as being the fullness of revelation, but rather directs the searcher for “All the truth” forward to things that were to be revealed after that the Spirit of truth had come. All truth is not therefore to be discovered in the Gospels, but in the revelation given subsequently. While All Truth was not revealed by the Lord in Person when on earth, it nevertheless was to be concerning Him, and it would glorify Him.

A moment’s reflection will suffice to show that many of the things made known in the writings of Paul, for example, depended for their revelation upon the fact that the Lord Jesus had come, died, risen and returned. “But Christ being come....” prefixes important teaching concerning His high priestly work in HEBREWS 9. These things could obviously not have been spoken during the days in which the Lord tabernacled in the flesh. The entirety of the truth God has been pleased to make known to us, is therefore to be sought in the Scriptures that communicate the things revealed by the Spirit of truth after that the Lord Jesus had been exalted at God’s right hand.

These observations do not imply that any part of Scripture should be preferred above another. The fact of inspiration precludes the possibility of degrees of authority. Neither do they suggest that any words could be greater than the words spoken by the Son of God when on earth. But what we have endeavored to draw attention to is, that “All truth” can be found only where the Lord Himself promised it should be given, and that is in the leading of the Holy Spirit after Christ was exalted. Loyalty to the Lord is not in question; for the most glorious things concerning Him are found not in His own utterances, but in the words given by the Spirit of Truth who came to bare witness to Him.

As it is our desire to discover where the Lord’s promise of All Truth was fulfilled, it is necessary to examine the things that were reserved for the Holy Spirit

to reveal. Epaphras labored fervently in prayers for his fellow-believers, that they might “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (COLOSSIANS 4:12). To have this completeness should indeed be our earnest desire and prayer, and in seeking it, we should take notice of the guiding passages of Scripture which direct attention to where all the will of God is to be found.

ACTS 2 records the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples as had been promised. The Twelve, taught by the risen Christ and actuated by the Spirit, opened the testimony to the fact of the Lord’s resurrection. What was the special theme of their teaching?

“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (ACTS 2:16).

“Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (ACTS 3:21).

The public testimony of the disciples recorded in the early chapters of Acts consisted mainly of a declaration that the things spoken by the prophets had been fulfilled, and that the promised hopes and blessings could be received upon the ground of redemption that had been provided by the Lord Jesus. Public testimony was not the only activity of these who had been so closely associated with the Lord, they had also the care of the believers, and to these epistles were written. The public testimony had been confined to the things foreseen by the prophets and spoken of by the Lord, but it might be expected that the more private and intimate character of the testimony in the epistles would provide a means for the unfolding of any further truth, should any such truth have been given. The epistles written by the apostles who had accompanied the Lord are those of Peter and John, who were among the twelve disciples, and of James and Jude, who may have been the Lord’s brethren (MATTHEW 13:55). What is the stated purpose of these epistles?

“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance” (2 PETER 1:12-13).

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 PETER 3:1-2).

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before. . . .” (2 PETER 3:17).

“Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning . . .” (1 JOHN 2:7).

“I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it . . .” (1 JOHN 2:21).

“Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning” (1 JOHN 2:24; cp. 4:3).

“. . . not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, as ye have heard from the beginning, . . .” (2 JOHN:5-6).

“I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this” (JUDE 5).

“But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (JUDE 17).

We have been unable to find a concise statement, similar to the foregoing, in James, but a general survey of the epistle will suffice to shew that it has similar characteristics to those indicated by these quotations. While there are very many precious things revealed in these epistles, yet it is evident that their general purpose is not to unfold further truth, but rather to establish the believers in what was already known through the prophets and to bring to their remembrance the words of the Lord. Nothing approximating to a claim to have received “All Truth” is found. It is rather otherwise, for Peter, who was among those who heard the Lord’s promise of “All Truth,” does not refer to himself or to any of his fellow-disciples as being the recipients of any further revelation, but he directs his readers to Paul.

“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” (2 PETER 3:15-16).

Paul, therefore, had been given some things that were hard to be understood by Peter. This direction of Peter suggests that an analysis of Paul’s epistles should be made, to ascertain if they contain anything which could be referred to as that “All Truth.” Such an analysis would be lengthy and complex, and there would be the possibility of our making some unintentional mistakes. We need not, however, engage in such an attempt, for Paul himself made an analysis of a very large portion of his ministry. If we take Paul’s own summary of his testimony as a covering text for all that he did up to the time when the summary was made, then

we shall be on sure ground.

“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying **none other things** than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).

Paul spoke these words before Agrippa, in the last tribunal that took place on his journey from Jerusalem to Rome as a prisoner who was to appear before Caesar. In such circumstances his words would have been chosen with care, when he maintained that he had said “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come,” he was declaring something that might be called into question by his accusers. But apart from the authority of Paul’s own statement, we have the sanction that these words are true in that the inspired record has included them. Up to the time of Acts 26 Paul had said “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” By that time he had completed all the missionary journeys recorded in the Acts. What Paul spoke he must also have written; his epistles written up to that time have therefore to be included. When this summary was made Paul had written all the epistles that were addressed to the churches prior to his being a prisoner in Rome. These epistles are ROMANS, 1 and 2 CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, and 1 and 2 THESSALONIANS.

What were the “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come”? We are not left in doubt, for Paul summarizes them. These may be considered under three heads (verse 23). First, “That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead.” This was the basis for the doctrinal teaching concerning salvation as contained in the first eight chapters of ROMANS. Second, “And should shew light unto the people.” The people were Israel; Paul had shared with the other apostles in the testimony that was “to the Jew first.” Third, “And to the Gentiles.” This was the distinctive feature of Paul’s testimony as being “the apostle to the uncircumcision.” Under one or other of these three heads it is possible to classify every part of Paul’s testimony up till the time when he made this summary. The things revealed to him were fuller than anything found in the Old Testament, as an acquaintance with the Roman epistle, for example, will shew; but while they were indeed fuller, yet he affirms that he had spoken nothing beyond what had been foreseen by Moses and the prophets.

Previous to this comprehensive summary in Acts 26 Paul had given two other reviews of his ministry; these were both made during his journey to Jerusalem, which ended by his being taken prisoner by the Romans. Addressing the elders of

the church at Ephesus who had known him so intimately, Paul said:

“. . . . I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God**” (ACTS 20:20,26,27).

Writing about this same time to Rome, the city he was so desirous of visiting for the sake of the many believers he had not met in the flesh, he said:

“Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have **fully preached the gospel of Christ**” (ROMANS 15:19).

This declaration of all the counsel of God and the full proclamation of the Gospel of Christ must both be contained within the limits of the summary Paul made later — “Saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” If ACTS 26 covers all that time during which Paul preached, ROMANS 15 covers all the territory in which Paul had witnessed; for Illyricum, on the west coast of the Balkans, marked the outer edge of the circle of Paul’s activities up to that time.

The question suggests itself — Was the All Truth promised by the Lord a fuller unfolding of the things contained in the Old Testament and not the revelation of anything that was essentially unique or unforeseen? The answer to this must be deferred until we have completed the survey of the remainder of the New Testament.

While Paul at the time when these summaries were made claimed to have exercised a complete ministry, yet it was by no means the completion of his earthly testimony. In the immediate context of each of these summaries Paul is found to be looking forward, not knowing the things that were yet to come upon him.

“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (ACTS 20:22-24).

“But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ”.
(ROMANS 15:23, 29)

When Paul made the summary of ACTS 26 he was in bonds and on the way to Rome, as anticipated in these passages. In the record of his conversion and testimony that Paul gave before Agrippa he mentions for the first time some words spoken to him by the Lord when he was smitten down on the road to Damascus.

“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness **both of these things** which thou **hast seen**, and **of those things** in the which **I will appear unto thee**” (ACTS 26:16).

On an earlier occasion, when Paul recounted his conversion before the nation of Israel, he mentioned only the words of Ananias:

“For thou shalt be His witness unto all men **of what thou hast seen** and heard”.
(ACTS 22:15)

Paul’s testimony at the first was concerning that which he had seen; but there was given him the expectation of the unfolding of things in the which the Lord should afterwards appear unto him. The contrasting words “These things those things” emphasize that God did not reveal to Paul all His purpose at the beginning, but reserved some things until later. This of course is very evident, but with the desire to discover how “All Truth” was unfolded it is necessary to notice this promise of a subsequent revelation. That the “those things” should not have been mentioned by Paul until as late as ACTS 26 is significant and should stimulate the desire to discover where all “those things” are eventually made known.

After chapter 26 little is recorded in the ACTS concerning the things Paul was teaching. When he arrived at Rome he called the Jews together, “To whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (ROMANS 28:23). This testimony, like that which had preceded, concerned “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” The history of the ACTS concludes with Paul a prisoner.

The dealings of God with Paul during that time can be gathered only from the epistles that he wrote from prison. EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, 2 TIMOTHY and PHILEMON. It remains, therefore, that these epistles should be examined in order

that the search into the nature of the “All Truth” promised shall be complete.

Anticipating what these epistles have in store for us, we suggest again the question put forward earlier in this chapter. Was the “All Truth” promised by the Lord a fuller unfolding of the things contained in the Old Testament and not the revelation of anything that was essentially unique or unforeseen? The final answer must depend upon the things stated in these prison epistles of Paul. Whatever he had previously written came under his summary, “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” It is now necessary to notice if the things revealed in the prison epistles are also included within the limits of that summary.

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which **from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God**, who created all things by Jesus Christ”.
(EPHESIANS 3:8,9)

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which **hath been hid from ages and from generations**, but now is made manifest to His saints”.
(COLOSSIANS 2:25,26)

That which had “been **hid** in God” “from the beginning of the world,” and had “been **hid** from ages and from generations” until it was then revealed to the apostle Paul, could not have been the subject of any Old Testament prophecy. Moreover, that which had been hid in God, and hid from other generations, could very obviously not have formed part of Paul’s testimony during the time when his words were confined to “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come”: The truth revealed under the title of “The Mystery” must therefore, of necessity, be something new and unforeseen in relation to the things contained in Moses and the prophets and to the earlier ministry of Paul.

This Mystery is clearly some further light of truth that was revealed only through Paul in his later epistles. Is this therefore that “All Truth,” or are there yet further things into which the Spirit of truth will guide us? The words “to fulfil” in COLOSSIANS 1:25 are rendered in the Englishman’s Greek New Testament “to complete.” The same word appears in Chapter 2:10, “And ye are complete in Him”; and in 4:12, “that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Substituting this alternative rendering, COLOSSIANS 1:25-26 would read:

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, **to complete** the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but **now** is made manifest to His saints”:

This Mystery completed the word of God. It is therefore the fullness of the “All Truth” to be made known; and, moreover, it is not to be expected that any further truth will be revealed, for nothing can be added to that which is complete.

The promise “He will guide you into all truth” is realized to the full in that revelation of the Mystery given Paul “to complete the word of God.”

In this search it has been seen that the Lord Jesus did not only remind His disciples of the words He had spoken while with them, but He also gave the promise that the Comforter who was to come would go on to guide them into “All Truth.” Peter, who heard that promise, wrote epistles to remind his readers of the things that had already been spoken; but he did not claim to have received “All Truth,” but rather directed to Paul, to whom special wisdom had been given. Paul in his turn does not direct us to his ministry as a whole, but summarizes the earlier part as being concerned with “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come”: that the distinctive character of his later ministry of the Mystery, never before made known, may become evident. **JOHN 16:13** leads on to **COLOSSIANS 1:25-26** if we desire to know “All the Truth” (R.V.) then we must ask, “What is the riches of the glory of this mystery”?

The work of the Comforter is to glorify Christ. The purpose of the Mystery concerns the exaltation of Christ “Far above all” (**EPHESIANS 1:21**).

II

His saints: To whom God would make known what is . . . this mystery” (COLOSSIANS 1:26-27)

ALL Truth has been revealed in that the Word of God is now complete. The promise of the Lord Jesus was, “He shall guide you into all truth.” The passage that states that the word of God was completed by the Mystery committed to Paul states also that it is God’s will to make known this Mystery to His saints. Thus the Lord’s promise and God’s will alike direct attention to something to be entered into and appreciated by the believer.

“. . . His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery . . .;” (Colossians 1:26-27).

The word rendered “would” is *thelo*; to wish or desire as prompted by natural impulse rather than from considered deliberation, a wish that is closer to the passions of the heart than to the reasoning's of the mind. Another word used almost synonymously is *boulomai*, the wish or will from a mental standpoint, to have a wish that makes for intention or purpose. The first occurrence of both words is in MATTHEW 1:19:

“Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing (*thelo*) to make her a publick example, was minded (*boulomai*) to put her away privily.”

Joseph’s feelings towards Mary moved him to **wish** that she might be shielded; this desire caused him to think the matter over, and in consequence he **determined** to put her away.

God does not, in this day of grace, force His Truth upon any, but has condescended to use a word that signifies the heart’s desire in order that those who earnestly seek to please Him might realize that there are things He would have them know. This fact should indeed cause us to respond to His desire and seek to understand “what is the riches of the glory of this Mystery.”

A contrast in the use of these two words translated “would” is seen in the following:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing (*boulomai*) that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 PETER 3:9).

“Who willeth (*thelo*) that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 TIMOTHY 2:4, R.V.).

It is not God’s **intention** that any should perish, but it is His **desire** that all should be saved. What God has said concerning the unsaved sinners He has said also of His saints; He has a **wish**, a desire, for both. For the unsaved it is His “desire that all men should be saved”; for the believers it is that He “desires to make known this Mystery.”

When we remind ourselves that it is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, He before Whom all principalities and powers must bow, Who has said that He **desires** to make known to us, His saints, this Mystery; surely we should exclaim, with Samuel of old, “Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth!”

To think that any desire of God for His own should not be fulfilled is almost untenable; and yet, if we take notice of our fellow-believers, we become saddened by the obvious fact that many do not take heed to this Mystery that God would have them know. Believers are very rightly occupied with the precious privilege of proclaiming to mankind at large that it is God’s desire that they should be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. None can be too earnest in that proclamation, but it is evident that there is a danger of being so occupied with proclaiming what is God’s desire for others, as to overlook the fact that He has expressed a desire for us.

One would expect that to read such a statement as “His saints: To whom God would make known what is this Mystery” would be sufficient to cause the busiest Christian to stop and consider; and to rouse the most drowsy Christian to ardent inquiry. It is not, however, our intention to comment on the shortcomings of others; our concern is rather to see that we may ourselves give proper attention to that which God desires to make known unto us.

Because Paul knew God’s purpose, he prayed and acted accordingly. God’s desire for us is reflected in Paul’s request for prayer:

“Praying for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel. For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak”. (EPHESIANS 6:18-20)

God's desire is to make known this Mystery to His saints; and because of this it was Paul's longing and entreaty that he might be granted boldness to be able to make the Mystery known. Both "which" and "therein" agree with the neuter "Mystery" not with the feminine "bonds." The sense and emphasis of the passage is therefore:

“. . . that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel. For which mystery I am an ambassador in bonds: that in the mystery I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”

It was no mere chance that Paul was in bonds at the time when the commission was given him to make known the Mystery. Great stress is laid upon the fact that he was in bonds for the express purpose of being the channel through whom it should first be revealed.

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles. If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery;”
(EPHESIANS 3:1-3)

It is important to take heed to this insistence upon the connection between Paul's bonds and the revelation of the Mystery, lest we should fall into the unjustifiable, yet none too infrequent, mistake of expecting that it is possible to discover truths that are peculiar to the Mystery in the epistles written prior to Paul's prison ministry.

We have seen that EPHESIANS, PHILIPPIANS, COLOSSIANS, 2 TIMOTHY, and PHILEMON are the prison epistles, in which alone it is possible to discover that revelation for which Paul was the prisoner of the Lord.

God's revelation of His purpose has been progressive. It would seem unnecessary to remind ourselves of this, if it were not that we are prone to forget it when reading the Scriptures. The value of noticing the progressive way in which God has unfolded His Truth is that it calls attention to that which is the latest revelation. The latest revelation to us is also the final revelation of the Word of God. It has always been the last revelation of God to any of His own that has been the important thing for them to heed. This can be seen in the following two examples.

In the beginning man was given a vegetarian diet:

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat” (GENESIS 1:29).

But after the flood meat was added:

“Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things” (GENESIS 9:3).

Had Noah continued his vegetarian diet after the flood he would have come short of all God intended for him.

When the Lord first sent forth the disciples He instructed them to:

“. . . take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece” (LUKE 9:3).

But later these instructions were modified:

“And He said unto them. When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said He unto them, **But now**, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: . . .” (LUKE 22:35-36).

It was imperative that the disciples should heed the Lord’s **last** instructions to them. Had they disregarded His “But now” and continued the earlier practice, they would have dishonored their Lord, and, instead of experiencing the former provision, they would, in all probability, have lacked something. Having been accustomed to regard our Scriptures as a complete revelation from God, we may perhaps have been a little inattentive to that which was the last unfolding of God’s purposes; if, however, we overlook the “but now” which is intended to draw attention to that which God desires for us, we shall most certainly lack something.

“Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, **but now** is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery’” (COLOSSIANS 1:26-27).

The examples of Noah and of the disciples, enable us to appreciate more fully the importance of God’s latest revelation to any of His own. Before the latest directions were made known to Noah or to the disciples, they could not have acted upon them; but after they were revealed, it was their responsibility to take notice and act accordingly. Any reversal of the divine order of revelation is unwarranted; it may even result in serious error, for God’s will at one time may definitely not be

His intention for another. The antediluvians were not permitted to eat meat; but now the command to abstain from meats is listed among the things to be shunned as doctrines of demons (1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5).

To read back the revelation concerning things that had been “hid from ages and from generations” into Paul’s epistles written at a time when he was “saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come,” would be as much a deviation from the order of revelation as for Noah to have eaten meat before the flood. To continue in the things that are limited to the prophecies of the Old Testament without regard to that which has been revealed as being distinct from anything previously foreseen, would be as much a coming short of God’s will as for Noah to have continued as a vegetarian after the flood.

A few moments spent in considering the foregoing illustrations will serve to shew that no new or untried principle of Bible study is being advocated. Most readers will have noticed the manner in which God’s revealed will for man has at times been changed, modified, or augmented, as the case may be, as the result of the fuller unfolding of His purposes. To notice these changes is interesting; but to take notice of the change introduced by God’s last revelation, which is especially addressed to us, is imperative. The evidence of the necessity for giving heed to that which is last revealed should stimulate us to inquire more earnestly what is for us “All Truth.” We cannot discover “All Truth” before “All Truth” is revealed; we must expect to find it only where it is plainly stated to have been made known.

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil (**complete**) the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery”; (COLOSSIANS 1:25-27).

The “All Truth” that completes the Word of God is, as we have noticed, called “the Mystery.” A mystery according to the present-day usage of the word suggests something incomprehensible, obscure, an enigma. Such is not the meaning of mystery in Scripture; God’s truth is never perplexing. Among the ancient religions there were certain inner secrets called the mysteries (*musterion*) into the knowledge of which only the initiated (*mustes*) were admitted. The translators of the Septuagint made use of this word, and God has been pleased to sanction that use by employing it to denote the mysteries revealed in the New Testament. God has His secrets to make known to His saints.

The Mystery that was revealed to Paul the prisoner, was the last and final truth

to be made known, and yet it had precedence in respect of time to all other purposes. This Mystery is distinguished from other Mysteries revealed earlier, in that it has to do with purposes formulated before the foundation of the world. A comparison with the Mysteries of the kingdom in MATTHEW 13 will exemplify this difference:

“. . . . I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret **from** the foundation of the world” (MATTHEW 13:35).

“According as He hath chosen us in Him **before** the foundation of the world”
(EPHESIANS 1:4)

There are good reasons for rendering “foundation of the world” as “overthrow of the world”; but for our present purpose the essential thing is to notice two words, the meanings of which are indisputable, **from** and **before**. Mysteries concerning purposes kept secret **from** the foundation of the world cannot obviously be the same as a purpose that was **before** the foundation of the world. This being so, the respective purposes should be distinguished, in order that the distinctive character of the Mystery may be better appreciated.

The purposes that are said to be **from** have to do with what is spoken of in MATTHEW as “the kingdom of heaven.”

“. . . . Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you **from** the foundation of the world” (MATTHEW 25:34).

Compare HEBREWS 4:3, 9:26, REVELATION 13:8, 17:8.

The only references to **before** are connected with Christ, and with those who are blessed according to the purpose of the Mystery committed to Paul when he was in bonds. The following are all the occurrences:

“Father, Thou lovest (*agapao*) Me before the foundation of the world”.
(JOHN 17:24)

“But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish (*amomos*) and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world. . . .” (1 PETER 1:19-20).

“According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame (*amomos*) before Him in love (*agape*)”.
(EPHESIANS 1:4)

The two things spoken concerning Christ before the foundation of the world, without blame (*amomos*) and love (*agape*), are combined in this reference to those who were chosen in Him at that time; such is the wonder of the purpose of the Mystery that completed the Word of God. The Mysteries of the kingdom were an integral part, the esoteric part, of the purposes of the kingdom; but the Mystery committed to Paul was a purpose entire in itself, that had its origin in the will of God before the foundation of the world. We have just quoted EPHESIANS 1. This chapter is the first in the canon of Scripture to make known this choice of a specific company of the redeemed, before the foundation of the world, who are destined to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. This choice and blessing is because of one reason — “according to the good pleasure of His **will**.” It is God’s **will** that summarizes this purpose rather than His **counsel**. God’s will is placed first as the motive of this purpose; it is not until verses 7 to 11, which deal with the work of the Son, whereby that will is to be realized, that there is any suggestion of “the mystery of His will” and “the counsel of His will.”

If we would but transport ourselves back into the times of the Ephesians, to whom this epistle was addressed, and endeavor to visualize their outlook upon Paul’s ministry at the time it was taking place, we should not be of two minds as to whether Paul’s prison epistles contain a distinctive revelation. When Paul was last with the Ephesians he called on them to acknowledge that his testimony had been complete and unreserved; “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I have not shunned to declare unto you **all the counsel of God**” (Acts 20:26-27).

What, then, would be the effect upon them of the opening prayer of this epistle? “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; **that ye may know** what is the hope of His calling ,” (verse 18). If they had already heard “all the counsel of God,” what calling and what hope was it that they did not know? “All the counsel of God” was a testimony restricted to the things foreseen by Moses and the prophets (Acts 26:22-23), and consequently could not have included that revelation that had been “hid from ages and from generations” (COLOSSIANS 1:26). It was not until the Mystery was given that the full purpose of God’s **will** was known and “All Truth” could have been said to have been unfolded.

Looked at from this standpoint, Paul’s request for the Ephesians — “That ye may know what is the hope of His calling” — becomes deeply significant. As it is God’s desire to make known this fuller unfolding of His will to His saints, and if it is our desire to know it, what more is necessary? Just this, the enlightenment given of God. It is for this enlightenment that Paul was praying on behalf of the saints. The word rendered “know” here, implies knowledge that comes from without, that which we come to know as absolute knowledge in contrast to getting to know by

learning. It is really a perfect of “to see” — namely, “I have seen.” With the reference to eyes in the context it might be permissible to make a provisional change by substituting “see” for “know” in the same way as when we say “I see” after that a fact we have sought to know unsuccessfully suddenly dawns upon us. “The eyes of your understanding having been enlightened; that ye may see what is the hope of His calling.”

This same word “know” is used in connection with the Mysteries of the kingdom: “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye (get to) know all parables?” (MARK 4:13). This stands in direct contrast to the blindness of the people referred to in the context. While it is for us to search to understand God’s mysteries, yet the entry into them depends on God causing us to “see” or “know.” It is after we receive that initial insight that we may explore and get to know something of the fullness of the revelation. The use of this word is in keeping with “mystery” which God makes known, not to the world at large, but to His own redeemed ones whom He initiates. The contrast with the word which implies “getting to know” by research is evident in the following passage:

“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might **know** the things that are freely given to us of God But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he (get to) know them, because they are spiritually discerned”.
(1 CORINTHIANS 2:12-14)

The disposition of the knowledge of the things God has revealed is therefore retained in His own power. A truth made known in Scripture does not necessarily become public property to be seen by all who may read, for He can both veil or unveil the eyes, according to His wise judgment. The things freely given us of God are given with Christ; but not apart from Him; like salvation, they are an unmerited gift of grace secure through His work, not a reward of any works of ours.

“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not **with** Him also freely give us all things?” (ROMANS 8:32).

Every gift can be received only through Christ, and consequently every gift can be received only by those who are in Christ. It is, therefore, the believer who alone is able to receive all the things God would make known.

“To His saints: To whom God would make known what is . . . this Mystery.” This being so, why is it that all believers do not, as a matter of course, come to know this Mystery? One reason is evident. Many have never given any heed to

what God desires for them. There is, however, a deeper reason; going on into fuller truth does not depend solely upon our resolution to look into these matters, it rather depends upon “If God permit.” Unless God graciously permits His own to enter into His Truth, any attempt on their part to force an entry would be futile; even as Israel were unable to enter their land when they were presumptuous and went up without God’s commission (DEUTERONOMY 1:43).

It is not for us to decide that we will look into the matter of this Mystery; it is rather that we should ask of God that we may be allowed to do so.

Who, then, among God’s saints are allowed to be entrusted with His secrets? Being a Christian is not the only credential necessary for the reception of “All Truth.” Those of Corinth to whom Paul wrote were believers, and yet his testimony to them was restricted. He had to say:

“For I determined not to know anything **among you**, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:2).

This limited testimony was due to their state:

“And I, brethren, could not speak **unto you** as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (1 CORINTHIANS 3:1).

Glorious as is the proclamation of Jesus Christ crucified, yet this cannot be regarded as the totality of all testimony. It is clear that the world of the unbelieving needs that word, but it is a sad evidence of lack of growth if a believer should require to hear no more. Jesus Christ and Him glorified at God’s right hand in heavenly places far above all, is the fullness of the gospel. The Corinthian church, through their failure in the ordinary matters of life, were not permitted to enter into all the truth that they might have done. “Howbeit,” said Paul, “we speak wisdom among them that are perfect” (1 CORINTHIANS 2:6).

The state of the Corinthian believers stirred Paul to the utmost. Their failures were sad enough in themselves, but the more serious result was that they prevented growth in the knowledge of the Lord and of the fruits that are the outcome of that growth. Paul, with all earnestness, draws attention to his own state that it might reveal to their hearts what is required of one who was to be entrusted as a steward with the mysteries of God:

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is **required** in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-2).

This principle obtains in home life; how much more, then, in the household of faith! It is to the faithful child that the parents entrust the private affairs of the family; even so it is to His faithful children that God commits His mysteries.

These evidences of faithfulness which Paul knew to be necessary for the reception of fuller truth he looked for in others. It was **after** he heard of the Ephesians faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all saints that he prayed that prayer for their enlightenment which we have just noticed (EPHESIANS 1:15). The two epistles in which the hope of the Mystery is made known have a peculiarity not to be found elsewhere in Paul’s church epistles, they are addressed to **faithful** brethren (EPHESIANS 1:1, COLOSSIANS 1:2). Timothy was among the first to whom this Mystery was committed, and he in his turn was instructed to commit it to other faithful men.

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to **faithful** men, who shall be able to teach others also”.
(2 TIMOTHY 2:2)

As Paul specified that the truth was to be committed to faithful men, it is of special interest to notice the history of one whom he spoke of as faithful. Onesimus was to Paul “a faithful and beloved brother” (COLOSSIANS 4:9). This man was a runaway slave who was brought to the Lord through the instrumentality of Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome (PHILEMON 10). Before the end of that two years imprisonment, Onesimus was sent back to his own city Colossae in charge of this letter that declared him to be faithful. Not years, but months of Christian activity had been sufficient for Onesimus to have gained this appellation. God looked upon his heart and upon the faithful service he had rendered to Paul’s needs in the bonds of the Gospel (PHILEMON 13).

The inspired biographies of other lives give examples which shew that on this principle of faithfulness, God has made known His purposes to His own, whatever purposes they may have been. These cases are helpful, as they display that which is esteemed to be faithfulness.

“. . . Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; . . . For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him”
(GENESIS 18:17-19).

“He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel”.
(PSALM 103:7)

“. . . as also Moses was faithful in all his house” (HEBREWS 3:2).

Abraham and Moses were alike faithful in their houses, irrespective of what others were doing; and in consequence God was able to entrust them with the understanding of His purposes and ways. The Scriptures have much to say concerning the ordinary, commonplace matters of domestic life; for it is these matters that, to a large extent, provide the testing-ground for that which God regards as faithfulness. 1 TIMOTHY declares that one credential of an overseer is an ordered household. To some, such faithfulness might appear very ordinary and unattractive, and not nearly so exciting as to leave the paths of everyday life and launch forth into all kinds of Christian exploits. Yet if it is ordinary, it nevertheless provides an equal opportunity for all, and should give encouragement to those who have no other sphere in which to be faithful.

While individual faithfulness has been the character of those to whom God has revealed His secrets, yet the cause for the revelation of the secrets themselves has been corporate failure. After Israel had failed under their kings and were carried away captive, God revealed to Daniel the secret concerning the character of future Gentile dominion (DANIEL 2). It was after MATTHEW 12, where the state of that unrepentant generation is reviewed, that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven were made known to the disciples.

Although the Mystery committed to Paul is stated to be distinct from former promises; it was, nevertheless, revealed on the same principle as previous mysteries. The setting was failure; Israel had rejected the testimony that was to them first, and as a result their hopes, that were conditional upon repentance, were necessarily deferred, but through the grace and wisdom of God the failure of Israel but led to the revelation of this Mystery.

We see therefore that it is God’s desire to make known to His faithful children the Mystery, which is the last and final revelation in the Word; a purpose that reaches back to before the foundation of the world and which was hid in God until committed to Paul the prisoner. This is clearly the subject to be specially heeded by those who long to be led into “All Truth.”

“His saints: To whom God would make known what is . . . this mystery . . .”
(COLOSSIANS 1:26-27).

III

“ . . . what is the riches of the glory of this mystery”

(COLOSSIANS 1:27)

WHAT IS glory? To give a comprehensive and satisfactory definition of God’s usage of this word would indeed be difficult. What then shall be said of “the riches of the glory”? or again of “what is the riches of the glory of **this Mystery**”? As these transcending terms are employed to qualify “this Mystery” we should certainly hesitate before any assertion is accepted which commences with such words as, “The Mystery is simply”! The prison epistles are rich with superlative expressions; this is without question one of the reasons why these epistles are so especially precious to believers. The following are examples taken from EPHESIANS:

“To the praise of the glory of His grace” (1:6).

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, . . .”(1:17).

“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe,”.
(1:19)

“ . . . His great love wherewith He loved us” (2:4).

“ . . . He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (2:7).

The superlative language is necessitated by reason of an excelling revelation. It is good to notice the glory of the language, but it is more precious to discern the revelation contained therein. Paul prayed that we “may approve things that are excellent” (PHILIPPIANS 1:10); it is fitting, therefore, that we should endeavor to appreciate these superlatives.

Any suggestion as to a method of investigation given in the prison epistles should be closely followed, as it may be intended to be a guide to that which God is desiring to make known. “That ye may approve things that are excellent.” The word translated “approve” is variously rendered “discern” (LUKE 12:56), “prove” (LUKE 14:19), “try” (1 CORINTHIANS 3:13), and “examine” (1 CORINTHIANS 11:28); while the word “excellent” is elsewhere “differeth from” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:41). The reason for the marginal readings can therefore be understood. The A.V. has “That ye may try things that differ,” and the R.V. “prove the things that differ”: Only by trying or proving the things that differ is it possible to discern the things that are best. To “try things that differ” is the process, to “approve things that are excellent” is the result.

Any comparison between the things of God might at first thought appear improper and unjustified, for everything from Him must be excellent. We are not, however, left to our own surmisings in this matter, for the Scriptures provide several comparisons that serve as examples of this principle.

In 2 CORINTHIANS 3 the New Covenant is compared with, and found to be more excellent than, the Old Covenant. Both these Covenants with Israel were of God, both were glorious; but the one which brought life and forgiveness of sin was more glorious:

“For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness **exceed in glory**. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of **the glory that excelleth**” (verses 9-10).

The work of the Lord Jesus as the minister of this New Covenant is set in contrast to that of Moses the minister of the Old Covenant.

“But now hath he obtained a **more excellent ministry**, by how much also He is the Mediator of a **better covenant**, which was established upon **better promises**” (HEBREWS 8:6).

The condition of the Old Covenant was the law of Sinai, the condition of the New was the word of grace of the Gospel. Paul declared the law to be holy and just and good (ROMANS 7:12); but when the law and its associated things were used to dim the glory of the Gospel of grace, he had no compunction in calling them “weak and beggarly elements”! (GALATIANS 4:9). The law had its place in the purpose of God, but it was not the only hope given to Israel.

“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a **better hope** did; by the which we draw nigh unto God” (HEBREWS 7:19).

The ministration of the New Covenant (2 CORINTHIANS 3) was accompanied by confirmatory gifts of the spirit, manifest in tongues, healings, etc., the proper control and order of which is outlined in 1 CORINTHIANS 12. Great and wonderful as these gifts in their various manifestations were, yet the apostle Paul sought that the believers should not be hindered in going on in the truth through esteeming these as the most excellent things. The best gifts were those that made for edification, but gifts were not the final “All Truth.”

“But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you **a more excellent way**”
(1 CORINTHIANS 12:31).

These gifts were not the end of all things; Paul did not exhort the believers to clamor after them, he rather pointed forward to “a more excellent way”; a way that was bound up in the purposes of love.

“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 prophecy in part. But **when that which is perfect is come**, then that which is in part shall **be done away**”.
(1 CORINTHIANS 13:8-10)

When that purpose of God is fully come to which these gifts bore confirmatory witness, then they will be done away, being no longer necessary. These gifts did cease in the Apostle’s own lifetime, although the purpose of the New Covenant was not realized (PHILIPPIANS 2:26-28, 1 TIMOTHY 5:23, 2 TIMOTHY 4:20). Something else came, even that Mystery which completed the Word of God. With this revelation the gifts given are of a different order, not being seen in outward demonstrations of power; and until the purpose of this revelation is realized there is no reason to expect such gifts to occur. The obvious absence in this day of these gifts, in the measure in which they were granted to the Corinthians, makes evident the exigency of the inquiry into that unfolding of truth which caused their temporary suspension.

The New Covenant, its conditions and its ministry, are all therefore shown to be more excellent than the Old Covenant. This exemplification of the principle “try things that differ,” and in consequence “approve things that are excellent,” should prepare and encourage us to apply it elsewhere.

The Lord Jesus Christ in resurrection receives many titles, all of them glorious, all of them exalting Him; yet some by their very nature are more excellent than others. To appreciate in any measure His most excellent titles must certainly be honoring to Him.

When Peter addressed the people of Israel on the day of Pentecost (ACTS 2:14) his subject was the resurrection of the One who they had rejected and crucified. This resurrection was witnessed to by Old Testament quotations, one of which dealt with an office to which the Lord was raised.

“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would **raise up Christ to sit on his throne**” (ACTS 2:29-30).

Christ raised as King to sit upon the throne of David! A message of hope to Israel and to the world, for as the Lion of the tribe of Judah He will yet be proclaimed as the King of kings and Lord of lords over all peoples. There is, however, a greater throne than that of David.

“Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a High Priest, Who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A Minister of the Sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (HEBREWS 8:1-2).

At the right hand of this throne the Lord is called High Priest, and as such, He became the Minister of the tabernacle in heaven. The chapter goes on to shew that this ministry is associated with the New Covenant that is to be made with Israel. In the capacity of High Priest the Lord Jesus “passed into the heavens” (HEBREWS 4:14), to “appear in the presence of God” for His people (HEBREWS 9:24).

What title and position is ascribed to the risen Lord in the prison epistles? Of all the excellent things revealed in these epistles none should quicken our expectation more than that which speaks of His transcendent glory.

“. . . . He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, **Far above all** principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be **Head** over all things to the church. Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all”. (EPHESIANS 1:20-23)

There can be no higher place than “far above all.” With this exaltation is associated the title “Head,” a title peculiarly connected with His present preeminence in the heavenlies, in contrast with other places that are not yet put under Him (HEBREWS 2:8).

“And He is the Head of the body, the church; Who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence”. (COLOSSIANS 1:18)

Intimately connected with these different titles and positions of the Lord are the hopes of His redeemed. All hopes are centered and secure in Him; all will be received from Him and all will be glorious. But while this is so, it does not follow that all are identical. What is the difference between them? and in consequence, Which is to be approved as the most excellent?

Christ being given “the throne of His father David” (LUKE 1:32) suggests the thought of the kingdom given to David, even that which was in the mind of the disciples when they asked, “Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom of Israel?” (ACTS 1:6). The extent of Israel’s land was specified when it was promised to Abraham (GENESIS 15:18). Israel have never possessed all this territory, but when at last their King shall reign in Zion it shall be theirs; the description of that time is the burden of many of the prophets.

Abraham, who received the promise of this earthly country, was given the promise of an even better country, — that is, an heavenly. It is not recorded in the Old Testament when that promise was given Abraham, but it is spoken of in HEBREWS 11, a promise not known by him only, but by others also.

“For he looked for a city which hath foundation, whose builder and maker is God” (HEBREWS 11:10).

“But now they desire a **better country**, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city”. (HEBREWS 11:16)

The Hebrew believers who are addressed in this epistle were partakers with those blessed in this heavenly calling of Israel; a calling associated with the Lord Jesus as the Great High Priest.

“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;” (HEBREWS 3:1).

This heavenly city is described as “Jerusalem which is above,” in contrast with Jerusalem which now is (GALATIANS 4:24-26). A glorious word picture of it is given in REVELATION 21, which almost surpasses comprehension.

With the Lord’s title of “Head” He is associated yet another calling:

“. . . set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, And gave Him to be the Head over all things to **the church which is His body**, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (EPHESIANS 1:20-23).

The “Church which is His Body” is blessed with Christ its exalted Head in a place that is “far above all”; there is nothing that can excel this hope.

“And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (EPHESIANS 2:6).

No detailed account of this place of blessing could be given, for who, in this life, would expect to be able to comprehend what are “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places”? It should suffice any craving for descriptions if we believe that, by wondrous grace, we have been made to sit together with Christ in the heavenlies; as to the place, one word appears to be specially used to describe it — “**glory**” (COLOSSIANS 1:27; 3:4).

Other parts of the New Testament speak of the Lord Jesus being raised and seated above all; but **only in** the prison epistles of Paul is it revealed that a company of His redeemed ones called “the Church which is His Body” are seated with Him in heavenly places. This calling is the distinctive message of the Mystery never before made known.

We may conclusively “approve” that the blessings of the Mystery are, without question, the most “excellent” if we compare the “things that differ” concerning these blessings with those of other blessings.

It is hardly necessary to compare heavenly blessings with those blessings that are to be received on the earth; the contrast is apparent. We will, therefore, note the difference between the blessings of the Church which is His Body in heavenly places and the Bride, the heavenly Jerusalem, Israel’s heavenly blessings.

The Church which is His Body:

“Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, **Far above all** principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and **every name that is named**, not only in this world but also in that which is to come: And hath put **all things** under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (EPHESIANS 1:20-23).

“And hath raised us up together, and made us **sit together** in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (EPHESIANS 2:6).

The Heavenly Jerusalem:

“But ye are come **unto** Mount Sion, and **unto** the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and **to** an innumerable company of angels” (HEBREWS 12:22).

The station of angels provides a *datum stratum* by which the relative position of these two companies can be compared. The Church which is His Body is blessed with Christ **far above** all principalities, powers and every name, but those of the heavenly Jerusalem come only so far as **unto** the realm of angels. This contrast is so sharp and clear cut that if there were no other things that differed about these two callings this alone would be adequate proof of their distinctiveness; and, moreover, the contrast with the station of angels is such that it at once makes evident which calling is the most excellent; that which is far above every name must be more excellent than that which is situated among angels.

Both the blessings of the Church which is His Body and of the new Jerusalem are heavenly; but **only** the Church which is His Body is blessed **in** the heavenly places. The construction “in heavenly places” (*en tois epouraniois*) occurs **only** in EPHESIANS.

“ . . . blessed us with all spiritual blessings **in** heavenly places in Christ (1:3).

“ . . . set Him at His own right hand **in** the heavenly places” (1:20).

“ . . . made us sit together **in** heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ (2:6).

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers **in** heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (3:10).

“ . . . wicked spirits **in** heavenly places” (6:12, margin).

The Church which is His Body is blessed in heavenly places, but it is also blessed far above the principalities and powers that are in those heavenly places, its position in Christ is more excellent than the highest of heaven's host. The new Jerusalem is called "the heavenly Jerusalem" (HEBREWS 12:22), but nowhere is it said to be in heavenly places; it is spoken of as "Jerusalem which is above" (GALATIANS 4:26), but nowhere is it said to be far above all. Those blessed therein are "partakers of the heavenly calling" (HEBREWS 3:1), but they are not said to be blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places. When the hope of that calling is received it will be seen coming **out of** heaven.

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, **coming down from God out of heaven, . . .**" (REVELATION 21:2; 21:10; and 3:12).

While both these callings are heavenly, yet there is a difference — the Church which is His Body, being seated with Christ, occupies a place that is "far above all heavens" (EPHESIANS 4:10); the heavenly Jerusalem has in comparison a subjacent position, for it is to come down from God out of heaven, and it is among an innumerable company of angels.

The times of the revelation of these two hopes are different: the hope of the Church which is His Body was not made known until it was revealed to Paul (EPHESIANS 3:2-9); the hope of the heavenly Jerusalem was known to Abraham (HEBREWS 11). The times of entry of these hopes are different; the Church which is His Body has a present hope (EPHESIANS 2:6, PHILIPPIANS 3:20), but the heavenly Jerusalem is a city yet to come (HEBREWS 13:14). The times for the subjugation of things under Christ are different: to the Church which is His Body this is viewed as already accomplished (EPHESIANS 1:22-23), but for others this is not yet seen (HEBREWS 2:8).

When the full complements of these callings are attained they will be called by dissimilar names.

". . . for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come . . . unto a perfect **man, . . .**" (EPHESIANS 4:12-13).

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a **bride** adorned for her husband" (REVELATION 21:2).

"Man" in the former passage is not the general word *anthropos*, which sometimes can be inclusive, "mankind"; but it is the particular term *aner*, a male or husband (the other occurrences of the word in EPHESIANS are 5:22, 23, 24, 25, 28,

33, in each of which it is used in the sense of **husband**). The Church which is His Body is therefore to attain unto a perfect man, and the heavenly Jerusalem is to be prepared as a bride. Some have said that these are but two names for the same company, their argument being that as the terms are used figuratively they have a flexible meaning; — but a word used figuratively does not lose its meaning, it rather acquires increased force. If the language and terms of Scripture are ambiguous, then of what use are they for the purpose of signification? It is impossible to regard “man” and “bride” as synonymous terms; these words have therefore been used for the purpose of contradistinction.

The relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers is different in these two callings. In the Church which is His body all such distinctions are entirely lost; but in the heavenly Jerusalem which was promised to Abraham the distinction is still retained, for on the gates of the city are written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, and on the twelve foundations the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (REVELATION 21:12-14). These twelve apostles are those of ACTS 1, whose special mission was to witness to the people of Israel.

If it was in one point only that the Church which is His Body was found to differ from the heavenly Jerusalem, then we might have reason to doubt that the difference was the result of some misunderstanding on our part; but when it is found that in many points they are completely different, then without question, they must constitute two separate and distinct companies; for how can blessings in heavenly places be the same as those which come down from God out of heaven? or how can “far above all” be the same place as that which is among angels? or how can a calling hid in God and hid from generations until revealed to Paul the prisoner, be the same as that for which Abraham looked? or how can a company called “a perfect man” be also “the Lamb’s wife”? The verse in PHILIPPIANS 1 that precedes the request “try things that differ” asks that we “may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all **sense**” (margin). If ordinary sense is graciously allowed to be used to guide us in these things, the result will be a clear appreciation that the calling of the Mystery is distinct from Israel’s earthly and heavenly callings and is the most excellent of all callings.

The relationship of these callings to the Lord Jesus Christ is, after all, the supreme factor that decides which is the more excellent. The Lord’s Name as Head to those of the Church which is His Body implies the very closest relationship to Him, they being members of that unity, the One Body, of which He is the inseparable Head. The Lord as Head to those blessed in the Heavenly Jerusalem is as a husband is the head of his wife.

“. . . Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife . . . shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God”.
(REVELATION 21:9-10)

The superlative expression “what is the riches of the glory of this Mystery,” led us to examine the injunction that would have us “approve things that are excellent”; the superlative language leads to a superlative revelation, and so, by observing the things revealed in the prison epistles of Paul, we are led to see the most excellent position of our Lord in relation to His redeemed and the most excellent position of His redeemed in relation to Him we being members of His Body, to the praise of His glory.

“. . . to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery . . .” (COLOSSIANS 1:26-27).

IV

“... what is ... this mystery ...”
(COLOSSIANS 1:27)

We might well convert this chapter heading into a question — “What is this Mystery?” Many Christians would be prepared to tell us what they believe the Mystery to be; that, however, is irrelevant to the point of our inquiry. We desire to know “What **is** this Mystery.” In order that we may have the truth of God, and not the interpretations of men, we must take up our concordance and look up the word “mystery” to discover the passages wherein it is spoken of that we may get to know what it really **is**.

It has already been observed that there are several Mysteries in Scripture; among the characteristics that distinguish “this Mystery” from other Mysteries is that the passage we are considering states that it had been hid until made known through Paul the prisoner. It would therefore be futile to search for it in any Scripture written prior to Paul being made a prisoner; to attempt to do so would be akin to the inattention to God’s word that led some of the Israelites to look for the manna on the **Sabbath** day, in spite of the fact that they had been plainly told they would not find it.

As this Mystery was the distinctive ministry of Paul the prisoner, it is necessary to search his epistles written from prison; in doing this it becomes apparent that even these epistles are concerned with more than one mystery.

The Mystery of Christ:

“... the mystery of Christ, Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, **as it is** now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets . . .”
(EPHESIANS 3:4-5)

The Mystery:

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been **hid** from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints”
(COLOSSIANS 1:25-26).

The Mystery of Christ was known in other ages or generations, although it was

not known “as it is now.” In contrast to this, the Mystery was not known at all in former ages and generations. Moreover, the Mystery of Christ was revealed to apostles and prophets, but the Mystery was made known solely through Paul.

The Mystery of Christ concerns who He is and what God has made Him to be. One only fully knows Christ; and we can get to know Him only as that One reveals Him. “No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father” (LUKE 10:22). The ultimate aim of the unfolding of all God’s purposes is the revelation of His Son. It was given to the Old Testament saints to discern glories in the prophecies concerning Him who was to come; “Abraham,” the Lord said, “rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad.” But the glories of the Christ could not be known “as it is now” until He who came had returned to the heavenly places far above all and God had unfolded the purposes respecting that sphere of His exaltation. The Son who is exalted upon the throne is verily God.

“But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom” (Hebrews 1:8).

The progressive revelation of the Mystery of Christ through the different generations marks it out as being distinct from the Mystery revealed only to Paul. The final unfolding of the Mystery of Christ “as it is now” was nevertheless closely interrelated with the revelation of the Mystery. This connection is also realized in the experience of entering into the truth of the Mystery; we must know who Christ is and where He is before we can understand what it means to be blessed with Him far above all.

Many believers, who dearly love their Lord, have their hearts set on the thought of His glory at God’s right hand and rejoice in these passages in EPHESIANS and COLOSSIANS which speak of their having been made to sit together with Him in the “far above all” in the heavenlies. These things are indeed precious, and some might be tempted to ask — “If this is believed why trouble further”? “What necessity is there to stress the need of knowing the how, when, and why of such blessings”? It should be noted that God’s will expressed in COLOSSIANS 1:27 does not say “would make known what is the hope of this Mystery”; it says rather “would make known what is this Mystery.” Now to be seated with Christ in the heavenlies far above all is the distinctive **hope** of the Mystery, but the Mystery itself includes other things besides its hope. We are brought back, therefore, to our opening question — “What is this Mystery”? The answer is found in the near context:

. . . . the dispensation of God even the mystery” (COLOSSIANS 1:25-26).

The Mystery is a dispensation. “Dispensation” is an unusual word, its meaning may therefore be obscure. The word so translated occurs first in LUKE 16:2-4, where it is three times rendered “Stewardship”:

“. . . give an account of thy stewardship; . . . What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: . . . when I am put out of the stewardship . . .”

The steward had been entrusted with the responsibility of dealing with his lord’s household, but his way of dealing was unfaithful, and in consequence the lord deprived him of this privilege. A dispensation is “a way of dealing” or, to express it in a single word that is rather more familiar, an “administration.” A “dispensation of God” is therefore God’s manner, scheme, plan, or system of dealing with His own household. God would make known “this Mystery” which is to us-ward who believe; or, in other words, He would have us know what is now His way of dealing with His redeemed ones.

Can it be imagined how disastrous it would have been for an Israelite not to have heeded the law during the time when God’s “way of dealing” with that nation was by the law? Such inattention would almost certainly have eventuated in transgression, for which the plea of ignorance would be inexcusable, for God had spoken. But would the result of not heeding God’s “way of dealing” with us to-day be any less disastrous? Summary retribution is not seen so evidently in this day of God’s grace and longsuffering, but it does not follow that it is any the less possible to neglect, with immunity from loss, that which is God’s present administration.

While it is indeed blessed to rejoice in the fact that God has raised and seated us with Christ, yet it is certainly of great importance that all who have such a hope should know what is God’s way of dealing connected therewith. God’s ways explain His acts, and only as we enter into His ways shall we understand His acts. To know what is now, at this present time, God’s “way of dealing” is to appreciate what is His wish for us and what should be our chief witness for Him.

God’s dispensations, administrations, or “ways of dealing” are connected with two main themes — salvation and blessing. The law was at one time to Israel both the condition of receiving life and the promised blessings, but it was impossible for them to receive either on this stipulation. Since the law salvation is by grace (ROMANS 5:21), and the blessing of their inheritance is to be received by grace (ROMANS 4:16). The dispensation of the law was superseded by the dispensation of grace, in respect both to salvation and to blessing. The law was therefore a way of dealing with Israel that obtained during a limited and clearly defined period (JOHN

1:17, ROMANS 10:4).

The twofold purpose, salvation and blessing, is seen together in EPHESIANS 3: “the dispensation of the grace of God” (verse 2), and “the dispensation of the Mystery” (verse 9, R.V.). Grace is still the manner of salvation — “By grace are ye saved”; but the Mystery now reveals the manner whereby the redeemed are blessed. As it is of vital importance for the unsaved to know that God’s way of salvation is by grace through the efficacy of the Lord’s substitutionary death; so it is also of vital importance that believers should know God’s way of blessing revealed in the Mystery, by reason of the Lord’s exaltation far above all. If one is vital, so also is the other; and if we are concerned about proclaiming to others the former, we should also be concerned about giving heed ourselves to the latter.

Of the several ways in which God has dealt with His own the present is distinguished as being “the dispensation of the Mystery”; other dispensations have had their related Mysteries, but this dispensation was itself altogether and entirely a Mystery until it was revealed. It should be noted that there is no reference to an age, or period of time, in the term “dispensation.” The present age was not a Mystery — it was foreseen by the prophets and spoken of by the Lord; but what should be God’s dispensation during this age was a Mystery right until the time this age commenced. The present age was described as being a period of the desolation of Jerusalem and dispersion of Israel; this did not come about immediately after the Lord’s death, for when He was on the cross He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”: This request was answered in the years of testimony to Israel that ensued. The Lord had spoken of those years, but He also revealed plainly that the testimony would not be received and in consequence Israel should be dispersed and their city destroyed (LUKE 11:49-51, 13:1-5, 19:41-44, 23:28-30).

“And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh . . . for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (LUKE 21:20-24).

ISAIAH 6:9-10 describes the state of the heart of Israel that was to bring about this present age of Israel’s dispersion. It was not until after Paul had quoted that passage as being characteristic of the Jews of the dispersion, as it had been of the Jews in the land, that the destruction of Jerusalem took place and this era of its desolation's began (ACTS 28:25-27). Isaiah, when he heard these fateful words, asked how long this condition should continue:

“Then said I, Lord, how long? And He answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land. But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall **return**,”
(ISAIAH 6:11-13)

History declares that this has been the state of Israel and their land right down to this present day. Hosea foretold that this period should be protracted, but nevertheless not without an end — they shall return in the latter days.

“For the children of Israel shall abide **many days** without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: **Afterward** shall the children of Israel **return**, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the **latter days**” (HOSEA 3:4-5).

Thus the present age was foreseen, but what was to be God’s administration that should obtain during this age was not foreseen by the prophets — it was a Mystery. God’s purposes in Israel remained in view so long as they were a people in the land and walked according to their God, temple and city, but when their heart was hardened they were dispersed and their hope was necessarily deferred. It is at this juncture that the question arises — “What is now God’s administration?” The Mystery committed to Paul after Acts 28:28 supplies the answer.

The somewhat difficult term “dispensation of the Mystery,” therefore, simply means the way God is dealing with His redeemed during this period of Israel’s dispersion.

To inquire what is this present way of dealing is obviously the most logical and most necessary thing the believer should do. What is now the position of the Lord Jesus Christ and what is now God’s purpose among the redeemed?

“And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the **Head** over all things to the **church which is His body**, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all”
(EPHESIANS 1:22-23).

“And He is the **Head of the body, the church**:” (COLOSSIANS 1:18).

This position now particularly ascribed to Christ (“Head of the body the church”), and this position now given to a company of the redeemed (“The church which is His body”), are both present facts. The sevenfold unity of the spirit enumerated in EPHESIANS 4 commences “There is one body” (verse 4). As this

is so, God's present way of dealing with His redeemed is to call out from among them those who are to form this One Body.

“In Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In Whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (EPHESIANS 2:21-22).

The building or growth of this One Body is taking place during this period of Israel's dispersion. Nationality is lost sight of entirely in the blessings of this calling; the present, in contrast to the past, position of believers is that they are called out, irrespective of whether they are Jews or Gentiles, to form One Body.

“. . . . for to make in Himself of twain (Jew and Gentile) one new man, so making peace; And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby”: (EPHESIANS 2:15-16).

This way of dealing was a Mystery until revealed to Paul; never before was it known that out from among believing Jews and Gentiles there should be called such a company to be the “Church which is His Body” whose hope is to be seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

Some may ask — Was not the One Body spoken of by Paul in his epistles written during the period covered by the ACTS before his prison ministry began, even in ROMANS 12 and 1 CORINTHIANS 12?; and is not the Bride referred to in the prison epistle EPHESIANS 5? These are vital questions which demand close attention.

The subject of the body in both ROMANS 12 and 1 CORINTHIANS 12 is introduced by the word *kathaper*, “as,” or “even as”; what follows is therefore an object of comparison rather than a statement of fact.

“**For as** we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: **So** we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (ROMANS 12:4-5).

“**For as** the body is one, and hath many members **so** also is Christ”.
(1 CORINTHIANS 12:12)

The body is used in these two passages as an illustration; the understanding of the illustration depends upon that to which it is applied, and it is therefore essential to consider the figure of a body in the light of the context. The same sequence of subject is found in both passages.

ROMANS 12:3-6

- Subject:** “. . . . to think soberly, according as God **hath** dealt to every man the measure of faith.”
- Figure:** “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the **same office**: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”
- Application:** “Having then **gifts differing** according to the grace that is given to us,”

1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-31

- Subject:** “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given to another But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, **dividing** to every man severally as He will.”
- Figure:** “For as the body is one, and hath many members, If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? But now **hath God** set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him.”
- Application:** “And **God hath** set some in the church, first after that But covet earnestly the best gifts:. . . .”

The subject in these scriptures is the disposition of gifts in the church; these were entrusted to individual members according to the judicious discrimination of God. The gifts were all from the same source, and all worked in the same cause, but severally their functions were dissimilar. The believers were therefore exhorted to view the several gifts as parts of a united manifestation of the working of that one and the self same Spirit, and in consequence not to think too highly of their own apportioned gifts nor allow schisms to arise through preferring some recipients of gifts above others.

The figure of the body is interposed as an apt illustration of diversity in unity. The body in question is the human physical body, and not that specific company of the redeemed called “the Church which is His Body” of which Christ is Head; for it is conceivable that there might arise a dissension within the head, between the ear and eye, or again between the head and some members of the body as the hand

or foot. Such allusions as these would not be fitting if the figure was illustrating the unity of that Body of which Christ is the Head. Moreover, the members are definitely referred to as “our” parts, some of which are feeble or uncomely; these would not be appropriate terms if the illustration depicted the members of that company who will be “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (EPHESIANS 5:27).

The believers were called “members one of another” (ROMANS 12:5), not members of Christ’s Body. As they individually belonged to each other they were to have “care one for another” (1 CORINTHIANS 12:25). The spiritual gifts with which they had been entrusted are enumerated in 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7-11. Some of these pertained to the testimony to unbelieving Israel, which occupied the first place during that period as recorded in the ACTS. “Tongues,” for example, were a sign especially given to confirm the word spoken to Israel:

“For the Jews require a sign,” (1 CORINTHIANS 1:22).

“Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not(1 CORINTHIANS 14:22).

In the twenty-seventh verse of 1 CORINTHIANS 12 “body” is without the article as it is the predicate, and thereby affirms something respecting the subject — “now ye are a body”; and as such they “belonged to Christ” and were “members individually.” In 1 CORINTHIANS 10:17 the same figure is employed; they were a body by reason of their all having partaken of the one bread, or, in other words, the one sacrifice of Christ. If they were the body of Christ, they were also the bread; and if they were the bread, then they were broken for themselves. This, however, is untenable: the term can only mean that as a body they had all partaken of the table of the Lord, and therefore, as the context shews, it would have been inconsistent to partake also of the table of demons. The reference in 1 CORINTHIANS 6:15 is to our personal bodies as being used as instruments in the Lord’s service; and this has no bearing on the present subject.

These references to believers being a body are not therefore exceptions to the unbroken silence of the earlier epistles of Paul to the subject of the Church which is His Body. The believers were all one in Christ Jesus; they all as a body belonged to Him; but nowhere before the Mystery revealed in the prison epistles of Paul is anything spoken of that Church which is His Body, the fullness, of which Christ is the Head, and whose peculiar place of blessing is to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Is that Church called the Bride, referred to in EPHESIANS 5:22-33? The practical exhortations of the last three chapters of EPHESIANS are covered by the opening verse:

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,” (EPHESIANS 4:1).

We are exhorted to walk worthy according to the vocation, or calling, wherewith we are called; not according to another calling wherein other redeemed ones have been called. Thus in chapter 5 our calling is clearly stated.

“Because we are members of His body,” (EPHESIANS 5:30, R.V.).

The closest illustration in practical life of this oneness between Christ and the members of His Body is found in the marriage tie (verse 31). The exhortations to husbands and wives are thereby given with a special appeal to emulate the relationship that exists between Christ and His Body; note verses 23, 24, 25, 27,28. Although the subject is man and wife, it is affirmed that the example is “Christ and the church” (verse 32).

Thus the Church which is His Body is not revealed in Paul’s earlier epistles and the Bride is not referred to in his prison epistles. The working towards the Bride, the heavenly city, the hope of Israel, occupied the chief place in God’s dealings up till the time of the last chapter of ACTS (verse 20); not until the revelation to Paul of the dispensation of the Mystery was anything known of the hope of the Church which is His Body, the calling out of which then came into the forefront of God’s dealings. The revelation of this new hope of the Church which is His Body did not alter in any way the hope of the heavenly calling of the Bride that was previously the dominant hope; it only rendered Israel’s hope subservient for the time being. When the present cardinal purpose, the calling out of the One Body, is complete, then once again Israel’s hope will occupy the leading place as is foreseen in the REVELATION.

In our last chapter we compared the things that differed concerning the Body of Christ and the Bride, which things shewed that the two callings were distinct and also that the calling of the Church which is His Body is the more excellent. In this chapter, we have found that it is the calling out of the Church which is His Body that is now the principal purpose of God’s dealings with His redeemed. How precious it is that the most glorious calling of the One Body should be that calling which God would now make known to His saints and which He would have us acknowledge!

We asked “What is this Mystery?” and have found that it is “the dispensation of the Mystery,” a way of God’s dealings with His redeemed that had been a secret but now is revealed; a dealing concerned with the calling out of the Church which is His Body that is now obtaining during this present period of Israel’s blindness. This Church is blessed in Christ “far above all.”

Paul not only received the revelation of the Mystery, he also received a ministry according to that revelation.

“Whereof I am made a minister, **according to** the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints” (COLOSSIANS 1:25-26).

Ministry must always be “according to” that which is God’s present administration. When the hope of Israel was in view, then Paul’s ministry was according to that hope, for he listed himself with those who had been made “able ministers of the new covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:6), a ministry that was witnessed to by signs, healings, and mighty evidential powers.

With the change in God’s dispensation that came about with the postponement of the hope of Israel there came also a change in Paul’s ministry; not only did he receive the revelation of that unpromised, unforeseen, dispensation of the Mystery, but he also was “made a minister **according to** the dispensation of God . . . even the Mystery.” This ministry was not accompanied by gifts of a demonstrative character, but by such as were for the edifying of the Body of Christ: outward signs and wonders would be as inadequate, as they would be unsuited, to attest the truth of “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.”

That he might fulfill this ministry was Paul’s longing and request, for its expediency laid heavily upon him (EPHESIANS 6:19, COLOSSIANS 4:3). As it was God’s purpose to make known to His saints “what is the riches of the glory of this mystery”; so it was Paul’s desire:

“And to make all men see **what is the dispensation of the mystery** which from all ages hath been hid in God who created all things” (EPHESIANS 3:9, R.V.).

Ministry is not confined to the few, it should be the occupation of “every one” of the redeemed; but for it to be effectual it must, as always, be according to God’s present purpose, even the “edifying of the Body of Christ.” As the dispensation of the Mystery is the outcome of the Lord Jesus Christ being exalted far above all

principalities and powers, so also are its associated gifts connected with that exaltation. Actually it is not so much gifts to members, but the gift of members who contribute to the growth of the Body of Christ.

“But **unto every one of us** is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore He saith, when He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. . . . And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the **edifying of the Body of Christ**” (EPHESIANS 4:7-12).

As God’s present purpose is found to-day in the growth of the Church which is His Body, so also the main objective of the present opposition of evil is to distract the attention of the believer from the things that pertain to this purpose. This opposition is very specious; it may even take the form of so occupying a believer with some phase of truth to the extent of preventing him from giving heed to that truth of the Mystery which it is God’s wish to make known.

Opposition is generally directed at that which is God’s existing working. When it was the administration of the law, the Lord Jesus bade His disciples beware of the teachings of those religionists to whom He said “Thus have ye made the commandments of God of none effect by your tradition.” In this present administration of the Mystery we must seek the special “beware” in the prison epistles. After Paul had spoken of the “full assurance of understanding, that they might know the mystery of God, even Christ” (COLOSSIANS 2:2, R.V.), special warnings were given:

“And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words”.
(COLOSSIANS 2:4)

The things to be guarded against are to be tested by what is God’s present purpose. The test of truth is whether it is “after Christ,” not whether it conforms to man’s accredited philosophy, tradition, or rudiments.

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and **not after Christ**”.
(COLOSSIANS 2:8)

The test of practice is whether it is according to what is now the substance of God’s dealings with us — “the Body is of Christ”; not whether it is a shadow of those things yet to be.

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; **but the body is of Christ**” (COLOSSIANS 2:16-17).

The test of worship is whether it ascribes to Christ the title He has already received — “And gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all”; and the test of genuine growth is whether it arises from that nourishment received directly from the Head and ministered through the joints and bands which make for the increase of the Body.

“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, **And not holding the Head**, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (COLOSSIANS 2:18-19).

Thus the present working of God among His redeemed is found in the calling out of the Church which is the Body of Christ; and the opposition to beware of is that which would hinder the understanding and enjoyment of this precious fact. Principalities and powers are **now** learning **through** God’s dealings with this Church His manifold wisdom.

“. . . . to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery to the intent that **now** unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known **through** the church the manifold wisdom of God”.
(EPHESIANS 3:9-10, R.V.)

This is the present administration of God, the goal of which is the completion of this Body as a “perfect man.”

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”
(EPHESIANS 4:13).

Growth towards this stature, increase of this Body — that is the occupation of every member. It is towards Christ that the growth is moving, even as it is from Him that the nourishment is derived.

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the **Head**, even Christ: From whom the whole **body** fitly joined together and compacted by that which **every joint** supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of **every part**, maketh increase of the **body** into the **edifying of itself** in love” (EPHESIANS 4:15-16).

“Effectual working” is ever the character of a witness that is according to God’s existing way of dealing. The testimony concerning the dispensation of the Mystery which God would now make known to His saints results in effectual working, even in believers entering understandingly into the special calling and blessing that God in such super-abounding grace has been pleased to unfold. To desire first to enter ourselves into the joy of this revelation and then to point our fellow-believers to this truth, is the gracious gift vouchsafed to us through the effectual working of His great power.

This working in making known the Mystery and in the building up of the One Body is made effectual by reason of the power especially connected therewith.

The prayer of EPHESIANS has three requests — “that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe.” This last, “His power to us-ward who believe,” is defined in the remaining verses of the chapter.

“And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, **according to** the working of His mighty power. Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all”.
(EPHESIANS 1:19-23)

God’s ways with His own are ever **according to** their calling. Our calling is to be raised and seated with Christ far above all, so that now God’s power that is to us-ward who believe, is nothing short of that power that has raised and exalted Christ far above all. Before the Mystery was revealed believers were said to have died and risen with Christ, but never to have been raised and seated with Him; they were said to have received the power of the Spirit from on high, but never is it mentioned that the power that placed Christ far above every name was towards those that believed. This mighty power is the special accompaniment of this high

calling; this power was towards Paul in making known the Mystery.

“Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of His power to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God” (EPHESIANS 3:7-9, R.V.).

This power is towards us, that we may be able to comprehend the love of Christ, which theme approaches the climax of all the purposes of God respecting this calling.

“That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints the love of Christ” (EPHESIANS 3:16-19).

The ascription of praise that follows this central prayer of EPHESIANS, declares that the abundant answer that can be given to the request for enlightenment, is according to this selfsame power to us-ward who believe.

“Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (EPHESIANS 3:20).

May we bow our knees and ask that according to the power that made possible this calling, we maybe strengthened to be able to comprehend, in some measure, what is now this truth that God would make known to His saints.

“. . . . to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery” (COLOSSIANS 1:26-27).

V

“ . . . **this mystery among the Gentiles; . . .** “
(COLOSSIANS 1:27)

THIS Mystery that was committed to Paul the prisoner has special reference to the Gentiles; it is therefore important to discover who the Gentiles are, in order that we may appreciate the reason why this Mystery was specially to be proclaimed among them.

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ **for you Gentiles**, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to **you-ward**: How that by revelation He made known unto me **the mystery**;”
(EPHESIANS 3:1-3)

“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of **this mystery among the Gentiles**;” (COLOSSIANS 1:27).

The most direct way of discovering who the Gentiles are is to notice who they are not. This may sound paradoxical, but it is apparent immediately a comparison is made between those things that distinguish the Gentiles from the Jews.

The Jews:

“Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and **the covenants**, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and **the promises**; Whose are the fathers, and to whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” (ROMANS 9:4-5).

The Gentiles:

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in times past Gentiles in the flesh, That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers from the covenants of promise**, having no hope, and without God in the world;” (EPHESIANS 2:11-12).

To the Jews pertained certain promises, but the Gentiles, or nations other than Israel, had no such promises. This had been the distinction between the Jews and Gentiles ever since the promises were given to Abraham, the natural father of the Jewish race.

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made”
(GALATIANS 3:16; HEBREWS 6:13, 7:6, and 11:17).

These promises concerned blessings, both earthly and heavenly, revealed first to Abraham and then repeated with additional particulars to his descendants as God’s purposes in Israel were more fully unfolded.

Earthly:

“In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:” (GENESIS 15:18).

“. . . . our father Abraham, for the promise, that he should be heir of the world,” (ROMANS 4:12-13).

Heavenly:

“. . . . Abraham For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. . . . But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city” (HEBREWS 11:8-16).

Elsewhere, both these spheres of Israel’s blessings are described in detail — the earthly mainly in the Old Testament, notably in the Prophets, and the heavenly in the New Testament (see REVELATION 21-22).

These promises have been offered to Israel conditionally, that is to say, the reception of the promises has been dependent upon their keeping certain conditions or terms. The trial of Israel under these terms has made their history; a history which provides an illustration of human inability to acquire any promise in the flesh. From the birth of Ishmael — where human device sought unsuccessfully to bring forth the seed that should inherit the promises — right down to the present day, it has been an unbroken story of human failure.

The conditions whereby the promises have been offered to Israel are the terms of the Old Covenant and the terms of the New Covenant. Since Israel became a nation in Egypt, they have been dealt with under two heads — Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant, and Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant (HEBREWS 8:5-13). The terms of the Old Covenant given through Moses were the law.

“Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (EXODUS 19:5-6).

Under this Old Covenant, Israel possessed a small portion of their promised land, but entry into the whole territory depended upon their keeping the commandments of the law (DEUTERONOMY 19:8-9), as also did the status of being the Lord’s peculiar people (DEUTERONOMY 26:16-19); but keep these commandments they could not, for they had no power of themselves to do so, being sinners.

It was God who gave the promises to Israel, their inability to receive the promises under the terms of the Old Covenant could not dis-annul the original promise or make it ineffective. It but revealed to them their impotent condition in the flesh, that it might lead them to Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant.

“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make **the promise** of none effect Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom **the promise** was made ;. . .” (GALATIANS 3:17-19).

That which was confirmed of God in Christ to Israel depended on Christ; thus in due time He came, to confirm the promises made to their fathers.

“To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant;” (LUKE 1:72).

“Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister to the circumcision for the truth of God, to **confirm the promises** made unto the fathers:” (ROMANS 15:8).

“For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen,” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:20).

The promises are secure to Israel in Christ, and therefore they can be secured by Israel only as they receive them in Him. In GALATIANS 3 Paul calls attention to the fact that it was to Abraham’s seed, in the singular, not to his seeds, in the plural, that the promises were made.

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the **promises** made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ . . . till the seed should come to whom the **promise** was made ;. . .” (GALATIANS 3:16, 19).

The Lord was born under the law. He fulfilled its conditional terms, and thereby received all the promises to Abraham that were dependent thereon. Thus the law itself was in no way a failure, but was fulfilled in Christ, Who secured to Israel the promises (MATTHEW 5:17). The Lord lived under the Old Covenant, but He died to make the New Covenant.

“For this is My blood of the new testament (covenant), which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (MATTHEW 26:28).

The Lord’s death was for the redemption of all the redeemed; this preeminent and all important fact must ever be kept before us. But in thus procuring redemption, the Lord’s death had other purposes, one of which was the ratification of the New Covenant. The promised inheritance that Israel could never have received by the Old Covenant, because under it sin could not be done away, can now be received by the New Covenant because of the redemption provided by its Mediator, the MAN CHRIST JESUS.

“And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament (covenant), that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament (covenant), they which are called **might receive the promise of eternal inheritance**” (HEBREWS 9:15).

This new Covenant, like the Old Covenant, was made with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah (JEREMIAH 31:31-34, HEBREWS 8:8-12), and the promises secured thereby were those given to Israel’s fathers.

The Lord, in thus coming to Israel, did not come to break down those barriers that made Israel a nation distinct from the Gentiles, He came to reaffirm them in His ministry and to establish them by His death. The Lord was a minister to the circumcision (ROMANS 15:8) that is, the Jewish people; and His ministry, with a few significant exceptions, was confined to Israel, as also was that of the twelve disciples.

“But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (MATTHEW 15:24).

“These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (MATTHEW 10:5-6).

The Lord, in His death, established the New Covenant that is to be made with Israel, and by which they will receive their promised inheritance. The preaching of the New Covenant (2 CORINTHIANS 3:6), which took place after the cross, still maintained to Israel their separate position; for the gospel under these conditions was to be proclaimed “to the Jew **first**, and also to the Greek” (ROMANS 1:16, 11:10).

The difference between the Jews and the Gentiles is therefore seen in that the Jews have certain promises of blessings, earthly and heavenly, which the Gentiles have not. The difference between God’s dealings with Jews and Gentiles is that Israel’s promises have been offered them on the terms of the Old and New Covenants during the time when Gentiles were aliens and strangers to all such covenants of promise. It is not merely racial characteristics that make the difference between the Jews and Gentiles; it is something more vital and important, even the purposes of God in Israel that have separated them from all other peoples.

What has been the relation between Israel and their promises since the New Covenant was confirmed by the death of its Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ? This New Covenant, with its condition of faith, superseded the Old Covenant with its condition of law (HEBREWS 8:13). Christ had become the “end of the law for righteousness to every one **that believeth**”: Faith, or belief in the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, became the sole condition on which Israel could receive their promises; but instead of there being a national acceptance of their Messiah there was but a small remnant, or election, who believed.

“I say then, Hath God cast away His people? God forbid, **For I** also am an Israelite, . . . Even so then at this present time also there is **a remnant** according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but **the election hath obtained it**, and the rest were blinded”.
(ROMANS 11:1-7 compare 9:27-33)

This remnant from among Israel is likened to Isaac in that they were the children who were counted, or reckoned as, the heirs of the promise.

“Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the **children of the promise** are counted for the seed” (ROMANS 9:6-8).

The blessings inherited by this remnant were the heavenly blessings of Israel.

“But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. . . . Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the **children of promise**” (GALATIANS 4:26-28).

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, And to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant,” (HEBREWS 12:22-24).

These two passages clearly define the position of this remnant. Their place of blessing was Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the sphere of those blessings being among an innumerable company of angels. They were called the “church of the firstborn,” and to them Jesus was the Mediator of the New Covenant.

There are two words translated “new”: *kainos*, new in reference to kind — that is, different; and *neos*, new in reference to time — that is, fresh. The usual construction of the term “New Covenant” is with *kainos*, hence a Covenant new in character, in contrast to the Old Covenant; but in HEBREWS 12:24 is the only occurrence of *neos* with covenant, the sense being “a covenant recently given.” To these believers, who were the fruits of the New Covenant ministry that followed immediately after the Lord’s death, that Covenant was of recent origin — it was something fresh. They themselves are referred to as a “first-fruits” of all Israel that are to be saved when the New Covenant is actually entered into. Compare ROMANS 11:16 with verse 26. It was these redeemed ones who in those days inherited the promises; the rest of unbelieving Israel were blinded, having stumbled at that Stumbling Stone, that Rock of Offense, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

While the promises made a difference between the Jews and Gentiles, yet the way of salvation was the same for both. They were alike sinners and the Lord Jesus Christ was the one and only Saviour of them both. In this respect there was no difference between Jew or Gentile.

“What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is **no difference**: For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (ROMANS 3:9-23).

“For there is **no difference** between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him” (ROMANS 10:12).

There was no difference between the Jews or the Gentiles in respect to their state as sinners, or as to Christ Jesus being their Redeemer and Lord; yet in the context of the foregoing passages the advantage of the Jew is reaffirmed: “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way:” A Jew, when he appropriated to himself through faith the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, was able to receive the blessings that were his by promise; but a Gentile who similarly believed to salvation had no such blessings to receive. What then was the position of the believing Gentile at a time when the blessings of Abraham were the only blessings in view? The Gentiles were made **partakers** of Israel’s blessings.

“And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou (the Gentiles, ver. 13), being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them (Israel, ver. 14), and **with them partakest of** the root and fatness of the olive tree; ” (ROMANS 11:17).

“. . . . For if the Gentiles have been **made partakers** of their spiritual things. . . .” (ROMANS 15:27)

Israel’s promises were not transferable, for when they were made to Abraham, God confirmed them to him and to the heirs of promise by an oath, thereby showing the immutability of His counsel (HEBREWS 6:13-17). “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (ROMANS 11:29). His purpose according to election in Israel can know of no change. Israel’s promises were not transferred to the Gentiles; but the Gentiles were allowed to participate in those blessings, in the same manner as a branch grafted into a stock participates with the natural branches of the fatness of the root. No amount of grafted branches can alter the nature of the root; even so no number of Gentiles who participated in these blessings could alter the fact that they were Israel’s **own** blessings (ROMANS 11:24).

That the Gentiles should participate in Israel’s blessings had been foreseen from the beginning when the promises were first given to Abraham (GALATIANS 3:8), that had never been a mystery. Paul is caused to call attention in ROMANS 4 to

the important fact that Abraham received both justification by faith and the promises by faith, at a time when he was yet uncircumcised, or before he received the outward mark that distinguishes the Jewish race. This fact is shown to constitute Abraham the father of all who believe, whether they be circumcised or not; and, moreover, to make it manifest that his true heirs are those who are of faith, whether they be circumcised or not.

Abraham the father of all who receive righteousness by faith:

“. . . Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. . . . Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision, . . . that he might be **the father of all them that believe**, though they be not circumcised; **that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:**” (ROMANS 4:3-11).

Abraham the father of all who receive the promise by faith:

“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

“. . . Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the **promise might be sure to all the seed**; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; **who is the father of us all;**” (ROMANS 4:13-16).

This same principle is seen in GALATIANS:

Abraham’s children are all who receive righteousness by faith:

“Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which **are of faith**, the same are **the children of Abraham**” (GALATIANS 3:6-7).

Abraham’s heirs are all who receive the promise by faith:

“So then they which be of faith are blessed **with** faithful Abraham”.
(GALATIANS 3:9)

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew or Greek, . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus, And if ye be Christ’s, **then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise**”.
(GALATIANS 3:26-29)

The Gentiles who, on this principle, participated in the blessings of Abraham formed part of that remnant or election (ROMANS 9:24-27), the true “Israel of God” (GALATIANS 6:16). The inclusion of the believing Gentiles among that election was for the purpose of provoking to emulation Israel according to the flesh (ROMANS 11:13-14). That the Gentiles had no part or lot with Israel was the confident trust of the Jew, when therefore the Gentiles were shown to be able to have a part in Israel’s blessings, it unsettled the composure of the Jews; but instead of this provoking the nation as a whole to emulation, it rather stirred them to bitter opposition, which resulted in the filling up of the nation’s sins (1 THESSALONIANS 2:16).

The record of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the testimony that was first and foremost to Israel, and the opposition of the unbelieving Jews to the Gentiles being included, is given in the last historical book of the Bible — THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

That the Gentiles found no place whatever in the testimony of the Apostles until the tenth chapter of ACTS, can be seen from the astonishment of the elders at Jerusalem when Peter rehearsed to them the matter of the conversion of Cornelius.

“When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying,
Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (ACTS 11:18).

This was not astonishment only at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles; it was astonishment at something more initial, even that God had granted to the Gentiles “**repentance unto life**”! At Pentecost it was to “all the house of Israel” that Peter spoke (ACTS 2:14, 36); and it was “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” who heard the Apostles speak with tongues (ACTS 2:4-11); if the Gentiles were present they were not included in the addresses of those days, nor in the appeals to believe (ACTS 2:37-39, 3:12-26, 4:10). The Grecians of Chapter 6:1-3 for whom a daily ministration was provided were Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews; this is evident from the fact that up to ACTS 11:1-3 no believing Jews had eaten with the Gentiles. The Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip was sent was a proselyte, a Gentile who had adopted the Jewish faith, such were reckoned by the law as Israelites (EXODUS 12:48, ISAIAH 56:1-8).

Peter was the first apostle who spoke to the Gentiles.

“. . . Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. . . . Simeon hath declared how God **at the first** did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name”.
(ACTS 15:7, 14)

It was not until Peter received the vision that bade him go to Cornelius that he gave any testimony expressly to the Gentiles. This first Gentile-ward movement was unprecedented in the annals of the Apostles; the believers at Jerusalem were therefore amazed when they heard, so that they “glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life”!

While Peter was the first to open the door of testimony to the Gentiles, yet it was not given him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles; immediately before the record of Cornelius the ACTS recounts the conversion of Paul, the one who was singled out to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.

“But the Lord said unto him. Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”.
(ACTS 9:15)

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

The testimony to the Gentiles commenced by Peter was continued by Paul. The Apostle to the Gentiles was not therefore one of the Twelve of ACTS 1: for at that time he was not converted, neither can his name be numbered with those who were apostles with the Lord (REVELATION 21:14). Paul’s apostleship, like his conversion, was the outcome of the direct dictate from heaven.

“Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)” (GALATIANS 1:1).

The subject that underlies the record of the ACTS is the re-offer to Israel of their promise on the terms of the New Covenant; the apostles at that time were called “able ministers of the New Covenant” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:6); the terms of this Covenant were repentance and the reception of Jesus Christ. Peter, having the keys of the kingdom, opened the testimony with this subject.

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. . . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ For **the promise** is **unto you** and **to your children**, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (ACTS 2:36-39).

Stephen in his address made allusion to the period in Israel’s history “when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham,” for the purpose of rousing the Jews to a realization of the then present time of opportunity (ACTS 7:17). Paul, in the first recorded address that he gave in a synagogue, deals with the promises made to Israel.

“Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, David to be their king; Of this man’s seed hath God according to **His promise** raised **unto Israel** a Saviour, Jesus: And we declare **unto you** glad tidings, how that **the promise** which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again”. (ACTS 13:16-41)

Although Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, yet his heart’s longing was for Israel.

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (ROMANS 10:1).

The subject of the Apostles’ testimony recorded in the ACTS was therefore the proclamation to Israel of Jesus Christ as their Saviour, the One through Whom they could receive their promises. This being so, the word was spoken to Israel first. This fact Peter emphasized at the beginning.

“Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. **Unto you first** God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (ACTS 3:25-26).

The Gentiles were not spoken to until the time of ACTS 10, after that time the order “To the Jew first” was strictly observed, it was only after the Jews locally had rejected the testimony, that the Apostles turned to the Gentiles.

“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said. It was necessary that the word of God should **first** have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:45-46).

The Gentiles were spoken to after the Jews turned away from the truth, for the purpose of provoking them to emulation (ROMANS 11:13-14). Thus, during the time when the New Covenant, with its hope of the promises, was being proclaimed to Israel, there was also an ever-increasing number of Gentiles included in blessing for the express purpose of rousing the Jews to a decision. This inclusion of the Gentiles did arouse the Jews in a very decided manner. The conversion of the first Gentile, Cornelius, resulted in contention between the Jewish believers at Jerusalem and Peter; not until they heard the indisputable evidence that Peter’s action of going to this pious and inquiring Gentile, was the Lord’s leading, did they accept the fact that Peter had done rightly (Acts 11:1-18).

After the conversion of Cornelius, it is Paul’s ministry that is alone prominently in view in the record of Acts; for he was the Apostle to the Gentiles, and it was the inclusion of the Gentiles, for the purpose of exciting emulation among the Jews, that was then the crux of the situation. Instead of Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles resulting in the Jews being led to repentance, it served only to expedite the rejection. Many instances are recorded of the bitter envy aroused among the Jews when the Gentiles believed.

“And some of them believed the devout Greeks a great multitude, and the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, set all the city on an uproar (Acts 17:4-5).

Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish people, Paul therefore visited Jerusalem with the object of recounting what God was working among the Gentiles. After Paul’s first missionary journey, he declared before the church at Jerusalem the conversion of the Gentiles (Acts 15:12). After his last missionary journey of the Acts, he returned to Jerusalem again, for the purpose of recounting the conversion of the Gentiles; on this occasion it produced a climax.

Declaration to the believers:

“And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it they glorified the Lord,. . .” (Acts 21:17-19).

Declaration to the nation of the Jews:

“Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) . . . And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. . . Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the **Gentiles**. And they gave him audience **unto this word**, and then lifted up their voices, and said. Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live” (Acts 22:1-22).

The declaration of the conversion of the Gentiles to the believing Jews produced praise, but to the nation as a whole, it evoked hatred. They heeded all Paul had to say up to one word, “Gentiles,” but at that word they cast off their clothes, threw dust into the air, and cried against Paul with similar words to those which they cried against his Lord years before — “Away with such a fellow.” The last word Paul spoke to the Jews in public was “Gentiles.” The inclusion of the Gentiles did not therefore provoke Israel to repentance, but rather to rejection.

These incidents declare plainly that during the time covered by the ACTS there still existed a very distinct difference between God’s dealings with the Jews and with the Gentiles. The Jews had one set of commandments, the Gentiles had another (ACTS 15).

What was there about Paul’s address to the Jews in ACTS 28 that should cause it to be chosen to bring this history to an abrupt end? There is a marked connection between the first recorded ministerial address of the Lord Jesus Christ (LUKE 4:16-22) and this last recorded address of Paul. The Lord’s address commenced with a quotation of ISAIAH 61:1-2: “. . . He hath sent Me to heal . . . To preach the acceptable year of the Lord,” followed by the statement “This day is **this** scripture fulfilled in your ears.” The attention of the Jews was thus directed to the fact that the Lord having been sent to them had introduced a period during which should be preached “the acceptable year of the Lord”! A reference to ISAIAH 61:1-2 will shew that the quotation was concluded in the middle of a verse, the remaining words

being “and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn”; these words were not quoted by the Lord on this occasion, but they were later, towards the close of His earthly ministry.

“And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. . . . For these be the **days of vengeance**, that all things which are written may be fulfilled And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (LUKE 21:20-24).

The “acceptable year of the Lord” was the character of the time during which the word was being proclaimed to the Jews; but the “days of vengeance” referred to the destruction of Jerusalem which took place shortly after the end of the ACTS and ushered in this present period of Israel’s dispersion. Some forty or more years elapsed between the time when, “To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” began to be fulfilled and the time when the “days of vengeance” befell Israel. That period was an “acceptable time” for Israel’s repentance.

Paul’s last recorded address to the Jews also included a quotation from ISAIAH:

“And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word. Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (ACTS 28:25-29).

“Lest they should be converted and I should heal them”! This blindness of Israel to the opportunity of receiving their promises during the “acceptable year of the Lord” prevented their being healed at that time, for healing and restoration depended upon their enlightenment (2 CORINTHIANS 3:16) and their repentance (ACTS 3:19-21). This definite rejection was shortly followed by those “days of vengeance,” and the dispersion of Israel. This casting off of Israel was not final, for all Israel are one day to be saved (ROMANS 11:26 — the “all” being subject to the inclusions of verse 17 and the exclusions of 9:6); it meant only that it was not possible for them to be received at the time of the last chapter of ACTS.

The first ministerial address of the Lord therefore revealed that an acceptable time for Israel’s healing had come, and Paul’s last recorded address revealed that,

that acceptable time for their healing had, for the time being, ended. The reason for the abrupt conclusion of the history of ACTS, after Paul's address, is therefore evident: Israel had become so blinded "lest they should be converted, and I should heal them."

At the time of this last chapter of ACTS, what became the position of the Gentiles? up to this juncture they had been permitted to share with Israel in the expectation of the promises, the postponement of those promises, which then occurred, necessarily involved also the postponement of the only hope the believing Gentiles had looked for to that date. Immediately after the words "lest I should heal them" Paul made a final declaration to the Jews.

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

"The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles." What was there significant in this? Had not the Gentiles already heard and believed in large numbers? It is in that word "**sent.**" This is brought out by the striking contrast between the first testimony to the Gentiles, given by Peter to Cornelius, and this last reference to the Gentiles in ACTS.

Peter's first testimony to the Gentiles:

"The word which God **sent** unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:)" (ACTS 10:36).

Paul's last reference to the Gentiles in ACTS:

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

The contrast, so far as the Gentiles were concerned, is seen, in that at the beginning they were able only to hear a Gospel that was sent to Israel; but upon Israel's rejection of that testimony the Gentiles had a gospel definitely sent to them.

Paul's first recorded address to the Jews in a Synagogue:

"Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation **sent**" (ACTS 13:26).

Paul's last recorded address to the Jews:

“Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is **sent** unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it” (ACTS 28:28).

The contrast, so far as the Jews were concerned, is that the word of salvation sent first to them was, by reason of their rejection, sent unto the Gentiles.

These contrasts make it evident that ACTS 28:28 was a definite change from one way of God's dealings with the Jews and Gentiles to another: a change in God's dealings which redirected the course of the testimony from a word that had been sent to Israel, to a word that was sent to the Gentiles. The more thoroughly this change is examined and tested, the more plainly defined and decisive it will be found to be. For example, the testimony of the promises to Israel was accompanied by signs; these healings are seen in operation in the opening verses of ACTS 28, but they ceased after the change in God's dealings that was introduced by verse 28. Almost the last words Paul penned were “Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick” (2 TIMOTHY 4:20).

Upon Israel becoming blinded “lest they . . . should be converted, and I should heal them” the “salvation of God” was “sent unto the Gentiles.” The end of the period of the ACTS was therefore a complete transition; the hope of Israel was deferred, and with this deferment, a new order commenced. The salvation of God being sent to the Gentiles did not exclude the Jews, any more than the word which God sent unto the children of Israel excluded Cornelius; however, history, since that transition to this new order, serves to shew that the majority of believers have been Gentiles.

What did this new order involve? what are God's purposes in the many Gentiles who have believed since salvation was sent unto them? and what are the blessings of the Gentiles now that the promises to Israel are deferred till a future time? It is not within the purpose of the ACTS to reveal these things, and consequently the record is brought to a conclusion. There is, however, a guide given. Paul is said to have remained a prisoner at Rome; whatever was revealed concerning the salvation of God being sent to the Gentiles, and what then became their blessings, will thus be found in the epistles written by Paul during that imprisonment. The opening statement in the first prison epistle, according to the order of the canon of Scripture, relates to blessing.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (EPHESIANS 1:3).

This is the first mention of blessings **in** heavenly places; never before had it been revealed that any of the redeemed should be placed in this highest sphere “far above all” (see Chapter 2). How wondrous it is that this plain statement concerning our present place of blessing, should have been put first, before anything is said concerning the character of the new order of testimony!

Paul’s ministry according to this newly revealed place of blessing and this new order of testimony is outlined in **EPHESIANS 3:7-9**:

“Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship (dispensation, R.V.) of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:”

Twice does Paul emphasize the fact that this ministry was a gift of grace, unmerited favor. So glorious was the revelation given him by the effectual working of His power, that he exclaims “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints.” It is not Paul who is to be exalted, but it is to be recognized that he received the honor of being given this revelation.

The ministry given by grace to Paul was two-fold. First, “To preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” Second, “To make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery” (R.V.). In our last chapter we noticed that the prison epistles were concerned with two related Mysteries — the Mystery of Christ, and the Mystery, this dispensation. These two Mysteries gave to Paul this two-fold ministry.

The Mystery of Christ was to be known among the Gentiles “To preach **unto** the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” During the testimony to Israel there had been many things revealed concerning the Lord Jesus Christ — His person as very God; His office as High Priest after the order of Melchizedek; His right to the throne of His father David. But when the Gentiles were testified to, there was given to be preached unto them further glories of Christ, even the things that pertain to **His fulness** (**EPHESIANS 1:23**).

“To make all men see what is the dispensation of the Mystery.” We have observed that a dispensation is a way of God’s dealing. The destruction of Jerusalem shortly after the announcement that “the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles,” and the age of Israel’s dispersion that has followed, had been

foreseen; but what should be God's administration during this age had been a Mystery. Not until this age had commenced was this Mystery committed to Paul; but when it was committed to him, it became his ministry to enlighten all as to "what is the dispensation of the Mystery."

These verses are followed by the conjunction *hina*, "to the intent that," which introduces a purpose or result of this ministry.

"To the intent that **now** unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (EPHESIANS 3:10-11).

The dispensation of the Mystery had been hid in God, and therefore hid from the principalities and powers, as well as from men. The rejection of Israel might have appeared to these heavenly onlookers as a failure in God's plan; but upon that seeming failure God revealed His hidden plan according to the purpose of the ages which He had purposed in Christ Jesus, and thereby heaven's high ones beheld God's manifold wisdom and grace.

Paul's ministry brought with it suffering and bondage. During ACTS it was "for the hope of the promises made of God unto our fathers" (26:6), "for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain" (28:20); but when he received this two-fold ministry his bonds were used for the purpose of making known the further unfolding of the Mystery of Christ and the revelation of the Mystery, this dispensation.

The Mystery of Christ:

"Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (COLOSSIANS 4:3-4).

The Mystery:

"Praying always And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (EPHESIANS 6:18-20).

Paul's bonds were for the One from whom he received this ministry and for the ones to whom he ministered.

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery;. . . .”
(EPHESIANS 3:1-3)

“The prisoner for you Gentiles”! Let it be supposed that at this moment it came to our knowledge that a fellow-believer was suffering imprisonment for us; what would our attitude be? Should we not hasten to discover the reason for his sufferings on our behalf? If this would be the effect such a present situation would have upon us, should not this statement concerning Paul’s sufferings also arouse us to inquiry, especially when we remember that Paul sealed his testimony with his life?

Paul’s declaration “the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles” was followed by his being a prisoner “for you Gentiles,” and as such he received the Gentile-ward revelation of the dispensation of the Mystery that has been ordained to occupy this present period of Israel’s dispersion, “the dispensation of the grace of God which is given to me to **you-ward**: the Mystery.”

We observed in our last chapter that the purpose of the dispensation of the Mystery is the calling out, and growth of, that company, “the Church which is His Body,” whose place of blessing is “in the heavenly places.” This is a Gentile-ward purpose, for into the One Body Gentiles are being gathered.

“That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” (EPHESIANS 3:6).

During **ACTS** the Gentiles were made partakers of Israel’s covenant promises, but now they are made fellow-heirs of that calling of the One Body which had not been promised. The promise in the above passage of which the Gentiles were partakers, refers to something other than to the character of their calling, as a reference to the occurrences of “promise” in post-Acts writings will serve to show.

“. . . according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 TIMOTHY 1:1; cp. 1 JOHN 2:25 and 1 PETER 1:19-20).

The promise is that of life in Christ Jesus; this has no reference to the promises of blessings made to Abraham. **EPHESIANS 3:6** refers respectively to the character of the Gentile’s calling and the promise of life in Christ.

Calling “That the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the body,
Promise and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (R.V.).

Both the calling and the promise of this dispensation are connected with a time before Abraham and before the purposes of the kingdom (MATTHEW 13:35, 25:34):

Calling

“According as He hath chosen us in Him **before** the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love”: (EPHESIANS 1:4).

Promise

“In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised **before** the world began (age times)” (TITUS 1:2).

The salvation of God sent unto the Gentiles brings life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the dispensation of the Mystery that is towards the Gentiles reveals the nature of their calling — “fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the Body.”

The Church which is His Body is spoken of as a building, but this is not peculiar to this calling. There are other buildings of God, Peter speaks of those to whom he wrote as being a building.

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 PETER 2:5).

This gathering is connected with that heavenly priesthood, an office that is not mentioned in respect to the Church of the One Body, although every calling will indeed render the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

These families occupy various abodes:

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (EPHESIANS 3:14-15, R.V.).

The Church which is His Body is one of these buildings, but it is distinct from all others, in that it is the calling destined for the highest place of blessing.

“In whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (EPHESIANS 2:21-22, R.V.).

A further characteristic of the One Body is that it is composed of Gentiles and Jews, who are fellow-heirs and fellow-members equally together. This unique relationship is dealt with in EPHESIANS 2:11-19. The passage opens with a call to the Gentiles to remember what they were once and concludes with the statement of what they are now no longer.

Gentiles were in time past:

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being **aliens** from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers** from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (2:11-12)

Gentiles are now no longer:

“Now therefore ye are no more **strangers** and **foreigners**, but fellow-citizens with the saints (or, of the holy places) and of the household of God (2:19).

The intervening verses 2:13-18 commence with “But now . . . and are occupied with an explanation of how the previous far-off separate position of the Gentiles, who were the strangers from the covenants of the promise, has now given place to this nearness, even to a fellow-citizenship in the blessings of the holy places.

“**But now** in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (2:13).

The alienation of the Gentile was “in the flesh” and the advantage of the Israelite was likewise “according to the flesh” (ROMANS 9:3-5); but now that the believing Gentile or Jew were no longer viewed as being in the flesh, but in Christ Jesus, the foundation was laid on which the Gentiles and the Jews could be brought together in perfect equality.

The Gentiles who were once far off are now made nigh; they had been viewed as being far off, not because they were sinners, for in that respect they were no different from the Jews, but by reason of their distance from God as compared with

Israel, the people who had been near unto Him. The nearness which the Gentiles can now enjoy is the result of the breaking down of the wall that had divided them from Israel.

“For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances ; . . .” (2:14-15).

The peace, here, must be considered in the light of the enmity, that it has abolished; in this case it is not the sin that estranged us from God as in the ROMAN epistle, but it is the enmity that divided the Gentiles from the Jews, “even the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” This peace is not the result of salvation by itself, but is the outcome of that calling of the One Body into which the saved Gentile or Jew can now be called.

“. . . for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby;” (2:15-16).

During the time of the Acts there was no difference between the Gentiles and the Jews in respect to salvation; but in the matter of the blessings salvation brought to them, there was a difference, for they were Israel’s blessings. This difference produced an enmity, and even when the Gentiles were grafted into Israel’s olive tree of covenant blessings it was for the express purpose of provoking to emulation Israel according to the flesh. But now, with the coming of the dispensation of the Mystery, other blessings have been revealed “in heavenly places” and another calling that is to enter those blessings, the “one new man,” that “One Body.” The believing Gentiles and Jews who upon the same foundation of salvation are called to be members of this newly revealed calling of the One Body have every distinction abolished, peace between them being established.

It is not therefore the foundation of redemption by itself that has rendered all differences between the Gentiles and the Jews to be lost sight of, but it is that foundation of redemption **and** that which is now built upon it, the One Body. Within that building all differences disappear.

The nationality of the Gentile and the Jew was as much lost sight of in the foundational fact of being a new creation “in Christ” during the time of the ACTS as it is now that the dispensation of the Mystery has been revealed:

During Acts:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. . . . There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (GALATIANS 3:26-28).

After Acts 28:28:

“And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him: where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision. Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all”. (COLOSSIANS 3:10-11)

The subject of both these passages is similar, it being the individual standing in Christ. They were the children of God, they had put on the new man, that new nature, life in Christ. This life in Christ, received at the moment of salvation, forbade any national, social, or cultural distinctions. In this respect there is no difference between the position of believers before the revelation of the Mystery and since. The only difference in the foregoing passages is one of emphasis; during ACTS, when the order of the testimony was “to the Jew first,” it was written “there is neither Jew nor Greek,” but after that the salvation of God had been sent unto the Gentiles this order is reversed, so that COLOSSIANS has it “there is neither Greek nor Jew.”

These passages in GALATIANS and COLOSSIANS alike establish the fact that neither Greek nor Jew retained any distinguishing characteristics when they received life in Christ; yet when the subject of blessing is introduced in GALATIANS the distinction of Israel’s blessings is seen to remain, for the verse that follows the quotation above reads:

“And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (GALATIANS 3:29).

Being neither a Jew nor a Greek in Christ did not alter the fact that Israel’s promises were those given to Abraham and that those promises were the blessings to which the believers were then heirs. It was not until the revelation of the calling of the Church which is His Body of this dispensation of the Mystery, that it was known that believing Gentiles and Jews were to be blessed collectively without any distinction.

The absolute equality of the Gentile and Jew is therefore something

subsequent to initial salvation, something that belongs peculiarly to the Church which is His body, the calling now open to those who are saved. This is also illustrated by the subject of the new creation:

Any man in Christ:

“Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation:”
(2 CORINTHIANS 5:17, R.V. margin)

The Gentiles and Jews in the One Body:

“. . . that He might create in Himself of the twain one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body” (EPHESIANS 2:15-16, R.V.).

The former passage refers to that new creation that takes place when any man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ to salvation, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (EPHESIANS 2:10). The latter passage refers, not to the new creation of the individual, but to the creation of a collective company, a new calling, the “new man” or “One Body” that is composed of the twain, believing Gentiles and Jews.

A further illustration is provided by the subject of reconciliation.

The world to God:

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them ;. . . .” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-19).

The Gentiles and the Jews in the One Body:

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

Reconciliation implies a change on the part of one party to another which results in the bringing together of the two. In the former passage it is the reconciliation of the world to God that has been accomplished by Jesus Christ who abolished sin, that had previously separated man from God, so that now trespasses need no longer be imputed. In the latter passage it is the reconciliation of “the both,” Gentiles and Jews, which is accomplished in the “One Body”; that which

had previously separated them from each other, “the enmity even the law of commandments,” having been slain by the cross of Christ.

Since the call of Abraham there had not been such an absolute parity between the standing of the believing Gentiles and Jews as now exists between the members of the Church which is His Body. It should be noticed, however, that this parity, this equality, is found **only** in the oneness of the calling of the One Body, not in other callings. He has “made both **one** . . . that He might create in Himself of the twain **one** new man . . . and might reconcile them both in **one** body . . . for through Him we both have access in **one** Spirit unto the Father” (EPHESIANS 2:14-19, R.V.).

“The riches of the glory of this Mystery among the Gentiles.” These words from the passage we are considering in COLOSSIANS 1 caused us to seek to discover who the Gentiles were, that we might more readily appreciate the reason this Mystery was in a special way revealed for them. The promise to Israel and the covenants of the promise separated the Gentiles from the commonwealth of Israel, so long as the hope of the promise was proclaimed to Israel the Gentiles had to take a secondary place in the order of the testimony. When, however, the state of Israel became such that it was not possible for them at that time to receive the promises, then the promises were postponed and the salvation of God was **sent** to the Gentiles. Upon the sending of salvation to the Gentiles, God revealed an unpromised, hidden, “dispensation of the Mystery,” a way of His dealing towards the Gentiles which was concerned with formation of a newly revealed calling, the Body of Christ, wherein Gentiles and Jews were united in absolute equality and whose blessings are in a sphere never before mentioned as a place wherein the redeemed should be blessed, even in the heavenly places, seated with Christ, far above all.

These features render the unique character of the Church which is His Body to appear unmistakable; its whole contour stands out in bold relief against the contrasting background afforded by all previous hopes.

“. . . His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles (COLOSSIANS 1:26-27),

VI

" **this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**"
(COLOSSIANS 1:27)

THE Lord Jesus Christ has ever been the hope of mankind. Since the promise, at the Fall, of a Coming One who should bruise the serpent's head, there has never been a time when Christ has not been the hope set before. The Old Testament prophets testified beforehand concerning "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 PETER 1:11). All the prophecies relating to the sufferings of the Coming One have been fulfilled; it is now the glory to follow that is the hope.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory:" The preposition *en*, "in," when used with the plural implies "among." It is so translated earlier in this verse "among the Gentiles," hence the marginal reading. "This mystery which is Christ amongst you, the hope of glory." Among those who rejoice in the revelation of the dispensation of the Mystery, Christ is the hope of glory.

The distinctive calling and blessing of the Church which is His Body is accompanied by a distinctive hope.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling" (EPHESIANS 4:4).

Paul prayed that the saints might know "what is the hope of His calling" (EPHESIANS 1:18). May we pray this ourselves. As the Mystery is made known only in the epistles of Paul written after the salvation of God was sent to the Gentiles (ACTS 28:28), so also the hope of the Mystery is only revealed in these epistles. What therefore do these epistles have to say concerning the one hope of our calling?

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (PHILIPPIANS 3:20).

He polis is "the city"; *to politeuma*, is the community, or commonwealth, that inhabits the city. This latter word occurs only in the above verse, where it is rendered "conversation." "For our commonwealth exists in the heavens." That is the place to which we belong as being those who are blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."

"From whence also we look for the Saviour." In the original, the relative

pronoun “whence,” or “which,” is in the singular, agreeing with the singular “commonwealth,” not with the plural “heavens.” The preposition “from” is *ek*, “out from the midst,” not *apo*, “away from.” The sense of this passage is therefore:

“For our commonwealth exists in the heavens, out from the midst of which commonwealth we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ”

To look for the Saviour is the expectation of every calling; but the distinctive privilege of our calling is that we look for Him from the standpoint of the place of our commonwealth, the heavens. This passage does not refer to the Lord’s coming away from heaven, but to those who look for Him to appear in the place where He is now.

The Lord Jesus is seated in the glory at the right hand of God far above all, and God has made us, the members of the Church which is His Body, to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (EPHESIANS 2:6). We are to be where the Lord is now; this makes it evident that no movement of the Lord away from the heavenlies is needed in order that we may enter our inheritance. There is no reference to the Lord’s coming connected with our hope; neither do Paul’s epistles written during this dispensation of the Mystery mention that event.

We look for the Saviour from the midst of our commonwealth which is in the heavenly places; there will therefore be a time when the Lord will be seen by us in that place, and this is our hope. A word is specially used to name this hope: *epiphaneia*, “shining forth,” “appearing,” or “manifestation.”

“Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ” (TITUS 2:13, R.V.).

This word is used once in Paul’s epistles before the revelation of the Mystery — “the manifestation of His coming” (2 THESSALONIANS 2:8, R.V.); but this refers to the shining forth of His coming, which coming, as we have noticed, is not associated with the hope of the Mystery. It is the appearing of His Glory that is the blessed hope for which we are to look. That glory is not confined to the Lord’s coming, but will be seen first where the Lord is now by those who are members of the Church which is His Body.

The shining forth or appearing commences in the heavenly places, where we look to see the Lord, and then extends to His coming into the spheres of the heavens and earth. This appearing is the hope of our calling ; it is that event which marks the “until,” when our responsibilities cease and we receive, if we are found

faithful, a crown of righteousness.

“I give thee charge . . . that thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 TIMOTHY 6:13-14).

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” (2 TIMOTHY 4:1).

“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” (2 TIMOTHY 4:8).

The cognate verb to the noun *epiphaneia* is *phaneroo*, to shine forth and so be seen, to appear or be manifested. It is the opposite to being hid, as can be seen from its use in COLOSSIANS 1:26:

“Even the mystery which hath been **hid** from ages and from generations, but now is **made manifest** to His saints:”

This word is used of our hope, also in contrast to “hid”:

“For ye died, and your life is **hid** with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall **be manifested**, then shall ye also with Him **be manifested** in glory”.
(COLOSSIANS 3:3-4, R.V.)

It should be noticed that this passage does not say, “When Christ, Who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye see Him.” But it says, “When Christ, Who is our life, shall be manifested, then **shall ye also with Him** be manifested in glory.” Thus not only implying an expectation for the Lord’s manifestation, but something more, even a participation with Christ in His being manifested. The Church which is His Body first looks for the Saviour in the midst of its commonwealth in the heavens and then, when Christ shall be manifested, this company will be manifested with Him, in glory. The references to the Lord being manifested that occur in writings other than the later epistles of Paul, do not speak of being manifested with Him, but of things that shall happen at His manifestation. It is the Lord’s manifestation at His coming that is there the subject.

“And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 JOHN 2:28).

The believers whose hope it is to wait for the Lord’s coming will, at His manifestation at His coming, “see Him as He is,” “be like Him” (1 JOHN 3:2), and

“receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 PETER 5:4).

The Church which is His Body is identified with Christ in three aspects of His exaltation that are not spoken of in respect to any other calling.

Raised — “and raised us up **with** Him,

Seated — and made us sit **with** Him in the heavenly places” (EPHESIANS 2:6, R.V.).

Manifested — “then shall ye also **with** Him be manifested in glory”.
(COLOSSIANS 3:4, R.V.)

Those of other callings are said to have died, been buried, and made alive with Christ, but only the Church which is His Body is said to have the added privilege of being raised and seated with Him. As the believer is identified with Christ so also is his hope, we who are raised and seated with Him shall also be manifested with Him. In contrast to this, those who are not said to be raised and seated have their hope centered in the coming of the Lord from heaven into the place of their blessing. Those who meet the Lord in the air do not afterwards ascend with Him to the far above all, but in the place where they meet Him there will their portion be.

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17).

Many things can be gathered by means of observing contrasts, or, to use the words of PHILIPPIANS 1:10, “That ye may try things that differ” (margin). Having noticed that the distinctive hope of the Church which is His Body is the manifestation in glory, it is helpful to look, by way of contrast, at the hope of other callings, even the coming of the Lord from heaven.

In the later epistles of Paul, wherein the hope of the Church which is His Body is revealed, there are no references to the Lord’s coming; but elsewhere in the New Testament His coming in one or another of its aspects is the hope that is in view. The principal words used in connection with the Lord’s coming are *erchomai*, the usual word “come”; *parousia*, advent or the presence of a person at their coming (the Revised Version renders it “presence,” either in the text or margin in every occurrence); *apokalupsis*, unveiling or revelation (when used of a person it denotes his being seen). The last two words, being nouns, specifically name that event; these, therefore, require attention in order to notice their usage and the things that

are associated with them.

The first occurrence of *parousia* is in a question put to the Lord by the disciples when on the Mount of Olives. The Lord had spoken in strong terms of the unrepentant condition of that generation of Israel among whom He testified; He had shown that at that time of His first advent Israel “would not” that He should gather them; they were therefore to be left with their temple desolate until the day when they exclaim “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord”!

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!”.
(MATTHEW 23:37-39)

These were the last words of the Lord to be spoken in the temple; immediately after He went out, and as He did so He said of the temple “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” This caused the disciples to ask the question in which they used the word *parousia*.

“And as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy presence? and of the consummation of the age?” (MATTHEW 24:3, R.V. marg.).

The disciples brought together the things of which the Lord had been speaking and thereby associated the Lord’s coming with the end or consummation of the age that precedes the time of Israel’s blessing. Their question concerned the time and the sign of that coming, and this the Lord answered in the discourse that occupies the remainder of MATTHEW 24.

This twenty-fourth chapter of MATTHEW provides a guide to the understanding of the other occurrences of *parousia*. The age when the Lord’s *parousia* is to be expected is one when the gospel of the kingdom is preached (verse 14), in circumstances commencing with troubles (verses 5-6), which deepen until there shall be great tribulation (verse 21). Then:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days . . . shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (MATTHEW 24:29-30).

The purpose of the Lord's coming will be to destroy that wicked one who is to arise at the end of that age:

“And then that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming”.
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:8)

And to gather His elect:

“. . . the Son of Man coming . . . And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the Other” (MATTHEW 24:30-31).

“. . . the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him”.
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:1)

It should be noted that the Lord's coming will not be secret but “in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” — “His angels with a great sound of a trumpet.” This hope in all its aspects is always associated with these demonstrations as the following references in the epistles serve to shew.

The gathering of the Lord's elect will also be accompanied by a resurrection:

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. . . . But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming” (1 CORINTHIANS 15:20-23).

This gathering and resurrection at the sound of the trumpet is fully described in 1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-18:

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-18).

The prospect of the reunion of the living and the raised believers in the presence of the Lord is that which was the comfort of those who lost loved ones who they had longed should remain alive unto the coming of the Lord, for that is

the desire expressed in connection with this hope.

“And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly: and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:23, R.V.).

“. . . Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?” (1 THESSALONIANS 2:19).

The knowledge and consciousness that “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” is not a “cunningly devised fable” (2 PETER 1:16), even though scoffers ask “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 PETER 3:4), is that which bids “Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord . . . for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (JAMES 5:7-8). This hope shall be their strength and stay under conditions that resemble the days preceding the flood, for “so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be” (MATTHEW 24:27, 37, 39).

“To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints”. (“Holy ones” — i.e. angels; cp. DEUTERONOMY 33:2, ZECHARIAH 14:4-5) (1 THESSALONIANS 3:13).

“And now, little children, abide in Him; that when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 JOHN 2:28).

The usage of *apokalupsis*, like *parousia*, connects this hope with things that are to be **brought** to the believers by the Lord’s coming from heaven.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ”. (1 PETER 1:13)

The concluding words of this verse are the Divine title to the last book of Scripture, “The revelation of Jesus Christ” (chapter 1:1); the book that, like MATTHEW 24, is a forecast of the events that will be prefatory to the Lord’s appearing. For this *apokalupsis* believers waited:

“So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 CORINTHIANS 1:7, marg.).

It is that event which will bring deliverance to believers under trial, for trial is ever connected with the time when the Lord’s coming is imminent.

“That the trial of your faith, might be found unto praise and honour and glory **at** the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 PETER 1:7).

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, **when** His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy”.
(1 PETER 4:12-13)

While the *apokalupsis* of the Lord will bring deliverance to the saints, yet at the same time it will bring vengeance to such as have not obeyed the gospel:

“And you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”.
(2 THESSALONIANS 1:7-8)

The foregoing references include **all** the occurrences of *parousia* and *apokalupsis* that relate to the Lord’s coming. It should be noted that **none** of these occur in Paul’s later epistles. While there are different stages in His coming, some will meet Him in the air, and others will see Him stand once more on the Mount of Olives, yet all these stages are but parts of that one coming and are alike associated with angels, with clouds, with the voice of the trumpet, and with a manifestation of power and glory as He shines forth in mercy and in judgment. It can be seen from these references that the election who have this hope are those whose blessings are other than in the heavenly places, for they are to meet the One who has left that sphere.

According to God’s dispensation, way of dealing, so is the hope. The dispensation of the Mystery concerns the blessings in heavenly places, and so the hope is centered in Christ where He is seated in that station far above all. The New Covenant concerns the promises to Abraham; the hope connected therewith is therefore centered in Christ in the station of those promises, even in His coming away from the heavenlies into the realm of Israel’s heavenly and earthly blessings.

The hope of a dispensation is the realization of whatever may be its special purpose. The purpose of the dispensation of the Mystery is the calling out of the Church which is His Body; thus the hope of the Mystery is the completion of this calling, the perfect man, ready for the manifestation in glory. The purpose of the New Covenant is the blessing of Israel and of the Gentiles who partake with them in their blessings. Israel will never receive any of their blessings, earthly or heavenly, without the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ; thus the hope of the New Covenant is the coming of the Lord into the realm of Israel’s blessings. The hope

of the Mystery is expressed in the words “till we all come” and the hope of the New Covenant in the words “till He come.”

The Mystery — “. . . for the edifying of the body of Christ: **Till we all come** in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (EPHESIANS 4:12-13).

The New Covenant — “. . . There shall **come** out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is My **covenant** unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (ROMANS 11:26-27).

“. . . the new covenant in My blood; . . . the Lord’s death **till He come**”.
(1 CORINTHIANS 9:25-26, R.V.).

The dispensation of God that obtains at any time decides what is the hope that is to be expected. In this time in which we live God is dealing with His saints according to the dispensation of the Mystery, the hope of to-day is therefore the hope of the Mystery, the manifestation in glory. In times when the New Covenant is in the forefront of God’s purposes, then the hope of the New Covenant, the Lord’s coming, is said to be at hand.

In our last chapter we observed that ACTS is the record of a period during which the New Covenant was being proclaimed (2 CORINTHIANS 3:6); this being so, the hope of the Lord’s coming was said to be imminent. The promises belonging to Israel were during that time offered them on the conditions of the New Covenant — namely, repentance and the reception of Jesus as their Messiah. The coming of the Lord, Who should bring to them their promises, was also conditional on their repentance. Peter sets this forth in his address to the people of Israel in **ACTS 3**:

“Repent ye therefore, and **turn again**, that your sins may be blotted out, . . . that He may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus”.
(ACTS 3:19-21, R.V.)

On this condition Israel’s turning again would have brought about the Lord’s return, so long as this offer remained open the Lord’s coming remained impendent. The last chapter of ACTS, however, marks the point when His coming ceased to be probable on this condition, for Israel had by that time become so blinded that they were unable to “turn again.”

“Go thou unto this people, and say . . . their eyes they have closed; Lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And should **turn again**, And I should heal them”.
(ACTS 28:26-27, R.V.).

From the commencement of the offer to Israel, “**turn again** . . . that He may send the Christ,” to the conclusion of that offer, when it had to be said “their eyes they have closed . . . lest haply they . . . should **turn again**,” there existed a period of New Covenant ministry when the Lord’s coming was probable.

The time when the Lord’s coming is expected is connected with the nearness of the day of the Lord (1 THESSALONIANS 5:2, 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-3, R.V.). The expectation for the Lord to come during ACTS was therefore linked with happenings that betokened that day. Peter, in his opening address at Pentecost, stated that the tongues, etc., were a fulfillment of those things which Joel had said would occur before the day of the Lord should come.

“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days . . . before that great and notable day of the Lord come”.
(ACTS 2:16-20)

That day did not come; but, as Peter said, “the day of the Lord will come.” The book of REVELATION is concerned with a description of that day — “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day . . .” (1:10). Its title is, as we have noticed, “The *Apokalupsis* of Jesus Christ.” In the time foreseen in this book the Lord’s coming will be at hand with certainty. Instead of a call to repent **that** He may send the Christ, as in ACTS, the REVELATION has the call to repent **because** Christ is surely coming. In that day it will not be the probability or possibility of the Lord’s coming that shall be the subject of the gospel, but rather the fact that He is surely coming quickly.

The hope of the New Covenant, the Lord’s coming, was therefore at hand, conditionally, up till the time of the last chapter of ACTS, and it will be at hand certainly in a future time. Between these two periods there intervenes the present dispensation of the Mystery, during which we are to look for that one hope of our calling, even the manifestation in glory: the distinctive hope of the calling of the Church which is His Body.

The failure of Israel to fulfill the condition of the Lord’s coming during ACTS, by not turning again, was by no means an unexpected or unforeseen hitch in God’s purposes with them; for, as we noticed in our last chapter, the present period of

Israel's dispersion and Jerusalem's desolation was revealed in the Old Testament. The purposes of God that occupy this period were "before the foundation (or overthrow) of the world." The Mystery had not been promised, but it was nevertheless part of God's before-ordained purpose of the ages in Christ Jesus. This dispensation of the Mystery must first fulfill its purpose in the completion of the Church which is His Body, before the New Covenant becomes once more in the forefront of God's dealings.

Why was the offer of the Lord's coming on the condition "turn again" ever given to Israel, seeing that it was revealed in the Old Testament that they should be scattered, and seeing that it was God's hidden purpose to bring forth the dispensation of the Mystery? It must be borne in mind when considering such questions that Israel are a people who have been dealt with provisionally and typically. At one time they were dealt with under the law; not that it was expected that they could thereby acquire righteousness, for in the purposes of God the Lord Jesus was already man's provided Redeemer, but rather that the law might serve to demonstrate the fact that none can receive righteousness save through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. On the same principle, Israel during ACTS had the opportunity of turning to the Lord, and the promise was that if they did so He would come; not that it was expected that they would turn, for the Mystery that was to be revealed had been purposed before, but rather that Israel will never be able to claim that they, through their turning again, were instrumental in bringing back the Lord of glory. These provisional dealings of God with Israel are for the instruction of mankind; none can by good works be made righteous before God, neither will mankind bring back the Lord from heaven, for "when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (LUKE 18:8). Israel still remain among the nations as a typical people; typical now of the consequences of rejecting the Lord Jesus.

The epistles written during ACTS show that the believers living at that time of New Covenant ministry were exhorted to be in a state of keen expectation for the hope of the Lord's immediate coming:

" . . . waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 CORINTHIANS 1:7).

" . . . We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, . . . at the last trump:".
(1 CORINTHIANS 15:51-52)

" . . . we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord"
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:15)

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord, . . . for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (JAMES 5:7-8).

The nearness of their hope is also expressed in other ways:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand: . . .” (ROMANS 13:12).

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly . . .”
(ROMANS 16:20)

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short (1 CORINTHIANS 7:29).

“. . . as ye see the day approaching” (HEBREWS 10:25).

“For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry”
(HEBREWS 10:37).

In MATTHEW 24 the coming of the Lord is associated with the consummation of the age. The time of the ACTS, during which there was this probability of the Lord’s immediate return, was also said to be “the last time”; the believers were reminded that they were living in the “ends of the ages.”

“. . . they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come” (1 Corinthians 10:11, R.V.).

. . . but now once at the consummation of the ages hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (HEBREWS 9:26, R.V. marg.).

. . . for you. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 PETER 1:4-5).

“Who . . . was manifest in these last times for you,” (1 PETER 1:20).

” Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time”.
(1 JOHN 2:18)

The foregoing passages would present an inexplicable difficulty if they were considered without regard to the special condition that obtained under the New Covenant administration during ACTS. If that is not regarded, how can such statements as “the coming of the Lord draweth nigh,” “the time is short,” “it is the last time,” etc., be reconciled with the fact that they were written some eighteen hundred years ago, and still the Lord has not come, neither has the sound of the trumpet been heard? Some have suggested that because a thousand years is as a day with God, no time to Him is distant. This is of course true; but in the Scriptures

God speaks to man, and in doing so He speaks in terms compatible with our limitations, otherwise His words to us would not be understandable; when an event is said to be near, it is near as we understand the term. To endeavor to explain these passages on this suggestion of a thousand years being as a day serves only to divest them of all significance, for if it was for this reason alone that the coming of the Lord could have been said to be at hand nearly two millenniums ago, then it might be asserted that no reference to a hope being near is of any significance.

It is sometimes suggested that the church of those days was unprepared, and therefore the Lord did not come; but when was the preparedness of the church ever said to be a condition for His coming? They were enjoined to watch and wait, but never was it promised that by so doing they might bring about His coming. The sole condition was Israel's turning again, and as Israel did not turn again the Lord's coming on that condition became impossible. If it is recognized that these expressions of expectation were made during the time when Israel were given the opportunity to turn again, then their significance becomes evident. The dispensation of the Mystery with its related hope of the manifestation in glory was revealed after that the Lord's coming on that condition was deferred; the reason for the absence of any expressions of an expectation of the Lord's coming in the epistles of the Mystery is therefore evident.

The change of God's administration, and consequent change of hope, necessitated a readjustment in the thoughts and lives of the believers in those days; this is seen in several ways.

The believers living in those early days knew of one outstanding event that was to precede the Lord's coming — the death of Peter. In the last chapter of the Gospel of JOHN the Lord signified to Peter by what death he should glorify God (verses 18-19). Peter, on hearing this, inquired concerning John. "Jesus said unto him. If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me" (verse 22). One thing was certain — Peter must die, whether or not John should remain unto the Lord's coming. At the time when Peter wrote his second epistle this event was at hand.

"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me" (2 PETER 1:14).

When Peter wrote this epistle did he give them to expect that the Lord would come immediately after his decease? No, he reassured them concerning the certainty of the Lord's coming, but at the same time he spoke of the long-suffering

of God in connection with its deferment. For the explanation of this long-suffering he referred them to the epistles of Paul (2 PETER 3:15-16). Thus the one who was used to proclaim to Israel the conditional promise of the Lord's coming in ACTS 3 was used at the close of his days to direct to the epistles of Paul. The believers who had known the New Covenant ministry and its hope were therefore guided to the Scriptures that reveal the present purpose of God, the administration of the Mystery and its associated hope, which purpose occupies this period of the long-suffering of God and which will be completed before the hope of the New Covenant is again imminent.

In the case of Paul himself, we find that during the time of ACTS he included himself among those who were hoping to be alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord.

“. . . we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air: . . .”
(1 THESSALONIANS 4:15-17)

When Paul wrote his last epistle he no longer entertained this hope:

“For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand”.
(2 TIMOTHY 4:6)

Paul's manner in writing to the believers concerning their hope in his earlier epistles is distinctly different from his manner in his later epistles; this shows that a change in the hope had taken place. At the time of writing to the THESSALONIANS, Paul could refer to their hope of the Lord's coming as one of the things they knew perfectly well although as a company they had but recently come to the faith. But at the time when Paul wrote the later epistle to the Ephesian believers the hope was no longer something that was generally known, but something he prayed earnestly that they might understand. The Ephesians as a company were well acquainted with the things concerning the Lord's coming, for Paul himself had taught them “all the counsel of God” as it was revealed at the time of ACTS; that teaching must certainly have included the things that were known so well by the Thessalonians. This prayer for the Ephesians makes it evident that a further hope had been revealed for them to know, even the one hope of the calling of the One Body.

“Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling” (EPHESIANS 1:16-18).

Paul's exhortations to the believers regarding their walk in relation to their hope are different in his earlier epistles from what they are in his later. In 1 CORINTHIANS 7 Paul suggests that, in the light of the fact that the time was short, it was as well that the unmarried should remain unmarried, and that the married should be as though they were not married.

“But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none” (1 CORINTHIANS 7:29).

In his later epistle to Timothy, Paul's reference to this subject is different.

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife. . . .” (1 TIMOTHY 3:2).

“I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children,. . . .”
(1 TIMOTHY 5:14)

It is not that Paul's personal views had been modified by the time he wrote this later epistle; we speak of the writings of Paul; but we must ever keep in mind that they are not his ideas but the inspired words of God. It was not a change in Paul's convictions, but a change in God's administration and a resultant change in the hope set before the believers, that necessitated this altered injunction.

How essential it is that we should give heed to this Mystery which God would now make known to His saints, so that we may know what is the hope of our calling. Knowing this, we shall be enabled to walk and to witness accordingly, ever reminding ourselves that our hope is a present hope, so that “we should live Looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (TITUS 2:12-13).

“. . . . to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (COLOSSIANS 1:26-27).

VII

**“ . . . the dispensation of God which is given to me for you
to fulfil the Word of God; Even the mystery . . . ”**
(COLOSSIANS 1:25-26)

“THE dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God.” That Paul should thus specify that this particular revelation of the dispensation of the Mystery was “**given to me for you**” shews that it was necessary that it should be so distinguished. Had all the Word of God been given for us in the same sense as this Mystery was given such a distinction would be unnecessary; but as other parts of the Word were given for other readers than ourselves it can be seen that it was essential that this part given for us should be definitely addressed to us.

All the Word of God is given for our instruction in righteousness, and is necessary that the man of God may be perfect (2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17); but, while it is all for our learning, it was not, in the first instance, all given for us. This is clearly evident in the case of the law. The law was not given for those who knew the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour, for at that time He had not come, neither was it given for the Gentiles, but it was given for Israel.

“Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the giving of the law”
(ROMANS 9:4)

“. . . . the Gentiles, which have not the law,” (ROMANS 2:14).

The same inspired law was therefore regarded from a different standpoint by the Jews compared with what it was by the Gentiles. This is noticeable in the comparative references to the law in MATTHEW and MARK. Matthew’s Gospel presents the gospel of the kingdom to the Jews; Mark’s Gospel presents the same gospel to the Gentiles. This gave rise to a difference in the manner of their reference to the law.

MATTHEW 15:6: “. . . . Thus have ye made the **commandment of God** of none effect by your tradition.”

MARK 7:13: “Making the **word of God** of none effect through your tradition”

Matthew in addressing the Jews, to whom pertained the law, referred to it as what it was to them — verily “the commandment of God”; but Mark, having in prospect the wider testimony to the Gentiles who were without the law, referred to

it as what it was in itself — “the Word of God.”

MATTHEW 15:4: “For God commanded,”

MARK 7:10: “For Moses said”

MATTHEW 22:31: “. . . . have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God,?”

MARK 12:26: “. . . . have ye not read in the book of Moses?”

The Gentiles, reading that part of the Word of God written by Moses, would read in the book of MOSES that which he had been inspired to say, and they would be instructed accordingly; but the Jews, reading the same portion, would read not only what Moses said but what God had commanded them; the book of MOSES would be to them “that which was spoken **unto you** by God.”

This essential difference between the law as part of the Word of God in general, and the law as that part of the Word of God which, in particular to those under the law, was “that which was spoken **unto you** by God,” serves to illustrate the importance of Paul’s word to us — “given to me **for you**.”

All the Scriptures are the Word of God and are of equal authority, irrespective of the writer by whom they were given or those for whom they were given; it is therefore important to give heed to all the Scripture without esteeming any part above another. There is, however, a difference between the Scriptures in the way in which they concern us directly; all the Word of God was spoken by God, but all cannot be said to be “that which was spoken **unto you** by God.” That particular revelation was made to us through Paul, and is “the dispensation of God which is **given to me for you**, even the Mystery:” This is that truth which God would now make known to His saints.

The dispensation of the Mystery has other important distinctions besides this of being singled out as that part of the Scriptures which is spoken unto us by God. It was a revelation that was given only through Paul; the time of its revelation was after Israel had failed to turn again” as recorded in ACTS 28; and it was that revelation which, in the purpose of God, was given to complete the Word of God.

The word translated “to fulfil” in “the dispensation of God which is given to me for you to fulfil the word of God” is elsewhere rendered in COLOSSIANS as “complete”; “ye are complete in Him” (2:10); “complete in all the will of God” (4:12). The Mystery could not “fulfil” any earlier writings, for it was not known until revealed to Paul; it did, however, come to “fill full,” and so “complete,” the

Word of God in that it made known the highest glories of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The epistles of Paul written after ACTS 28:28 have therefore the twofold distinction of being that part of the Word of God given for us, and that part of the Word of God given to render it complete. For this reason they are of especial importance that we may apprehend what God would make known to us and recognize that which has made His revelation complete.

The epistles of Paul which, without doubt, were written after ACTS 28, are those written from prison: EPHESIANS 3:1, 4:1, 6:19-20; PHILIPPIANS 1:7, 13, 14, 16; COLOSSIANS 4:3, 10, 18; 2 TIMOTHY 1:8, 11:9; and PHILEMON 1, 9, 10, 13, 23. Within these epistles alone is the dispensation of the Mystery revealed. Two other epistles were most probably written after ACTS 28 — 1 TIMOTHY and TITUS; these do not claim to reveal the Mystery, for that is contained only in the prison epistles, whose late date is a certainty. They may, however, reveal things relative to the Mystery.

1 TIMOTHY was written at a time when Paul was at liberty (3:14, 4:13). He had requested Timothy to abide at Ephesus while he went into Macedonia (1:3). The ACTS leave no hint that Paul went into Macedonia at a time when Timothy was left with an established church at Ephesus; but by piecing together the items of history scattered in the prison epistles it is possible that this did happen after Paul's imprisonment of ACTS 28:30. Paul expressed the hope in PHILIPPIANS 1:27, 2:24, and PHILEMON 22 that he might be set at liberty; if, as we might expect, this hope was realized, then he would have been released at the close of the two years imprisonment of ACTS 28:30. Timothy was sent from Paul before he was certain that he would be released (PHILIPPIANS 2:19). Thus when the time came that Paul was free he may have made the journey mentioned in 2 TIMOTHY, during which he could have visited Macedonia and from there have written the first epistle to Timothy. Paul was later imprisoned once more, this time without hope of release; while awaiting the time of his departure he wrote the last of all his epistles — 2 TIMOTHY.

TITUS also appears to have been written during Paul's release after ACTS 28:30. Paul mentions that he had left Titus at Crete (1:5). This Paul may have done at his first recorded visit to Crete in ACTS 27:7-13, when he was a prisoner shortly to arrive at Rome; if so TITUS must have been written at the expiration of the two years imprisonment of ACTS 28, for Paul was then at liberty (3:12). If Paul did not leave Titus at Crete on that occasion, he must have visited the island later, which would have been during his release; in any case the probable placing of TITUS as a post-Acts epistle is unaffected.

Paul's epistles that were written when he had received the dispensation of the Mystery to complete the Word of God were therefore the five prison epistles, and evidently the two pastoral epistles — 1 TIMOTHY and TITUS — seven in all. Of these, only EPHESIANS and COLOSSIANS refer to the dispensation of the Mystery; PHILIPPIANS and 2 TIMOTHY deal with the prize and the crown open to those of this calling, things resultant from the dispensation of the Mystery. PHILEMON records the beautiful incident of the runaway slave Onesimus being restored to his master, "Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved": a little picture of the dispensation of the Mystery, wherein the alien and stranger to the covenants of promise is not only restored, but receives much more in Christ.

The first epistle to Timothy and Titus were written that they might know how to conduct themselves and the gatherings of believers committed to their care. If ever two knew how these things were done during the dispensation that obtained in ACTS it was Timothy and Titus; for as the companions of Paul they had witnessed his pastoral rule among the churches. The CORINTHIAN epistles shew what these things were. With the revelation of the Mystery, however, some of these things ceased or were modified; Paul therefore wrote to Timothy and Titus that they might know how to act. These epistles are in several respects a contrast to the things Timothy and Titus had known during ACTS. No reference is made to the ordering of spiritual gifts, nor of modification in family life in view of the shortness of the time; but instead a suggestion as to rules for health in the case of Timothy which betokens the cessation of the gift of healing, and the establishment within the church of faithful men and women who should be examples in time to come.

Of Paul's seven post-Acts epistles it is EPHESIANS and COLOSSIANS that deal directly with the unfolding of the dispensation of the Mystery. Both epistles are closely related, having many parallel passages; each has, however, its own theme or manner of approach to this truth. Paul requested prayer in EPHESIANS that he might "make known the mystery of the gospel" (6:19), in COLOSSIANS that he might "speak the mystery of Christ," (4:3). These requests indicate the relative themes of the two epistles. EPHESIANS reveals the calling of the One Body in the aspect of its place within "the purpose of the ages which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (3:11, R.V. margin), and of its blessings in heavenly places; COLOSSIANS reveals this calling in the aspect of it being an integral part of the preeminence of Christ.

EPHESIANS has special reference to the place, within time, of the dispensation of the Mystery: "before the foundation of the world (1:4). It was purposed that there should be some chosen and blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (1:3). Although purposed before, it was hidden until revealed to Paul:

“Unto me to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God who created all things” (3:8-10, R.V.).

In that the dispensation of the Mystery is revealed in its relation to time, the present position of believers under it is set in contrast with their condition in time past. We who “in time past were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (2:1-3) have now not only been quickened together with Christ, but God “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ” (2:4-6). Those who were “in time past Gentiles in the flesh,” who” at that time were strangers” (2:11-12), are “no more strangers” (2:19), both Jews and Gentiles having now been reconciled together in One Body (2:13-18). All these things are “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (3:10). The purpose that obtains at this present time is the completion of the One Body: “Till we all come unto a perfect man” (4:13). Till then we are sealed by the Holy Spirit of God (1:13-14, 4:30).

COLOSSIANS seeks that we “may know the mystery of God — Christ” (2:2, R.V.). It is from the aspect of Who Christ is that the calling of the One body is approached. What Christ is to creation, He is to the Body the Church.

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the church: Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell”. (1:15-19)

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, Which is the Head of all principality and power” (2:9-10).

In EPHESIANS, the revelation of the calling of the One Body is accompanied by the exhortation “to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called” (4:1, R.V.); in COLOSSIANS, the revelation of Christ is accompanied by the exhortation “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk ye in Him” (2:6). We who have received Him as Head are warned concerning things that relate to “not holding the Head” (2:19), “but the body is of Christ” (2:17). In EPHESIANS, the increase is of “the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (2:21). “From Whom the whole body maketh increase of the body

unto the edifying of itself in love” (4:16). In COLOSSIANS, the increase is “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord . . . increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:10); “holding the Head, from which all the body . . . increaseth with the increase of God” (2:19).

EPHESIANS and COLOSSIANS therefore pursue their individual though related themes and together reveal the dispensation of the Mystery. This truth must be received in all its aspects to be fruitful; the question of the time and place of these blessings must lead to growing through holding Christ as the Head and learning of Him. It is not difficult to apprehend the plainly stated fact that this Mystery was revealed to Paul after what took place in ACTS 28, and that it concerns blessings far above all; the mere mental recognition of these things is not, however, enough, for that by itself may become a hard and sterile dogma. Something else is required that it may bring forth fruit to God’s glory, and that is that the very purpose of this truth shall be fulfilled in us, even that we may “grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.”

The seven later epistles of Paul written after ACTS 28 are therefore the only Scriptures that contain the revelation of the Mystery, given for us to complete the Word of God; this, however, does not imply that they are the only Scriptures given for us, or that they were the last Scriptures written. There are other Scriptures of the Word of God which concern us directly, and in all probability there were other Scriptures written after the close of the history of ACTS. It is in the one particular of being the only Scriptures that contain the revelation of the Mystery that the later epistles of Paul stand alone; there are other things given of God for us besides the Mystery, things that are common to other Scriptures as well as the later epistles of Paul.

The Gospel of John is thought to be the last writing of Scripture; in the opening chapter it is stated definitely that the world that was made by the Lord had not known Him, and Israel His peculiar people had not received Him. John’s gospel does not prove this but rather accepts it, that it may pursue its special purpose, the revelation of the Lord to all who believe irrespective of nationality (1:10-12).

In revealing the Lord Jesus Christ the Gospel of John makes known Who and What He is in Himself — the Son of God; the sent One of the Father; it does not enlarge upon, as do the other Gospels, what the Lord was in His capacity of being a Minister to Israel. All the miracles, or more strictly signs, of John bare testimony to the Lord Himself, and are designed to bring that belief in Him as the Son of God

that gives life through His name (20:30-31): none of those miracles are included that have reference to God's special purpose with the Jews or with the Gentiles. It is the all-important subject of all time, the Lord Himself, that is the subject of John, not those specific matters that pertain to God's distinctive dispensational dealings with His own.

John's Gospel proclaims to all that to know and acknowledge the Lord as the Son of God is to receive life in Him, it is to such as know Christ to be their life, the saints, that God would make known the Mystery. John further proclaims to those who know the Lord, that the purpose of their life in Him is that they may go on to get to know Him and through Him to get to know the Father: "If ye had known Me, ye should have known my Father also: . . . he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (14:7-9). It is to such as seek to know Him that the Mystery is revealed; for through the Mystery is shown the full glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel of John is therefore relevant in a twofold sense to the present dispensation of the Mystery: it reveals the terms of the Gospel of this day and thereby prepares the saints to whom the Mystery may be known, and it reveals the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and is thereby relative to the fuller revelation of Him committed to Paul when he received the Mystery. In this latter respect it is significant to notice the affinity between the Gospel of JOHN and COLOSSIANS.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES was published after the close of Paul's two years imprisonment, with which the record concludes (28:30), and therefore after Paul had received the revelation of the Mystery. Luke's two treatises, his GOSPEL and the ACTS, cover the history of the entire period of the proclamation of the kingdom to Israel, and together they provide the historical background essential to the understanding of the Mystery that was revealed immediately after that proclamation was withdrawn. This historical background is especially necessary in understanding the Mystery as it is made known in EPHESIANS, for it makes manifest the importance of that word "**now.**" Luke's Gospel presents the Lord as The Man and provides the basis on which much of the doctrine committed to Paul is founded; moreover, the Gentile aspect from which Luke wrote, fits his writings to be the companions of the writings of Paul, whose ministry to the Gentiles reached its climax when it was given him to make known "the riches of the glory of this Mystery among the Gentiles;".

The earlier epistles of Paul reveal the doctrine of our salvation; what it means to be identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection; this doctrine is the basis on which the subsequent revelation of the Mystery is founded. His later epistles summarize in brief the doctrine expounded at length in ROMANS 1-8 (see

EPHESIANS 2:8-10), that they may go on to unfold the identification with Christ revealed in the Mystery, even that we are now reckoned to have been raised and seated with Him and have the prospect of being manifested with Him in glory.

It can therefore be seen that not only were the later epistles of Paul given of God for us, but other Scriptures also. The later epistles of Paul alone contain the Mystery, but the Gospel of JOHN, the writings of Luke, his GOSPEL and the ACTS, and the doctrinal teaching of Paul's earlier epistles, are all subsidiary to the revelation of the Mystery and are directly relevant to ourselves.

In this consideration of those Scriptures which while not themselves revealing the Mystery, are nevertheless subsidiary to it, we have mentioned the doctrinal teaching relative to salvation contained in Paul's earlier epistles, but we have not mentioned his earlier epistles as a whole. There is a special necessity that we should observe this difference, for while the doctrine as to the foundational truth of salvation is the same in Paul's earlier and later epistles, yet the hope that is founded on that one foundation is different. In Paul's earlier epistles it is the hope that obtained at the time when they were written, the hope of the New Covenant; but in his later epistles it is the hope of the Mystery committed to him after the hope of the New Covenant was deferred. The difference to be observed between Paul's epistles is therefore not in their doctrinal teaching, but in their dispensational teaching. The doctrinal teaching concerning salvation is the same in them all; but the dispensational teaching of his earlier epistles concerns the New Covenant, while that of his later epistles concerns the Mystery.

Paul's earlier epistles are seven in number, if HEBREWS is included: ROMANS, 1 and 2, CORINTHIANS, GALATIANS, 1 and 2, THESSALONIANS. Each contains historical references which shew that they were, without doubt, written during the time of Paul's missionary journeys recorded in ACTS; that is, before he became a prisoner to receive and make known the Mystery. The time of writing HEBREWS is difficult to infer, but in the case of this epistle its address — to the Hebrews — is a sufficient guide for the present purpose; and shews that it concerns a dispensation where the Jew still retains his covenant privileges and is not therefore concerned with the Mystery, where the distinction of Jew and Gentile is no longer retained within the calling of the One Body. These seven earlier epistles of Paul all concern God's dispensational dealings under the New Covenant; a glance at each will make this fact apparent.

ROMANS Chapters 1-8 set forth the doctrinal teaching of salvation; our identification with Christ in His death, burial, resurrection and life. Chapters 9-11

concern the dispensational teaching built on the foundation of the doctrinal teaching. This dispensational teaching has reference to the New Covenant that will be made with Israel and its hope of the Lord's return.

“And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written. There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (11:26-27).

The dominant theme of these dispensational chapters is the partial blindness of Israel and the inclusion of the believing Gentiles with the elect remnant of Israel, that they might with them partake of Israel's blessings (see 11:13-24). The remaining chapters (12-16) deal with practical exhortation and instruction; in some points these are colored by the dispensational teaching — as, for example, in the matter of the contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem. The Gentiles had been made partakers of Israel's spiritual things, and so it pleased the Gentiles to make the needy Jewish believers to be partakers of their temporal things (see 15:25-27).

1 and 2 CORINTHIANS. In these epistles Paul states that he with others had been made “able ministers of the New Covenant” (2 CORINTHIANS 3:6). “Therefore seeing we have this ministry” (2 CORINTHIANS 4:1) can thus be taken as guiding words to the understanding of the things set forth. Paul had heard of contentions within the Corinthian church (1 CORINTHIANS 1:11), and they had written him about certain matters (1 CORINTHIANS 7:1); moreover, there had been a serious moral fall on the part of one of their members (1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-7). These things caused Paul to write the first epistle to them; an epistle that evidently made them sorry, so much so that Paul shortly after had to write the second epistle to comfort and re-assure them in the faith and give instruction concerning the one that had sinned (2 CORINTHIANS 2:3-11, 7:8-12, 10:9-11, 13:10). Church government under the administration of the New Covenant is therefore a dominant theme in these epistles. This government included such matters as the proper ordering of the supernatural manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit, which are the accompaniments of that administration (1 CORINTHIANS 12-14), their remembrance of the Lord's death, “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood” (1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-34, R.V.), and their hope of the Lord's coming (1 CORINTHIANS 1:7). Both epistles mention the collection for the poor at Jerusalem, which, as is stated in ROMANS, was an expression of the Gentile's appreciation of their having been made partakers of Israel's blessings (1 CORINTHIANS 16, 2 CORINTHIANS 8-9).

GALATIANS 4:21-31 sets in contrast the two Covenants: the one from Sinai brought bondage, and is likened to Agar and Jerusalem which now is; but the other

is connected with “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” The gospel Paul had received to preach among the Gentiles is a leading subject (1:11-12; 2:7-9). Some had arisen who would have perverted this gospel, and consequently he wrote to warn them (1:6-9). Paul’s gospel at that time concerned the blessings of the Gentiles with faithful Abraham (3:8-9); the things Paul affirmed and defended have a bearing on that gospel. If it was his claims as to the authority given him, it was to shew that the pillars at Jerusalem had recognized that the gospel of the uncircumcision had been committed unto him (2:7-9). If he withstood Peter, it was because Peter and those with him “walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel” (2:14), for to withdraw from eating with the Gentiles was to perpetuate a distinction which his gospel had destroyed. If it was the great subject of justification by faith, it was to shew “that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ” (3:1-14). The blessings of the Gentiles under the administration of the New Covenant is therefore a dominant theme in this epistle.

1 and 2 THESSALONIANS do not mention the New Covenant; they deal, however, with the hope of the New Covenant, the Lord’s coming. In the first epistle, Paul wrote concerning the times and the seasons of their hope and affirmed what they already knew — that it was associated with the proximity of the day of the Lord (5:1-2). After receiving this first epistle the Thessalonians evidently received a spurious epistle purporting to be from Paul, in which they were led to imagine that the day of the Lord was then present; this necessitated a second epistle from Paul (2:1-3, R.V.), bearing the marks of his authorship (3:17-18), in which he corrected this misunderstanding and shewed them, as the Lord had shewn in MATTHEW 24, that that day shall not come until the man of sin shall sit in the holy place (MATTHEW 24:15; 2 THESSALONIANS 2:4). The imminence of the hope of the Lord’s return during a time of New Covenant administration is therefore a dominant theme in these epistles.

HEBREWS reveals the Lord Jesus as the Mediator of the new and better Covenant (7:22; 8:6). The things that pertained to the first Covenant served only to show that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest (9:1-11); but Christ, having come as the Mediator of the New Covenant, had, by means of death, made a new and living way into the holiest by His own blood (9:11-10:20). The types and shadows of the Old Covenant are seen to be superseded by the true things now to be entered and known through the New Covenant; these things

applied particularly to the Jews, for as they had received the rudimentary types and shadows, so now they were enjoined to go on to the very substance of the things whereof the shadows had spoken. In HEBREWS, as in GALATIANS, the New Covenant is associated with the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-24). The New Covenant and its related subjects as it concerns the Hebrews, is therefore the theme of this epistle.

These points, taken from each of Paul's earlier epistles, suffice to shew that they all relate to the New Covenant and its hope. It is for this reason that it is necessary to distinguish between their doctrinal and dispensational teaching; the doctrinal teaching of salvation is the same in Paul's earlier epistles as it is in his later, but the dispensational teaching of his earlier epistles pertains to those dealt with under the New Covenant. It is only in his later epistles that the dispensation of the Mystery, given for us, is revealed.

"The dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to complete the Word of God; even the Mystery." What is the setting of the Mystery within the rest of the Word of God that it completes? To discern the setting of any one part of Scripture it is essential to observe the scope of the whole. In order, therefore, to see the setting of the Mystery, and how it is that it completes the Word, let us notice briefly the scope of the rest of Scripture.

The opening verses of the Word of God record the creation of this heaven and earth; the concluding verses foresee the creation of a new heaven and earth of a new order that is to replace this present creation. In this new heaven and earth there will be "no more sea," "no need of the sun, neither of the moon," "for there shall be no night there" (REVELATION 21:1, 23, 25).

The record of the creation of this heaven and earth is followed by the record of man's fall and the bringing into this world of death, sorrow, crying, pain, and the curse; but in the new heaven and earth, foreseen in the concluding chapters of the Word, there will be "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." "And there shall be no more curse" (REVELATION 21:4, 22:3).

The opening chapters of GENESIS, therefore, find their complement in the closing chapters of REVELATION. Between these two extremes there come the Scriptures that record the outworking of God's purpose of redemption and restitution that shall eventually lead to that new heaven and earth. From the time when the promise of the Redeemer was given in Eden, the hope of restitution has ever been before mankind.

The first eleven chapters of **GENESIS** suffice to record the creation of this heaven and earth and some two thousand years of man's history; but the remaining thirty-nine chapters record God's dealings with one man — Abraham, and his family. To us, it might at first seem disproportionate to the importance of the subjects to allot such a relatively small space to the record of creation and the history of the entire human race, as compared with the lengthy and intimate account of the affairs of Abraham and his household. The Word of God does not linger long on the subject of creation or of man's history, for the important matter as viewed from its pages is redemption and restitution. From this aspect the affairs of Abraham are of first importance, for it was through Abraham, according to the flesh, that the Redeemer was to come, and it was Abraham who, according to God's purpose, was to occupy with his heirs the prominent place in the new heaven and earth. Those blessed in these spheres are said to be blessed with faithful Abraham. Hence the prominence given to the history of this one family in **GENESIS**, and also in the whole Old Testament.

The Word of God is divided under two headings: the Old Testament and the New Testament. As the names suggest, the one is the complement of the other. The prophecy of the Old Testament concerning the Redeemer, Israel's Messiah, is fulfilled by the coming of Christ in the New Testament (**DEUTERONOMY** 18:15; **ACTS** 3:22-26); the prophecy in the Old Testament of the New Covenant is fulfilled in the Scriptures of the New Testament (**JEREMIAH** 31:31-34; **MATTHEW** 26:28; **ROMANS** 9:26-27).

The Scriptures of the Old Testament are mainly composed of history and prophecy. The history of Israel's failure under the Old Covenant made with them at Sinai, and the prophecy of what Israel are to be in the purposes of God under the New Covenant. The prophecies foresee that Israel are to be a kingdom of priests and an holy nation in the earth.

The Scriptures of the New Testament are mainly composed of history — the **GOSPELS** and **ACTS**; prophecy — the book of **REVELATION**; and a distinctive form of revelation — the epistles or letters to churches and individuals.

The **GOSPELS** and **ACTS** give the history of a period when the kingdom promised in the Old Testament was proclaimed to Israel, by John the Baptist (**MATTHEW** 3:2; **LUKE** 16:16), the Lord (**MATTHEW** 4:17), the twelve Apostles (**ACTS** 3:19-21), and finally by Paul (**ACTS** 26:7). The **GOSPELS**, **JOHN** excepted, record the Lord's words "This is My blood of the New Covenant" (**MATTHEW** 26:28; **MARK** 14:24; **LUKE** 22:20). That period of the proclamation of the kingdom that followed

the Lord's resurrection as recorded in ACTS was therefore given under the New Covenant.

The Apostles, during the time of ACTS, were all ministers of the New Covenant; but though this was so there was a difference between them, and a difference between the gospel they had received to preach. This difference is emphasized in GALATIANS 2, where Paul and Barnabas are seen to have received the Apostleship to the Gentiles, while James, Peter, and John were among those whose Apostleship was to Israel (verse 9).

The epistles relative to the proclamation during ACTS are fourteen in number; the seven earlier epistles of Paul the Apostle to the uncircumcision and the seven epistles of the Apostles of the circumcision, James, Peter, John, and Jude the brother of James. These fourteen epistles partake of the character of the proclamation of ACTS; what the Apostles spoke they also wrote. There was not one hope being proclaimed in ACTS and another distinct hope to believers in the epistles; but, whether it was public or private, the hope was the same, the hope of Israel and Gentiles made partakers with Israel.

The cardinal features of the proclamation of ACTS are seen both in the earlier epistles of Paul and the epistles by the Apostles of the circumcision. The Lord Jesus Christ had come first of all to Israel, whose were the fathers (ACTS 2:22; HEBREWS 1:1-2; I PETER 1:18-21). To unbelieving Israel He was as a stone of stumbling (ACTS 4:11; ROMANS 9:31-33; I PETER 2:8). But though He was rejected by Israel, yet God had exalted Him (ACTS 2:36; HEBREWS 8:1; I PETER 3:22), and He was yet to appear a second time (ACTS 3:20-21; HEBREWS 9:28; I PETER 5:4), the time of His appearing being associated with the day of the Lord (ACTS 2:16-20; 2 THESSALONIANS 2:2-3, R.V.; 2 PETER 3:4-10). The references given from ACTS, Paul's earlier epistles, and the general epistles serve to shew that the testimony of all to the outstanding features of the proclamation of that time are the same.

The position of the believers of that day, in relation to their hope, is similar in both the earlier epistles of Paul and the epistles of the Apostles of the circumcision. The believing Jews and the Gentiles blessed with them are alike referred to as a first-fruits of all Israel (ROMANS 11:16, note verse 26; JAMES 1:18, note the address, verse 1). They were the heirs of the promised kingdom (GALATIANS 3:29; HEBREWS 12:28; JAMES 2:5), and were called "My people" whether they were drawn from the Gentiles who had never been called "My people" (ROMANS 9:24-26) or from the Jews (I PETER 2:9-12) who through their blindness had been called "not My

people” (HOSEA I:9-10; 2:23). They were the true Israel of God (GALATIANS 6:16), His own peculiar people (1 PETER 2:9). Thus the position of the believers as heirs of Abraham’s blessings is the same in both these groups of epistles.

The hope of Israel that was proclaimed during the time of the GOSPELS and ACTS was not heeded generally, but those who did believe became a firstfruits of that harvest yet to come, when all the heirs of Israel’s blessings shall be gathered. To that believing remnant (ROMANS 11:5) there were given these epistles, by Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles and the Apostles to Israel, so that whether the believers were of the Gentiles or Jews they might be established in their hope.

The kingdom that was proclaimed (MATTHEW 3:2; 10:7), prayed for (6:10), and in prospect (ACTS 1:6) during the GOSPELS and ACTS did not come, but nevertheless it will come and the time of its coming is foreseen in the prophecy of REVELATION. The kingdom proclaimed provisionally in the GOSPELS and ACTS will be established actually in the time of REVELATION, when it shall be said “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; And He shall reign for ever and ever” (11:15). Those who rejected Him (MATTHEW 26:64) shall in that day behold Him coming in the clouds (REVELATION 1:7).

In the same manner the hope of the believers that was in expectation in the earlier epistles of Paul and the epistles of the Apostles of the circumcision did not come, but that hope will come as is foreseen in REVELATION. Paul’s earlier epistles look forward to the heavenly Jerusalem (GALATIANS 4:26; HEBREWS 11:10; 12:22); the epistles of the Apostles of the circumcision look forward to “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 PETER 3:13). The REVELATION speaks of the time when this hope will actually be realized: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:1-2).

This brief review of the scope of these Scriptures has shown that the final hope of the Old Testament, the GOSPELS and ACTS, the seven earlier epistles of Paul, and the seven epistles of the Apostles of the circumcision, is found in that new heaven and new earth and the heavenly Jerusalem within them, as is foreseen in the closing chapters of REVELATION. These Scriptures may relate to various callings, earthly and heavenly, but all will find their expectations fulfilled within the limits of that new heaven and earth. If the new heaven and new earth was the only place of blessing given by the will of God for the redeemed, the Scriptures might well

have been said to be complete, but it was not the only place; before the foundation, or overthrow, of the world God had purposed that there should be some blessed in Christ in the heavenly places far above all. The Scriptures could not have been said to be complete while the fact of blessings in this highest sphere remained a truth hid in God, but when it was revealed in the later epistles of Paul, it was “to complete the word of God.” The later epistles relate to blessings far above all heavens, the rest of Scripture to blessings in the new heaven and new earth. Thus within the complete Word of God is contained God’s word for all callings and for all times; but it is in that revelation given to complete the Word of God that we find the “dispensation of God which is given to me **for you.**”

In the foregoing chapters we have considered — in Chapter **I** that “All Truth” promised by the Lord has been revealed in the Mystery; in **II** that the Mystery is that specific truth which God would now make known to His saints; in **III** that the Mystery is a superlative revelation concerning superlative blessings far above all; in **IV** that the Mystery is a dispensation which is concerned with the calling out and growth of the One Body; in **V** that within this One Body Jews and Gentiles are blessed in absolute equality; in **VI** that the hope of the One Body is its completion and its entry into, and appearance with, Christ in glory: and now in this seventh chapter, we have seen that all these things, revealed in the Mystery that completes the Word of God, are contained in the later epistles of Paul, and that these epistles are therefore in a special sense given of God for us. In the foregoing chapters all these things have necessarily been considered only briefly; it has been the broad outline, the scope, of the Mystery that has been before our attention, but having seen that within the later epistles of Paul is revealed all that is to be known concerning the Mystery, may the wisdom be granted to each of us to give attention to those epistles, that we may learn the details of our calling and its responsibilities. May we do so by His grace.

“. . . the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (COLOSSIANS 1:25-27).

VIII

“ . . . Christ. . . Whom we preach, . . . that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, . . . ”
(COLOSSIANS 1:27-29)

ALL truth has been revealed, for the Word of God has been filled full, or completed, by the Mystery committed to Paul. Our responsibility is now to seek to apprehend this final unfolding of truth, for God has said He wills to make it known to His saints.

Paul not only received the revelation of the Mystery, but he also labored that he might “make all men see what is the dispensation of the Mystery.”

“For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles, if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which is given me to you-ward; . . . the mystery, . . . whereof I was made a minister to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery . . . Wherefore I ask that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which are your glory” (EPHESIANS 3:1-13, R.V.)

The tribulations Paul endured in his endeavor to make all see the Mystery were for your glory. He had received the Mystery “fully to preach the word of God” (COLOSSIANS 1:25-26, margin), but he endured suffering when all had forsaken him “that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear” (2 TIMOTHY 4:17). These sufferings could not improve the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, but they could avail to cause the saints to obtain that salvation **with** eternal glory.

“Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”.
(2 TIMOTHY 2:9-10)

Paul’s sufferings were to the end that the saints should obtain all that redemption had made possible. Thus he endured affliction in his endeavor to make them see the Mystery, for that revelation concerned the highest blessing of the redeemed, and for them to be brought to an acknowledgment of the truth was to their eternal glory.

“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the church: Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, . . . the mystery” (COLOSSIANS 1:24-26).

Paul had a distinctive ministry after he received the Mystery, a ministry to the saints who were members of the Church which is His Body. “Whereof” agrees with the word “church”; thus the emphasis is “Of which Church which is His Body I became a minister, according to the dispensation of God . . . the Mystery.” To the saints who were of this calling Paul ministered, first to shew them what was their calling and then to establish them in that calling.

All truth has been made known in the Mystery and it has been made known to be received by the saints. We became saints, or sanctified ones, through believing The Word of Truth, the gospel of our salvation, that Christ died and rose again for our salvation; but now that we are saints we should go on to believe the All Truth that God would make known to us, even the Mystery that concerns Christ glorified.

The labors of Paul in the testimony of the Mystery were to the end that he might “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (COLOSSIANS 1:28-29). This word “**perfect**” *teleios*, is related to the word “**end**” *telos*. It has special reference to the attainment of a purpose, the thought being not so much the termination of the purpose, but rather its issue. We say we have gained our end when that for which we have striven is achieved. In like manner “**perfect**” expresses the complete realization of some intention.

To be presented perfect in Christ Jesus does not refer to flawless righteousness or sinless perfection, for in these things no labors of man have any place; when we know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour we are “made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,” that is the fitness wherewith we are already made meet to be presented faultless in God’s presence; nothing can improve the righteousness of God which is ours in Christ. Salvation implies not only the forgiveness of sin; it implies more, even that upon believing we receive life in Christ; nothing we do subsequently can make us more alive in Christ, for that life is wholly dependent on Him. Salvation, however, is, like birth, the commencement of life; after salvation maturity or perfection is henceforth the purpose of our life in Christ, even that we “may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.”

To be presented perfect in Christ Jesus refers therefore to the end to which our

growth in the apprehension of the things given us of God should lead. There is nothing to be afraid of in this word for it simply expresses the logical outcome of our life in Christ, even that we should grow up into Him. The usage of “perfect” in connection with growth shews that it is set in contrast to immaturity.

“For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of **full age** (margin, **perfect**). . . . Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection;. . .” (HEBREWS 5:13; 6:1).

Full age or maturity is the perfect state of growth, it is the end to which growth seeks to attain. To be a babe in Christ is a precious thing, and for such there is the sincere milk of the Word that they may grow thereby; but for one to always remain as a babe in Christ would be a tragedy — it would mean that they had not grown by the Word. The exhortation is therefore given to leave the “principles of the doctrine of Christ,” which principles are the milk of the Word, and to “go on unto perfection.” The verses that follow explain that to “go on unto perfection” refers to those “things that accompany salvation” (verse 9).

Some examples of those who sought to be perfect will help to make these things clear. Abraham “believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness” (GENESIS 15:6); and for this reason his case was chosen to illustrate imputed righteousness without works in ROMANS 4. After believing God in this way Abraham received the exhortation “walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (GENESIS 17:1). His subsequent walk before God caused his name to be included among those of HEBREWS 11 who had been “made perfect” (verse 40). Thus it was after Abraham received imputed righteousness that he was bidden to “be perfect,” and so to-day it is because we have received imputed righteousness through believing God concerning the Lord Jesus Christ that we are bidden to go on unto perfection.

Paul himself sought to be perfect:

“Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (PHILIPPIANS 3:12).

This was Paul’s abiding attitude, and concerning this he said “Brethren, be followers together of me” (verse 17). He had been apprehended, or laid hold of, and it was his fervent desire that he might lay hold of that for which he had been laid hold of by Christ Jesus. To lay hold of all that God had purposed for him was the end towards which he pressed, and while life lasted he would say, “Not as

though I had already attained,, either were already perfect.”

For any to go on unto perfection is therefore to go on unto those things for which they have been chosen, or laid hold of. The things for which different ones of the redeemed have been laid hold of have varied. Abraham, we read, “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (HEBREWS 11:10). That for which we, as members of the Church which is His Body, have been chosen, is revealed in the Mystery. Paul’s labors that he might “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” were those he expended in the endeavor to make all see what is this Mystery. Thus it is evident that for us to be presented perfect it is essential that we should be brought to a knowledge of the Mystery.

It was to the Colossian believers that Paul stated that he labored to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”; a consideration of the position of these believers at the time they received this epistle will therefore be helpful.

Epaphras had been their faithful minister, and he was taken from them and became a fellow-prisoner with Paul; as a companion of Paul at the time when the Mystery was committed to him he must have been among the first who came into the light of the truth. Having himself been brought into the joy of the truth Epaphras’ thoughts naturally turned to the gathering he had left at Colosse that they too might hear all that had been revealed. Epaphras therefore told Paul of these believers whom he had not seen in the flesh, and hearing that they were faithful men he wrote this epistle to them, even as unto such as might be brought to know what is this Mystery.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints Epaphras Who also declared unto us your love in the spirit” (COLOSSIANS 1:1-8).

Paul and Epaphras shared in conflict and labor on behalf of the faithful saints at Colosse. These saints had much assurance of salvation, but Paul desired that they might go on “unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God — Christ” (2:1-2). As believers they were “complete in Him” (2:10), but Epaphras longed that they might stand “complete in all the will of God,” that they might be perfect, and to this end he labored for them in prayer.

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (4:12).

That they might stand perfect it was essential for them to be complete in all the will of God, even to know that revelation of the will of God respecting the Mystery which completed the Word of God. The Colossians’ love to all saints was precious indeed, but now that they were to hear the Mystery a crisis was about to come, for the responsibility of hearing truth is belief. The labors of Paul and Epaphras for the Colossians were to the end that having had the Mystery presented to them they might be brought to a definite acknowledgment of the truth.

The case of the Colossian believers makes it evident that if we, by God’s grace, desire to be presented “perfect in Christ Jesus,” then our need is as theirs was — to be brought to a definite knowledge and acknowledgment of the Mystery. The perfecting, or growth, of the believer is in that he goes on to believe all that God would make known to His saints at this time, which implies that he goes on from the truth relating to salvation to believe the truth relating to the Mystery.

The hearing of truth must be accompanied by belief if it is to profit. When truth is heard there are two ways open, and two only — to believe and thereby receive, or to reject and therefore not receive. There can be no intermediate position, for to remain indifferent is not to believe, and not to believe amounts to rejection. The way of salvation may be known and yet not acknowledged, and so also the Mystery may be known of by a believer and yet not acknowledged. To believe God is the appointed way of appropriating to ourselves the truths revealed for us.

Entrance understandingly into the apprehension of the Mystery is an experience as definite as anything in the Christian pathway; the assurance of the truth that is put into our hearts is something which is more than can well be expressed, it is the assurance that brings the calm peace and liberty of the truth that sets free.

That the Mystery should be so inseparably associated with the perfecting of the believer of this day shows that it is a truth that makes for establishment. When the Mystery is acknowledged and the distinctive practice connected therewith is consistently adhered to, then the believer is established in the truth of God that applies to this present time. This establishment brings deliverance from the bickering of conflicting interpretations of men which arise from not heeding the distinctive characteristics of the dispensation of the Mystery that now obtains. The

walk that is worthy of the calling of the Mystery is, in EPHESIANS 4, set in contrast to the uncertainty that characterizes the walk of a babe in Christ:

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ:” (EPHESIANS 4:14-15).

The winds of doctrine all make for instability and uncertainty, but their greatest harm is in that they prevent and hold back the saint from going on to believe all truth, and so from going on to grow up into Him the Head, Christ. “Whereby they lie in wait to deceive”; has been rendered “with a view to the systematizing of error.” A characteristic of the days in which we live is the number of systems of interpretations that sway believers to and fro. These systems are so contrary to each other that they must of necessity be erroneous; but one feature they all have in common — they pose as the truth and in this they are all counterfeits of the truth. To know the truth that God would make known to His saints is the means of being established.

To keep the sinner from the Saviour and the saint from his glorified Head is the twofold work of evil. Thus the systematized work of evil is to hold down mankind from the truth. This is apparent enough in the world of the unbelieving, but it is also the case among those who believe. The endeavor of Christians is often directed to the building up or maintenance of some form of unity. These unities may in their early stages appear good, but when believers are conciliated into any form of visible unity the way is laid open for the systematizing insinuation of evil. Thus it is that these unities too often prove to be organizations that hold down their adherents from going on to the fullness of revelation.

To go on to apprehend the Mystery is the true way of furthering unity among believers. If all believers received what God would make known to His saints they would all know the same thing. Thus first to seek ourselves to apprehend the Mystery, and then endeavor to make it known to our fellow-believers, is the way to the true unity. The truth of the Mystery is sometimes said to cause strife. If the unity is of man, then the truth may well cause division; not that the truth makes for strife, but rather that the unities of man are opposed to the truth. The unity of all believers is their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection; but the peculiar unity of the One Body is identification with Christ in the heavenlies, the members being united together because of their corporate membership to their exalted Head. Those called according to this calling are not enjoined to make a unity but to endeavor to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is

one body,” (EPHESIANS 4:3-4).

The most painful form of opposition which comes to those who would go on into all truth is perhaps that which arises, not from systems, but from fellow-believers who have not the same desires. Such believers would discourage others from their apprehending truth, and often taunt those who speak of their blessings in Christ far above all with the charge of being lifted up with spiritual pride. Had such blessings been conceived apart from revelation it would indeed have been pride akin to that of Satan, which caused him to aspire to that position and brought about his fall; but to believe God is not pride or presumption, but is glorifying and honoring to Him. The first exhortation relating to the walk that is worthy of this calling is that it shall be “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love” (EPHESIANS 4:1-2). When the greatness of our calling is at all realized and at the same time our own unworthiness of the least of God’s callings, then lowliness and meekness appear the only befitting characteristics of a walk that can at all be called worthy.

It has never been popular to go on to believe God. Of the multitudes of Israel who sang the song of Moses on the shore of the Red Sea, two only received possessions in the promised land — Caleb and Joshua, for they alone “wholly followed the Lord;” The Israelites who looked to the received opinion of the majority for guidance died without the promises, but these two who believed God for themselves were led into all God had intended for them. This principle is the same today: a holding back from all truth characterizes the majority so that he who would go on to believe all that God desires to make known to His saints must do so for himself and should not be surprised if he finds that for so doing he is misunderstood and misrepresented by some of the saints.

Did the believers of Paul’s own day all go on to the fullness of truth committed to him? It would seem that as a majority they did not, for Paul in his closing days was lonely and forsaken save for a few faithful companions. At the time when Paul wrote the first epistle to the Corinthians he could say “The churches of Asia salute you” (16:19), but by the time he wrote his last epistle to Timothy he had to say “This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (1:15). To turn away from Paul was virtually to turn away from the truth he proclaimed; the believers of Asia had received part of Paul’s ministry whereby they had become saints, yet they failed to receive all his ministry in that they turned away from him when he became a prisoner for the testimony of the Mystery. There was therefore a collective turning away from Paul on the part of the very churches he had been so largely instrumental in establishing; he suffered rejection because these believers did not, as a whole, go on to believe all

that was committed to him.

Those who did go on to believe God were to Paul a comfort and joy; in his testimony to the Mystery he was lonely, nevertheless he experienced the truest fellowship with those who were likeminded. Timothy was one who entered into the joy of the truth; he was exhorted, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner” (2 TIMOTHY 1:8). The words “nor of me His prisoner” indicate that such as would follow wholly with Paul must not be ashamed of his prison testimony.

To go on to believe God is an individual matter; it is something we must do ourselves without heeding what others are doing. To believe, practice, and testify to the dispensation of the Mystery may occasion loneliness, but it nevertheless brings a fellowship with those enlightened into the same truth. Fellowship with all who know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour is indeed precious, but fellowship with another enlightened into the Mystery is something nearer and deeper even the experience of that unity which binds the members of the One Body to each other and all to their exalted Head.

There are many things a believer has to consider and weigh over before the Mystery is definitely acknowledged and acted upon and the consequences accepted. Of all considerations, however, the one that should assuredly be supreme and decisive is that it is God’s desire that we should acknowledge the Mystery, and of all the consequences of the truth the one that we should respect is that it glorifies Him.

To those who have acknowledged the Mystery there comes the responsibility of walking and witnessing according to the truth. We are exhorted not only to walk worthy of the Lord and of our salvation, but also to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (EPHESIANS 4:1). We must know what is our vocation or calling before we can in any measure walk worthy of it; thus to apprehend something of what is this Mystery is the basis of a life that may be acceptable and well pleasing to God. To know our calling and the rules connected therewith is essential if we would be crowned, for it is not all who strive that have that honor, but only “except he strive lawfully” (2 TIMOTHY 2:5).

The walk that is worthy of our calling is outlined in the last three chapters of EPHESIANS; it is a walk which ministers to the building up of the One Body, both of ourselves as individual members and also of others with whom we come in touch. To speak, or live, the truth in love makes for growth, and growth, as we have

noticed, is a thought implied in the exhortation to be perfect.

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: From Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (EPHESIANS 4:15-16).

The increase of the Body is of itself, from within not from without, “Maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”; it is only those who are initiated by grace into the Mystery who can give that edification which makes for the increase of the Body.

The privilege of being a minister to the growth of the One Body is granted to every member. “Every joint supplieth,” or, better, “every joint of supply”: the source of supply is our glorified Head, the joint being the channel through whom it is received. The rate of growth is “according to the working in due measure of each several part” (R.V.). All are dependent on the Head, but at the same time we are interdependent on each other; thus there is a responsibility of each member to the whole.

“Up into Him the Head out from Whom,” this is the direction and the derivation of the growth of the One Body; the members grow up into Christ as they receive from Him.

To walk so that we can be used to minister to the growth of the One Body is therefore the responsibility of each member. Apostolic succession in the accepted use of the term has no basis in Scripture; the Twelve had a ministry peculiarly their own (ACTS 1:21-26), and nowhere is it stated that any were appointed to succeed them. The ministry of the Mystery is, however, a ministry that is handed down. Paul alone received the revelation of the Mystery, but this he committed like a good deposit to faithful men, as Timothy, who were in turn instructed to commit it to other faithful men able to teach others also.

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also”.
(2 TIMOTHY 2:2)

This Ministry of the Mystery is a high privilege; to speak of Christ exalted is the greatest joy we can know. The gospel of salvation is to be proclaimed to

sinners, and as “all have sinned” its message is extensive; but the Mystery is to be committed to faithful men, and thus its message is restricted. “A great door and effectual” was opened to Paul when he preached the gospel during ACTS (1 CORINTHIANS 16:9); but when he was made a minister of the Mystery he requested prayer “that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds” (COLOSSIANS 4:3). God alone can grant such doors of utterance to speak the Mystery to prepared hearts; He knows His faithful saints, and it is His gracious work to bring those who have received the Mystery into touch with such that they may be used to commit to them this truth. To be allowed such openings should be our prayer.

The acknowledgment of, and consequent walk and witness according to, the truth of the Mystery are not of themselves the end, although they are an essential means to the end; the end set before those who would be presented perfect in Christ Jesus is the knowledge of Him. It was Christ Whom Paul preached that he might “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus,” but it was Christ as He had been revealed through the making known of the Mystery — Christ the hope of glory.

The contrast and yet connection between the Mystery of Christ and the dispensation of the Mystery has been noted, but here we may observe that it was the final unfolding of the Mystery of Christ, so far as it is to be made known, that resulted in the revelation of the dispensation of the Mystery. The highest glory of Christ in relation with the redeemed was made known when the dispensation of the Mystery was revealed, for it could then be known for the first time all that His Headship meant to every calling of the new creation.

Paul associates the revelation of the Mystery committed solely to him with his further understanding of the Mystery of Christ such as in other ages was not known as it is now revealed to the apostles and prophets (EPHESIANS 3:3-5). May our apprehension of the dispensation of the Mystery be graciously used to lead us each on to a fuller apprehension of our glorified Lord.

That the revelation of the Mystery may lead us on to know more fully of Him Who is exalted can be seen from the setting of the central prayer of EPHESIANS. The opening words “For this cause . . .” (3:14) shew that the requests of the prayer are resultant from the subject of the verses which precede. “For this cause . . .” takes up the theme of verse one “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,” the intervening verses explaining what was the cause — namely, that Paul was a prisoner to receive and make known “the dispensation of the Mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God.” The prayer

is therefore resultant from the revelation of the Mystery.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (EPHESIANS 3:17-19).

That the saints might go on to a fuller knowledge of Christ was the inspired request Paul made for those who had received the Mystery; an abundant answer to this request may be given through that power that is towards those of this calling. “According to the power that worketh in us” (verse 20) and that power is described in EPHESIANS 1:19-28. “The exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, . . . Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all . . .”

We have noticed the fact of our calling made known in the Mystery and the hope of our calling, to be manifested with Him in glory, and the walk that should be worthy of our calling, but in connection with the desire to go on more fully to “know Him” there is also “the prize of the high calling, or vocation, of God in Christ Jesus.” The calling of the One Body is by no means a prize; it is received by faith obedience; but to those of this calling who, like Paul, seek to press on to “know Him” there is a prize (PHILIPPIANS 3:14), and there is an out-resurrection out from among the dead (verse 11).

The nature of this prize and the manner of this out-resurrection are not described in detail, but the means to their attainment is set forth by the example of Paul.

“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11).

The power of His resurrection is, as we have noticed, that power which is to us-ward who believe that is able to exceedingly abundantly answer the prayer “And to know the love of Christ.” The fellowship of His sufferings and the conformity to His death cannot refer to that aspect of the Lord’s sufferings which wrought the great work of redemption, for in that work none can have part; but He suffered for His testimony to that which He was, very God (JOHN 10:33), and those who seek to know and acknowledge Him will share something of the fellowship of the same sufferings, but also something more of the glory that shall follow.

The end before the individual member is to seek to “know Him.” It is in connection with this going on to know Him that Paul wrote “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” The measure in which any are made perfect depends on their growth to this end. The “knowledge of the Son of God” is also the goal before all the members.

“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (EPHESIANS 4:13).

It has been our delight to trace how that All Truth promised by the Lord has been revealed in the Mystery committed to Paul the prisoner to complete the Word of God, and that it is that truth which God would now make known to His saints. We have rejoiced to see how that this Mystery concerns the present exaltation and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ far above all and our blessings with Him as members of “the Church which is His Body the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.” Having this hope, we look forward to the manifestation in glory, and pending that time we have the privilege of witnessing and walking according to this our calling, but above all of seeking to know Him that we may attain those things which are the rewards of this calling. May it be increasingly our joy to experience the Spirit’s leading into the All Truth revealed in the Word of God, even that we may be led more fully to know Him Who said “**I AM THE TRUTH.**”

**“Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come,
He will guide you into All Truth: He shall glorify ME”
(John 16:13-14)**