

The Kingdom of God In Heaven and On Earth

A Study of the
Kingdom of God
throughout the Bible
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Letters from Prison
The Early and Pastoral Epistles of Paul
The Unfolding Purpose of God
On Reading the Bible
The Interpretation of Scripture
The Early Centuries and the Truth
etc., etc.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Kingdom of God in the Pentateuch

There is no subject of deeper Scriptural import than the kingdom of God and the great redemptive foundation upon which it rests. The tendency has always been to whittle it down, to over-simplify it, to see part of it and to imagine that this is the whole. The fact is that it is nothing less than the entire purpose of God for heaven and earth in all its variety and complexity, and because of this it is the theme of the Word of God from Genesis to Revelation.

The Lord Jesus Christ is Himself the source, centre and goal of it all. He is the all-sufficient Redeemer of this creation which tragically has become involved in sin and death and without His redemptive work, the attainment of this kingdom would be impossible. These great barriers must be removed before the kingdom of God can be realised and the one offering of Himself as the sin-bearer on the cross of Calvary has made this gloriously certain (Heb. 10:11-14). Not only is the Lord Jesus brought before us in the Word as the one Redeemer and Saviour, but He is also the King of Israel (John 1:49; Matt. 21:4,5) and in a far greater sense He is 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS' (Rev. 19:16), the supreme King and the supreme Lord of the universe to Whom one day 'every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth' (Phil. 2:10). The kingdom of God does not rest on anything so flimsy as the limited strength or wisdom of any created being; rather it rests solidly upon the almighty strength and wisdom of our great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus.

At the outset we must be careful not to interpret the word 'kingdom' as merely the exhibition of sovereignty or government as some have done. The Bible knows nothing of a kingdom without a king or a king without a kingdom. A kingdom pre-supposes a ruler with adequate authority and power and a realm of subjects whom he rules and both these are clearly presented in the sacred Scriptures. God says 'Yet have I *set My King* upon My holy hill of Zion' (Psa. 2:6). Early in the Bible we find it presented in typical form by the first man Adam, who was given by God a dominion over the whole earth:

'And God said, Let us make man (Adam) in our image, after our likeness: and let *them have dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and *over all the earth*, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth' (Gen. 1:26 and see Psa. 8:3-9; Heb. 2:5-9).

In reality Adam was a king who shadowed forth the last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme King Who finally will reign over His whole creation.

It is our intention in this study to consider the testimony of the *whole* Bible with respect to this great subject of the kingdom of God. Only in this way shall we be able to get any adequate conception of its vastness and wonder. Some have made the great mistake of limiting their research to the New Testament, and have gone so far as to base it on one verse only, namely Luke 17:21, 'Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you', and from this verse they imagine that God's kingdom is nothing more than an attitude of mind and bears no relationship to the material world. We shall deal with this verse later on and hope to show how grossly unscriptural and inadequate this conception is.

The Characteristics of the Kingdom of God

There have been many conflicting ideas as to what this kingdom really comprises. Broadly speaking, these can be ranged under three headings as being: (1) the reign of God in heaven after the last judgment; (2) the periods between the second Advent of Christ and the last judgment and (3) the visible church between the first and second Advents. From these there are varying ideas some of which are the following:

- (1) Jewish scholars, though differing in details, have felt that the kingdom belongs solely to Israel in the days of the Messiah.
- (2) The reign of Christ is inaugurated at His second Coming to the earth in power and glory. It must be said that this was the predominating conception of Christians for the first 2½ centuries of our era. It was reversed largely by the works of Origen and Augustine. The latter, though he first embraced it, changed his mind and began to adopt spiritualisation as his method of interpretation and this is set out in the 22 books of his *De Civitas Dei*.

- (3) The kingdom refers to the final perfect reign of God in the new heavens and earth at the end of the ages.
- (4) The reign of God is in heaven and is *now*, during the present age. Entering the kingdom means going to heaven after death.
- (5) The kingdom is the rule of God in the minds of the regenerate during the present time. 'The kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21) is the verse to which those who hold this view appeal.
- (6) The kingdom of God is expressed in the visible church of this age. This is the standpoint of the Roman Catholic church who regards her adherents as the only true members of this kingdom.
- (7) The liberal 'social' kingdom of the modernist which is expressed by the 'social' gospel which teaches that God's kingdom comes in the progressive improvement of mankind socially by whatever means used. Many 'leftists' who hold this view would even look on Russian communism, though stained with blood and tyranny, as a step forward towards this goal. Much is made of the universal fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. The early Socialists regarded socialism as an integral part of the gospel. Unfortunately for them the former idea is completely unscriptural as is the so-called ability of man to bring this perfect kingdom into existence by his own efforts. Two shattering world wars have dealt a severe blow to this conception and shown its utter failure, but its adherents persist and their remedy is still larger doses of Christless socialism!

We do not propose to stay and consider the modern eschatological ideas of the kingdom, either of Albert Schweitzer or the school of Barth and Brunner. One says that Christ was mistaken in His conception of the kingdom and the other that Christ put the kingdom above and beyond history. Neither of these will stand the test of Holy Scripture and we write for those who believe 2 Timothy 3:16 with its assertion that the Bible is the Word of God, both holy and 'God-breathed', and is a divine revelation in which all that can be known of the kingdom of God is found. It cannot be too strongly stressed that this kingdom is God's - He is the Originator and Designer of it and it will be only by His almighty power that it will come to fruition as a glorious fact.

When we start to examine the Scriptures concerning this great subject, we cannot help noticing that sometimes there appears to be a contradiction. Certain verses stress the kingdom of God as a present reality:

'Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; *thine is the kingdom*, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as Head over all' (1 Chron. 29:11).

'The LORD (Jehovah) is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of His land' (Psa. 10:16).

'The LORD (Jehovah) hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and *His kingdom ruleth over all*' (Psa. 103:19).

Others regard the establishment of the kingdom as future. In Daniel 2 we have the account of the colossal image of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. When Daniel, under the enlightenment of God, explains the meaning, he describes four successive kingdoms, three of which were future and these were suddenly destroyed by a 'stone cut without hands' i.e. not by a human being. This stone finally became a great mountain and *filled the whole earth* (Dan. 2:35). This is further elaborated in verse 44:

'In the days of these kings *shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom*, which shall never be destroyed ... it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever' (verse 44).

Yet at the same time Nebuchadnezzar was humbled and brought to realise that 'the heavens (i.e. God) do rule' (Dan. 4:25, 26). How do we account for this? We must certainly not regard these as two separate kingdoms which are opposed to each other. Rather it is two phases of the same kingdom. God has never abdicated His position as the almighty Ruler of His universe in spite of the rebellion and opposition of created beings like Satan and fallen men. As we have stated before, it is an integral part of the great purpose of the ages in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:8-11) to righteously eliminate sin and death from creation so that the kingdom of God which is a reality in heaven may become *manifest* over the whole creation which includes the earth.

At the present time we have sin, death and open rebellion against God as far as the earth is concerned and these must be removed before that glorious time envisaged by the prophets comes to pass when 'the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' (Hab. 2:14), when war will be removed and universal peace takes its place, 'when nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war

any more' (Micah 4:1-4). This aspect of God's kingdom is obviously *future* and God reveals in His Word how He is going to bring this glorious goal to pass. All other plans to achieve this will fail. Men, religious or otherwise, may scheme to bring in a utopia about which they dream, but it is nothing more than 'castles in the air' and doomed to utter disappointment, for it is entirely beyond the power and wisdom of man so to do.

It is only as we carefully study the Word of God and His teaching relating to His kingdom on earth and in heaven that we can get an insight as to how the Lord will accomplish His mighty plan and make this kingdom a glorious reality. We now propose to make this study, but first of all we must ask ourselves, what kind of kingdom does the Bible reveal? Is it literal and material or is it spiritual, or perhaps a combination of both?

As we study the writings of Bible scholars, once again we come across many conflicting opinions. For instance, what is a kingdom that is wholly spiritual and can such a kingdom ever exist? Some, especially those of amillennial persuasion, would say 'yes', and they believe a time will come when God will rule in the minds of all people and then His kingdom will have been established. They frown upon any material blessings which in their estimation are 'carnal'. Others look forward to a time when peace and plenty will abound on the earth which will become exceedingly fruitful and all men's literal needs will be abundantly satisfied.

Which of these two opposite views is true? We believe the answer is neither by themselves. The Scriptural conception of the kingdom of God is a *combination of both*, but with the spiritual side first and foremost. It will be a divine rule that meets the *total needs of men*, spiritual, moral and civil. This wonderful rule will be basically spiritual, but will manifest itself by tangible effects all over the physical world. Anything less than this is not the kingdom of the Bible for it would not meet the total needs of mankind.

It is remarkable how the word 'spiritual' is often misunderstood and made to mean something that is opposite to substances that are material or literal and as such can be apprehended by the physical senses, but its use in Scripture must guide us here. The word *pneumatikos* (spiritual) in a good sense means something produced by the sole power of the Holy Spirit without natural instrumentality and this can be in any realm whatsoever, physical or metaphysical. In 1 Corinthians 10:2,3 we read that Israel 'did all eat the same *spiritual meat* (food); and did all drink the same *spiritual drink* ... ' Yet both the food and the drink were literal, although their character and origin were spiritual. The food was the daily supply of the heavenly manna which could be baked, boiled, or ground to powder. Its taste was described and it could even breed worms (Num. 11:8; Exod. 16:19,20). Yet, in spite of all this, it could truthfully be called 'spiritual'.

1 Corinthians 15:44 distinguishes between a natural (soulish) body in this life and a spiritual body in resurrection. The resurrection body of the Lord Jesus though spiritual, could be seen and touched and had flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). It was the energising principle of the two which is contrasted.

The word 'spiritual' can also be used in a bad sense, for Ephesians 6:12 speaks of 'spiritual wickedness in heavenly places'.

Obviously we must take care with this word and not import into it unscriptural ideas. As an example, it is absolutely misleading to contrast the word 'spiritual' with the word 'literal'. They are not anti-thetical; *literal* is not opposed to *spiritual*, but to what is *figurative*. Nor must we make the mistake of designating what is physical and material as *carnal*. This is often the charge of the spiritualiser against those who normally treat the Scriptures literally, especially prophecy, that is, according to the received laws of language. But this is only a revived form of the error of ancient *gnosticism* which regarded all that was material as evil, and it is to be feared that there is plenty of such gnosticism in many modern religious systems.

The Interpretation of Scripture and of Prophecy

Before we go any further it is necessary to get quite clear what sound interpretation involves. The reason why there are so many differing ideas about the contents of the Bible is due primarily to varying and often opposing systems of interpretation. We do not intend to go into all these. If one wants to explore this most important subject in detail, then a treatise like F. W. Farrar's *The History of Interpretation* is recommended. In our own book, *The Interpretation of Scriptures*, we have summed up the position and given our reasons for adopting the *literal* method, often called the grammatical-historical method. We believe this to be the most sound method of handling the sacred

Scriptures, for only in this way can they be allowed to mean what they say. We believe that, in His Word, God means what He says and has a meaning for everything He says. The literal method of interpretation gives to each word the same basic meaning it would have in *normal, ordinary customary usage*, whether employed in writing, speaking, or thinking. If this is not so, how could God convey to man His thoughts or instruct him? If the Lord uses words in an entirely different way from normal usage, then it is absolutely impossible for any human being to receive or understand what He intends to convey to them. When we speak of a literal method of interpretation we do not mean that figures of speech and symbols are not used in the Scriptures, nor that spiritual application cannot be made from its contents. It is one thing to make a spiritual application of a passage from Holy Writ (and this can only be done after the basic interpretation has been made). It is quite another to adopt *spiritualisation* or *allegory* as a *system* of interpretation for the whole of the Bible. F.W. Farrar well says:

'... when once the principle of allegory is admitted, when once we start with the rule that whole passages and books of Scripture say one thing when they mean another, the reader is delivered bound hand and foot to the caprice of the interpreter'. *The Principles of Interpretation* p.238.*

This is impossible with the grammatical-historical method of Biblical study, which not only lets words mean what they say, but links them with the context in which they are found, thus exerting a sure and safe check on the imagination of both writer and reader, thereby delivering from fallible human opinion.

With regard to the interpretation of prophecy, we see no valid reason for departing from the above, providing symbols and figures of speech are recognised and the literality underlying them is found. Another point must be constantly borne in mind. Some prophecies have only had a *partial* fulfilment, leaving the *complete* fulfilment to a later time. Failure to distinguish this can only lead to wrong conclusions.

To interpret literally means to interpret in terms of normal designation which is the usual approach in all languages and this is the method we shall seek to employ in our study of the great theme of The Kingdom of God as we search the Scriptures.

The Rule of God and Satan's Opposition

At the commencement we must be very careful that we start in the right place. Many expositors commence with the New Testament and ignore the testimony of the Old Testament. This is a fundamental mistake, for God's conception of His kingdom had already been made known in the history and prophecy of the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, in type, it began with the first man, Adam, who, as we have seen, was in reality a king, having been given by God complete dominion over the whole earth and its inhabitants, foreshadowing the future dominion of *The King of kings and Lord of lords*. From the very beginning, God has manifested His sovereignty in His rule over creation and this is at the very heart of the stupendous plan of the ages centred in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:8-11). Sometimes He has used mediators in the carrying out of His divine rule, for the astonishing fact which permeates the whole Bible is that God, while able to accomplish everything by His wisdom and almightiness alone, yet desires to use created beings as channels to accomplish His will. The more we think about this and realise our own sinfulness and inadequacy, the more wonderful it becomes.

God's conception of perfect rule is the rule of *one mind*, not the governance of committees nor of the many along democratic lines. It goes without saying that this one ruler must be absolutely perfect and righteous, for past history gives a vivid account of what happens when unlimited power is put into failing human hands. 'All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely' is a dictum that cannot be gainsaid. Democracy is the safest and best form of *human* rule to minimise this, but it certainly cannot prevent corruption from occurring and ruining the realm over which human rule is exercised.

There is no doubt whatsoever that God's rule is that of a supreme king and therefore His kingdom can be designated as theocratic. G. N. H. Peters, in his great work, *The Theocratic Kingdom* (1:216) says:

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'The Theocracy is a government of the state by the immediate direction of God. Jehovah condescended to rule over Israel in the same direct manner in which an earthly king reigns over his people ... with wisdom worthy of Himself, He assumed not merely a religious, but a political superiority, over the descendants of Abraham. He constituted Himself, in the strictest sense of the phrase, King of Israel and the government of Israel became, in consequence, strictly and literally, a Theocracy'.

While we recognise this, we must never forget that this rule, stated above, is often carried out through created beings and we shall find this right throughout the Bible as it unfolds the purpose of God.

Adam was placed by the Creator as head and ruler of the earth. Had he not sinned and passed the 'virus' of sin and its consequence, death, to the whole human race, mankind, in its perfection, would have been an outward manifestation of the kingdom of God. Upon the failure of our first parents, they were deposed from the exalted position they had been given and because of this, the door was thrown open wide to the activity of the great enemy of God, namely Satan, who had already ruined the heavenly regions by *his* fall involving, as far as we can judge, many of the angels. From this point onwards, the stupendous battle of the ages commenced which tremendously complicated the outworking of God's will for heaven and earth. This meant nothing less than the need for the complete eradication *righteously*, of both sin and death, for God's perfect kingdom is impossible of attainment until these enemies to His purpose are removed, and only God Himself could undertake so mighty a task.

There was no created being in heaven or earth who could successfully assume such a responsibility. The action of God then was primarily *redemptive*, and this necessarily underlies the whole conception of God's kingdom in earth and heaven and it therefore permeates the whole of the Word of God. To miss this, is to miss everything and to end up by concocting unattainable dreams which finally lead to hopeless despair.

The first startling evidence of Satan's bitter animosity to God and the redemptive plan that spells out his utter defeat (Gen. 3:14,15), was in the first born son of Adam and Eve. In Genesis 4:1 Eve says 'I have gotten a man from the Lord' or more literally 'I have gotten a man, the Lord' (i.e. Jehovah). She evidently thought that God's promise of a seed that would crush the serpent (Satan) was now realised, but the New Testament reveals that Cain, her first born, was 'of (ek) the devil' (1 John 3:12). Here is a deep mystery which is not explained, but there is no doubt that the Word of God clearly teaches that there are two seeds on the earth, one of God and one of the Deceiver (compare 'thy seed' and 'her seed' in Genesis 3:15 and note the parable of the tares and the wheat and the Lord's interpretation of it (Matt. 13:24-30; 36-42).

The obvious aim of Satan was to corrupt the true seed so that the divine promise of Genesis 3 would be ruined and the birth of Christ impossible of fulfilment. Satan would then be triumphant. The early chapters of Genesis record the fact that this nearly succeeded. Only one man and his family were free of the evil one's contamination (Gen. 6:9) and the violence and wickedness that filled the earth (Gen. 6:5,11-13) was so great that there was only one thing left to do by God and that was to destroy the perverted seed and commence afresh with Noah and his family. It was like cutting out a gigantic cancer and making a new beginning.

From Noah's time onwards government was clearly placed in the hands of man again by God:

'And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (fill) the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; *into your hand are they delivered*' (Gen. 9:1,2).

Noah was, as it were, a second Adam and picks up the kingdom theme once more. In his rule, man must now take account of human life. This life was given by God and belongs to Him and therefore man is warned that he is answerable to God for it:

'... and for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man' (Gen. 9:5 N.I.V.).

Nothing less than the death penalty is now prescribed by God (verse 6) for murder and the reason given is that murder *blots out the image of God*. It was in this image that Adam had been created (Gen. 1:26). Men today imagine they are progressing by abolishing the death penalty. In their ignorance, this command of God is often

thought of as barbaric and part of the Mosaic law which is obsolete today. Actually it was given centuries before Moses and Israel came into existence and was a regulation to *all* humanity, not just one nation.

In trying to improve on God's command, men only play into the hands of Satan, who, in Christ's words, was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44).

We set out the correspondencies between Adam and Noah:

<i>ADAM</i>	<i>NOAH</i>
'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (fill) the earth' (Gen. 1:28)	'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (fill) the earth' (Gen. 9:1)
Possible judgment in the background (Gen. 1:2)	Judgment in the background the Flood (Gen. 6:7)
'Let the dry land appear' (Gen. 1:9)	'The ground was dry' (Gen. 8:13)
Have dominion and subdue it (the earth) (Gen. 1:28)	Fear and dread of the animal world (Gen. 9:2)
The image of God (Gen. 1:27)	The image of God (Gen. 9:6)
Three sons (Gen. 4:1,2,25)	Three sons (Gen. 10:1)
Nakedness covered (Gen. 3:7,21)	Nakedness covered (Gen. 9:22,23)
Cain cursed (Gen. 4:11)	Canaan cursed (Gen. 9:25)
The ground cursed (Gen. 3:17)	The ground no more cursed (Gen. 8:21)

After the flood there was evidently another irruption of fallen angels (Gen. 6:4 and note 'after that'), but this was not on the same scale as before. Later on we shall read of the giant Goliath who opposed David, and of Og, king of Bashan, whose bedstead in equivalent modern terms was approximately 18 ft. long and 8 ft. wide! Satan, however, did not depend on this alone to defeat God and His plan for the establishment of His kingdom on earth. Being vanquished along these lines, he started a religious system at Babel, headed by Nimrod, the mighty hero and hunter, a descendant of Ham. It is significant that the first mention of a kingdom in the Bible is that of Nimrod (Gen. 10:10). Here was Satan's answer to the kingdom of God. The great Satanic system of false religion and worship began at this point, sometimes dipping underground as in the heathen mysteries with their darkness and immorality, but finally coming out into the open at the end of this age in 'Babylon the great' described in Revelation 17 and 18 as the 'mother (source) of harlots and abominations of the earth' (17:5).

All the ancient religions were derived from Babel, in which we can see truth that has been utterly distorted by the great deceiver. The key figures were Nimrod and his wife Semiramis, who, when deified, became the central figures in the various religions of the pagan world. All have the travesty of the 'mother and son' in one form or another whether it was Egypt (Isis and Osiris), India (Isi and Iswara), Asia (Cybele and Deoious), Greece (Ceres, mother and babe), Rome (Fortuna and Jupiter), and China (Shing Moo, with her child in her arms). Papal Rome has the Madonna and Child, not realising what she is perpetuating. Greek and Roman mythology spread the darkness still further with its heroes and gods under various names derived originally from Nimrod and Semiramis. The whole was the Satanic travesty of the Seed of the woman in Genesis 1. Nor are we free from its deadly effects today, for it has entered Christendom in all sorts of ways. The reader may be surprised to know that hot cross buns and Easter eggs are primarily pagan in origin, originating from the heathen rites of Babylon. (For further details the reader is referred to *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop). In Jeremiah 7:18 we have apostate Israelites offering cakes in worship to the 'queen of heaven', probably the fertility goddess Ishtar who was identified with Venus, another form of Semiramis (see also Jer. 44:17,19).

We can now well understand why Jehovah separated Israel from the nations around who were steeped in idolatry and immorality. When Israel got involved with the surrounding paganism, the inevitable happened and the nation became contaminated with these things, thus playing into the hands of Satan, and in this way working diametrically against God's kingdom purposes.

The activities of the evil one are extended further in the false unity that was engineered at Babel and recorded in Genesis 11. Verse 1 tells us that 'the whole earth was of *one language* and *of one speech*'. The building of the city and tower was with the object '... lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth' (verse 4). Unity was essential if Satan was going to get control of the human race and dominate to the ends of the earth and this was foreseen by the Lord:

'And the LORD (Jehovah) said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now *nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do*' (verse 6).

To foil the enemy, there was no need to destroy the race as before. All God needed to do to break this false unity was to confound their speech so that they could not understand one another. Language can be the greatest of barriers between people and this is what resulted from the Lord's action:

'So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city' (verse 8).

It is interesting to remember that much later on, during the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles, God did the opposite and removed the hindrance of foreign language by the miraculous gift of tongues (Acts 2:7-12) thus speeding up the spreading of the gospel over the civilised earth.

Those who can discern 'the signs of the times' (Matt. 16:1-3) must see the fact that, in a similar way today, the world is being formed into one great unity or federation and the condition of Babel is being repeated. The many mergers that we see happening everywhere and concentrations of power into fewer and fewer hands, can only lead to this. The great money power that, behind the scenes, is running the present world system, is largely operated by those with great influence who may be described as 'one-worlders', that is, they are aiming at nothing less than a world federation which means the lowering of the nations of the west and the lifting up of the 'third world'. Much that is happening today which is puzzling, begins to make sense once this is perceived. Satan is attempting to do once again what he did with the nations at Babel to unite them so that, at the right moment, his representative, the Antichrist, can be brought upon the scene and take control of the whole earth. We shall be dealing with this later on when we trace the kingdom theme in prophecy.

Abraham and his posterity in the kingdom of God

Coming along further to the time of the patriarchs, we find God narrowing His kingdom purpose down to one man and his posterity, namely Abraham. The Lord planned to educate and train his posterity in His truth so that they could be the channel, spreading the knowledge of His kingdom and Himself as Redeemer and King, over the whole earth. So important is this in the purpose of God that He makes it sure and certain by bringing in an unconditional covenant or promise to Abraham and to this close attention must now be given.

The Abrahamic Covenant concerning the Seed and the Land

Covenants in the Scriptures are of two kinds (1) conditional and (2) unconditional. The Mosaic covenant of Law is an illustration of the former, whereas the covenant with Abraham concerning his *seed* and the *land* which was to be the inheritance of the seed, illustrates the latter and is really a divine unconditional *promise*, depending on the holy and almighty character of God Himself for its fulfilment and not on the recipient. It is as well to remind ourselves that covenants, as part of holy Scripture, must be interpreted in the same way as the Scriptures as a whole, using the grammatical-historical method we have discussed. They must therefore be primarily interpreted *literally*, no matter what spiritual blessings accompany them.

G.N.H. Peters states the point well when he says:

'In all earthly transactions, when a promise, agreement, or contract is entered into by which one party gives a promise of value to another, it is *universally* the custom to explain such a relationship and its promises *by the well known laws of language* contained in our grammars, or in common usage. It would be regarded as absurd and trifling to view them in any other light ... the very nature of a covenant demands that it should be so worded, so plainly expressed, that it conveys *a decisive meaning*, and not a hidden or mystical one that requires many centuries to revolve in order to develop' (*The Theocratic Kingdom 1:290-91*).

The next point to note is that the unconditional covenants of the Bible are *eternal*. The one we are considering concerning God's promise to Abraham, his posterity and their earthly inheritance is declared to be eternal in Genesis 17:7,13,19; 1 Chronicles 16:17; Psalm 105:10; Ezekiel 16:60. God's covenant with David and his throne is called 'eternal' in 2 Samuel 23:5; Isaiah 55:3; Ezekiel 37:25-28. The New Covenant is designated as 'eternal' in Isaiah 61:8; Jeremiah 32:40; Hebrews 13:20. As these covenants are eternal and depend solely on the integrity of God for their fulfilment, they are sure and certain.

It is important to note that *all* the covenants of the Word of God are made with the *people of Israel*, with one exception, the covenant made with Noah and all mankind centuries before Israel came into existence (Gen. 9:8-17). In Romans 9:3-5 the apostle Paul asserts:

'... my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: *who are Israelites*; to whom pertaineth the adoption (sonship), 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 of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever'.

As opposed to this, he states in Ephesians 2:11,12 that the Gentiles were 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and *strangers from the covenants of promise*'. One of the unique things about the nation of Israel therefore is that they were in a *covenant relationship with God* which has never been true of any other nation. This relationship permeates the whole Bible and the programme of God for the earth is incomprehensible without it.

So basic is the unconditional covenant made with Abraham, that it demands *resurrection* in order that its promises may be fulfilled to many of Israel who have died. In Matthew 22:23-32 the argument of the Lord Jesus with the Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection, concerned God Who said 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead but of *the living*'. And this He said 'touching the *resurrection of the dead*' (verses 29-32).

The Lord had entered into eternal covenant relationships with these men who 'died, *not* having received the promises' (Heb. 11:13), and as Stephen said in Acts 7:5 'He (God) gave him (Abraham) *none inheritance in it, not so much as to set his foot on*: yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child'. God can never break His word; therefore He must raise them from the dead in order to fulfil it completely (Matt. 8:11).

Initially the Abrahamic covenant was stated by God in this way:

'Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed' (Gen. 12:1-3).

Here is a sevenfold 'I will' on God's part. Verse 7 tells us that this posterity was to have an *earthly inheritance*. This was expanded by God in Genesis 13:14-17:

'... Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for *all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever*. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee'.

This unconditional promise is impossible to spiritualise for it concerned the literal land which Abraham 'saw' and in which he could 'walk in the length of it and in the breadth of it'. In chapter 15 the promise concerning the land was

widened and Abraham was put into a 'deep sleep' (verse 12) so that he could have no personal responsibility for its fulfilment:

'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 (the Nile) unto the great river, the river Euphrates' (Gen. 15:18).

Later on in chapter 17:1-8, God repeats His covenant, saying:

'... a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between *Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant*, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God'.

And after Abraham's faithful response to the great test of God to sacrifice Isaac, the Lord repeats:

'... because thou hast ... not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed My voice' (Gen. 22:16-18).

It is evident that these eternal unconditional promises cover a great range which may be summarised thus:

- (1) Abraham's name shall be great.
- (2) A great nation would come from him.
- (3) To him personally would he given two portions of land, one greater in extent than the other: (a) the land of Canaan (modern Palestine) and (b) a large stretch of land from the Nile right across to the Euphrates.
- (4) His posterity would be so numerous as to be like the stars of heaven or the sand of the sea shore.
- (5) That whosoever blessed him would be blessed and whoever cursed him would be cursed.
- (6) He would be the father not just of one, but many nations. (7) Kings would proceed from him.
- (8) The twofold gift of land would be for 'an everlasting possession'.
- (9) God would be a God to him and his seed.
- (10) The covenant would be 'an everlasting covenant'.
- (11) His posterity would possess the gate of his enemies.
- (12) In his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.

The range of these divine promises is wide indeed and we do well to keep in memory that a covenant is a pledge between *two parties* and may not be widened to suit human theories and ideas. The two parties are clearly (1) God and (2) Abraham and his posterity, the children of Israel.

Having carefully noticed the extent of God's unconditional promise to Abraham concerning his *seed* and the *land* they were destined to inherit, the next thing to realise is that the Lord repeated the same promise to Isaac and to Jacob which makes it even more emphatic. First to Isaac:

'And the LORD appeared unto him (Isaac), and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land that I shall tell thee of: sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and *unto thy seed, I will give all these countries*, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; and I will make *thy seed* to multiply as the stars of heaven, and *will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*' (Gen. 26:2-4).

Then to Jacob:

'Isaac called Jacob ... and said ... God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a *multitude of people* (thy seed); and give thee ... *the land*, wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham' (Gen. 28:1-4).

`... the LORD stood above it (the heavenly ladder), and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: *the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed*; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: *and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed*' (Gen. 28:13-14).

It will be seen that the original promise given to Abraham is intact and there are no conditions added. Both the seed and the land had a twofold element.

The amillennialist who denies the literal fulfilment of these promises makes much of a passage in Galatians 3:16:

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

It is represented from this that all Jehovah had in view in connection with the promises made to the patriarchs was the Person of Christ Himself, who descended from the literal seed of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). But those who assert this do not read far enough, for in the last verse of the chapter Paul writes:

`And if ye be Christ's, *then are ye Abraham's seed*, and heirs according to the promise' (Gal. 3:29).

Without any argument this must relate to the Galatian churches who are described as the *seed of Abraham* so there must be a twofold aspect to this seed which this chapter describes. Moreover, this is confirmed when we turn to the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul is recalling such a verse as Genesis 21:12, `In Isaac shall thy seed be called'. Here the Hebrew *zera*, seed, is a collective noun and is used in a singular sense with a singular verb. But in Genesis 17:7, the same word is used in a plural sense:

`And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed (*zera*) after thee *in their generations* for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to *thy seed* after thee'.

It is quite obvious that here the seed cannot be *singular*; it must be *plural*, therefore to base any doctrine on either the singular or plural of this word `seed' by itself is to get only half the truth. This can only lead to a distorted picture in our minds.

The same thing must be said about the gift of the *land*. It was a twofold gift. According to Genesis 13:14-17 and 17:8 the gift related to *Canaan*, the modern Palestine. But in Genesis 15:18 a much wider piece of land is envisaged, namely from the `river of Egypt (the Nile) unto the great river, the river Euphrates'.

By no stretch of imagination can these portions of the globe be identical and one is just as much a gift of God as the other.

Those who spiritualise and oppose the historical-grammatical system of interpretation, maintain that the gift of literal land was either fulfilled under Joshua or under Solomon. Let us examine this and see.

In Joshua 21:43-45 we have the following:

`And the LORD gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein ... There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass'.

At a first glance this looks conclusive; all came to pass that God had promised concerning the land, but in view of what we have just seen we should ask, which land? Was it Canaan, or the much larger piece of land stretching over modern Saudi Arabia, and Iraq to the Euphrates? There can be no doubt that it was the former. The rest that Joshua 21:44 refers to resulted from the conquests of Joshua *in Canaan*, but we have yet to meet anyone who asserts that Joshua conducted a campaign in the region of the Euphrates. This passage in the book of Joshua relates solely to the gift of Canaan, leaving the rest to be fulfilled in the future (see Exod. 6:4; 1 Chron. 16:15-18).

As regards Solomon's reign, we are told in 1 Kings 4:21 and 2 Chronicles 9:26 that his dominion extended from the river (Euphrates) to the land of the Philistines and to the *border* of Egypt. This is not the same as to the river Nile as God promised, nor did Israel ever dwell in such a large portion of land. We are specifically told that `Judah and Israel *dwelt safely*, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from *Dan even to Beersheba*, all the days of Solomon' (1 Kings 4:25). Dan and Beersheba were the extreme north and south of *Canaan* which was only a

portion of the land promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:17, 18, but Solomon's suzerainty extended much further eastwards. The prophecies concerning the land constantly affirm that Israel will inhabit *all of it*, not just a small portion like Canaan. In no sense then can either the conditions in Joshua's day or in Solomon's fulfil the original promise given by God to Abraham. This looks forward to the future and can only be completely fulfilled at the second Advent of Christ.

Isaiah 19:23-25 is a remarkable prophecy:

‘In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a *blessing* in the midst of the land: whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be *Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance*’.

This has never been fulfilled in past history. The area covered is the larger portion of land delineated in Genesis 15 and therefore it will be at *this time* that God will have fulfilled to the letter His gracious promise to Abraham concerning a *home* for his seed for ever. In the light of contemporary happenings in the Middle East this prophetic foreview is more than interesting. It is stupendous and proves that we are dealing with a God Whose word will not return to Him void, but most certainly will accomplish that which He pleases and prosper in the thing concerning which He sends it (Isa. 55:11).

It is important to grasp the fact that God's covenant with Israel respecting the land is one of grace and does not depend upon the faithfulness or obedience of the nation. In Deuteronomy 30:1-9 we have an amplification of this covenant as it relates to Canaan. In his foreknowledge, God knew that in the history of this people there would be sin and backsliding for which He would have to discipline them. In spite of this, His unconditional covenant would stand:

‘And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee: and the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it ... and the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. And the LORD thy God will put all these curses upon thy enemies ... And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the LORD, and do all His commandments which I command thee this day. And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous ... for the LORD will again rejoice over thee for good’.

Portions of the covenant have already been fulfilled literally. Israel has experienced various dispersions in judgment for their disobedience but also restorations, yet this remarkable prophecy looks to the second Advent of Christ for its complete fulfilment which likewise will be literal. The Lord will certainly come (verses 3-6) and Israel will look on Him Whom they pierced (Zech. 12:9-11) and be converted as a nation (Rom. 11:26,27). They will be restored to their land from the four quarters of the earth and their enemies will be judged. There is only one conditional element, but this only relates to the *time* of its complete fulfilment, ‘when ... then’ (verses 1-3). This depends upon the salvation and conversion of the nation which is dealt with in Romans 11 assuring that ‘the *gifts and calling* of God are *without repentance* (change of mind on His part, verse 29). This was also the expectation of the Old Testament prophets who enlarge upon this great theme and we shall deal with it later on.

We have seen that all the Scriptural covenants, with the exception of the early covenant with Noah and the whole human race, belong to Israel (Rom. 9:3-5). Having considered the one relating to the *seed* and the *land*, the next in importance is the Davidic covenant relating to the *throne*. This is an expansion of the divine promise concerning the seed:

‘And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy *seed* after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish *his kingdom*’ (2 Sam. 7:12).

'I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy *seed* will I establish for *ever*, and build up *thy throne* to all generations' (Psa. 89:3,4).

'As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the *seed* of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto Me.

Thus saith the LORD; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; then will I cast away the *seed* of Jacob, and David my servant' (Jer. 33:22,25,26).

The important thing to notice is that like the Abrahamic covenant, this one is 'for ever' and it is also unconditional. This must mean that the kingdom or rule over Israel, will never be taken from David's posterity, in spite of interruptions or chastisement for failure. In Psalm 89, the Lord's words are definite:

'My covenant will *I not break, nor alter the things that is gone out of my lips*. Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His *seed* shall endure for ever, and his *throne* as the sun before Me' (verses 34-37).

The promise is further confirmed in the following Scriptures which should be read and noticed by the student of the Word: Isaiah 9:6,7; Jeremiah 23:5,6; 30:14-17,20,21; Ezekiel 37:21-28; Hosea 3:4,5; Amos 9:11.

In connection with God's unconditional promise to David of a seed who should occupy his throne for ever, we must note one thing. God did not guarantee that any of David's posterity would occupy that throne *continuously*. There would be breaks, and history has shown this, but David's line *will never be lost*. This does not depend upon man with all his limitations of knowledge, but on the unchanging Word, and the almighty power and purpose of God.

The amillennialist spiritualises and asserts that Christ's present session in heaven fulfils this covenant with David. But Scripture makes perfectly clear that during this age the Lord Jesus Christ is seated *on the Father's throne in heaven* and by no stretch of imagination can this refer to the throne of David on earth.

G.N.H. Peters writes:

'No sophistry in spiritualising, symbolising, or typicalising can transmute the promise of the Davidic throne and kingdom into something else, as e.g., into the Father's throne, the divine sovereignty, the kingdom of grace, Gospel dispensation etc., for the simple reason that the identical throne and kingdom, now overturned, is the one that is promised to Messiah to be re-established by Himself (Amos 9:11; Acts 15:16; Zech. 1:16,17 and 2:12, etc.).

The theocratic crown cast down, the theocratic throne overturned, the theocratic kingdom overthrown, is the crown throne, the kingdom that Christ is to restore ... These, too, are linked with the restoration of the Jewish nation (Jer. 33:14; Micah 4:6,8). These facts - the existence of the throne at one time, its non-existence for a period, its restoration again, its connection at the restoration with the ancient people and land that formed the original kingdom ... indicate as fully as language can possibly express it, that the ancient faith in covenanted language must not be discarded' *The Theocratic Kingdom* 1:347.

There can be no doubt, if words have any meaning at all, that the present reign of Christ in heaven simply does not fulfil the specific promises of the Davidic covenant. What the words of the covenant do mean is that the Lord Jesus will return to the earth in power and glory to abolish the kingdom of Satan expressed in the Gentile dominion of the world and then to set up the precise righteous rule that has been promised by God. This will be a visible external kingdom, not wholly spiritual, though embracing and resting upon spiritual truths as a foundation. Both these features are necessary to fulfil the language of promise, and as we have stressed before, this kingdom will be eternal for God determines that it shall be 'for ever'.

The Relationship of the Earthly Kingdom to the Mosaic Law

We have seen how God uses representatives or mediators to carry out His kingdom purposes. These may be individuals or even nations. God said to Moses in respect to his relationship to Aaron 'Thou shalt be to him instead of God' (Exod. 4:16) and concerning his relationship to Pharaoh 'I have made thee a god to Pharaoh' (Exod. 7:1). But the whole nation of Israel was appointed by the Lord with the one object of being mediatorial, taking a

knowledge of Himself and His truth to the ends of the earth, so fulfilling the promise to Abraham, 'and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed' (Gen. 12:3; 26:4; 28:13,14).

God raised up Moses as their leader and ruler and could say of the coming Ruler, 'I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren *like unto thee*' (Deut. 18:18). Stephen in his speech recorded in Acts 7 describes Moses as a 'ruler (*archon*, prince) and deliverer', so the kingdom concept is maintained. In Exodus 19 we have a further elaboration of the kingdom purpose by God as it touched the people of Israel:

'And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. 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' (verses 3-6).

There is here a startling difference to what we have seen before in the revelation of the kingdom purposes of God up till now, all have been unconditional, resting upon the word and the grace of God alone. Now, for the first time, we have a covenant that *is* conditional, 'if ye will obey My voice indeed', and we know very well that this is the one thing that Israel did not do. In spite of their promise to the Lord, 'all that the Lord has said will we do and be obedient' (Exod. 24:7), their record is one of continual rebellion and disobedience.

We have now a real problem and might well ask, as Israel has miserably failed to keep God's conditions for them to be a 'kingdom of priests', has the great kingdom plan of God foundered? It would seem on the surface that this must be so, but the Lord's great purpose for world salvation and blessing does not rest on anything so frail as human power, determination or obedience.

There is yet another divine covenant made with the same earthly people, as unconditional as those covenants made with Abraham and David, and it is one of sheer grace. The Mosaic covenant is designated as the 'old covenant'. It is obviously one of works and merit, but God's remedy for Israel's failure is *the New Covenant made known in Jeremiah 31* and this gloriously supercedes the old one. Not that there was anything intrinsically wrong with the old covenant of law. It was a revelation of God's holiness but it gave no power to attain to it. 'It was holy, just and good' (Rom. 7:12), giving a perfect standard of thought and conduct towards God and man, expressed in the word 'love'. But sinful human nature could never reach this high standard. The law was weak 'on account of the flesh' (Rom. 8:3), and because of this it could never give righteousness, inheritance or life (Gal. 2:21; 3:18,21). What it did do was to show up sin in its true colours. The Apostle Paul said 'I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet' (Rom. 7:7).

It is evident then that neither Israel nor any other human beings can become participants in God's great redemptive plan on the basis of their own efforts or merit. The law given through Moses has one object to shut us all up to Christ and what His glorious redemptive work has achieved (Gal. 3:24). This was the lesson Israel never learned in the past but will do so in the future when the New Covenant of grace is put into operation at the Lord's Second Advent:

'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 (Israel): *for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins* ... For the gifts and calling of God are *without repentance (change of mind)*' (Rom. 11:26-29).

Let us look at the first occurrence of this covenant of grace. It is placed in a context of the re-gathering of Israel to the land:

'Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make *a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah*: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother,

saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:31-34).

To make this even more impressive, the Lord appeals to the ordinances of the sun and moon and says:

`If those ordinances depart from before Me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever. Thus saith the **LORD**; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD' (Jer. 31:36,37).

This is repeated in Jeremiah 33:25,26. If we summarise it, we find the following:

- (1) The covenant is between two parties, Jehovah on the one hand and on the other the houses of Israel and Judah. It is therefore a *national* covenant. Both old and new covenants must refer to the literal Israel for God speaks of the old covenant of law made with them and with their exodus from Egypt.
- (2) The New Covenant is unconditional, a covenant of grace resting upon the repeated 'I wills' of God.
- (3) It is an everlasting covenant like the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Ezek. 37:25-28; Jer. 31:35-37).
- (4) The New Covenant promises the impartation of a *new mind and heart* by God which is equivalent to regeneration, God Himself writing His law within them (Isa. 59:20, 21; Ezek. 36:24-29).
- (5) Forgiveness of sin is included in the covenant and the important passage in Romans 11:25-29 already quoted must not be forgotten. Other blessings both spiritual and temporal flow from this covenant of grace with Israel.

There are differences of opinion as to whether this covenant can apply in this present age to a wider company than Israel and Judah. It is certain that the basis upon which this covenant rests is the shed blood of the Lord Jesus at the Passover supper, for he says:

`... for this is My blood of the new testament (covenant), which is shed for many for the remission (forgiveness) of sins' (Matt. 26:28).

As the one offering of Christ on the cross is the basis for the salvation of the believer today, it is concluded by many that the New Covenant must apply to the church, the Body of Christ. How do they get round the fact that it is made *with literal Israel* and not with the church? Here is how E. W. Grant does it:

`It will be asked how, according to this, the New Covenant applies to all of us? Other Scriptures answer this by assuring us that if we have not the Covenant *made* with us, it can yet in all the blessings of which it speaks, be *ministered* to us' *The Numerical Bible* vii, 48.

This is ingenious, but even if it was true, it could not be done without spiritualising. What these people do not realise is that God is not forced to limit the forgiveness of sins, resting in the shed blood of Christ, to a *covenant basis of any kind*. The infinite blessings from Calvary can flow out to all who put their trust in the Lord Jesus irrespective of whether they are Jews or Gentiles, in covenant with God or not. This Ephesians makes perfectly clear:

`... In Whom (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace; wherein He hath abounded (overflowed) toward us ... ' (Eph. 1:7,8).

Riches of grace beyond our dreams can flow from the offering of Christ 'once for all' (Heb. 10:10-12) and 'exceeding riches of His grace' in the future ages (Eph. 2:4-9) and there is no mention of any covenant here. There is no need whatsoever to trespass upon Israel's national covenant of grace. It can be left where God expressly placed it, that is upon His earthly people.

J. N. Darby saw this clearly:

`This covenant of the letter is made with Israel, not with us ... Israel, not accepting the blessing, God brought out the church and the Mediator of the covenant went on high. We are associated with the Mediator. It will be made good to Israel by and by' *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby* xxvii, 565-566.

While the divine law given through Moses, the 'Old Covenant', from a spiritual and moral aspect was unable to meet the needs of man in his sin and frailty, yet in some aspects it expressed the concept of God's kingdom, especially in the civil sphere. We must not forget that the law embraces the typical foreshadowing of Christ and His redemptive work by sacrifice and offering and the regulations for day to day living as well as the ten commandments. God's wisdom and his constant concern for His earthly people is expressed in many ways. To begin with the priests and Levites were not allowed to own property or pile up material gain. The Lord's command to them was 'thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them' (Num. 18:20). This obviously prevented the development of a rich priestly caste which would have power over the people. Consequently they had no civil authority whatsoever. In place of this God said, 'I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel' (18:20) and as He was and is the owner of all, what could they lack? Their material support came from tithes and offerings from the nation as a whole, who received inheritances in the land (Num. 18:21-32).

Originally the Lord saw to it that, when Israel was freed at the Exodus, they did not come out penniless. The Israelites 'asked' (not 'borrowed' as the A.V. wrongly translates) and the Lord gave them 'favour in the sight of the Egyptians' who then allowed them great quantities of gold and silver as they were leaving. The Egyptians were doubtless only too glad to see them depart because of the terrible judgment of the plagues (Exod. 11:2,3; 12:35,36). On top of this, when they reached Canaan, 'a land flowing with milk and honey', each man had his inheritance with the rich produce that it yielded.

The important thing to note here was that under the Lord's directions *no inheritance could be lost*. And if God's kingdom is to be eternal this must be so even in type and shadow. A measure of freedom was given to the human owner. He could farm it, rent it, mortgage it, but *never could he permanently surrender the original title*. God said, 'the land shall not be sold for ever, *for the land is Mine*' (Lev. 25:23).

If any one became impoverished, the Mosaic law required that assistance must be given by those who were able, 'For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore ... thou shalt open thy hand *wide* unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land' (Deut. 15:11). But the greatest safeguard against permanent impoverishment was the law of the Jubilee. This remarkable and novel law directed that at the end of seven Sabbaths of years (49 years) the fiftieth year should be hallowed and liberty proclaimed to all. Every slave was freed, and all debts incurred in connection with real property were cancelled. Every man could freely reclaim his original allotment of land. Thus it was impossible for the burdens of one generation to be handed down and borne by succeeding ones. It should be carefully noted however, that there was no communistic principle involved in this or any confiscation of private property for indiscriminate public distribution. It was simply the restoration of all property to its original private owners. The jubilee only guaranteed a fresh start, not economic security irrespective of human folly.

Once this new condition was achieved, the results of normal human conduct followed. The lazy man could lose his land and liberty as easily as he had regained them. God never puts a premium on laziness or foolishness. On the other hand, the diligent man would prosper. This is the inevitable result of freedom of action. No perfect way has ever been found to reconcile personal liberty with complete equality, the reason being that the root of the problem lies in man himself and his sinful nature, and until this can be completely eradicated, such equality is only a dream.

It is because of this that socialistic and communistic plans have failed in the past and will always do so in the future. It is impossible for man to strike a proper balance between economic liberty and economic security. The only One Who can do this is the King of kings and when His kingdom and rule become paramount over the earth such problems will vanish, for He will deal with man's sin and failing first and then regulate external conditions afterwards in perfect justice.

Before the arrival of the Jubilee year there was hope for the man who had lost his original estate whether by misfortune or foolishness. A near kinsman could exercise the right to redeem the lost property by paying a fair price computed on the basis of the average income from the land remaining before the Jubilee year. If the man was without such relatives, he could redeem himself when he had accumulated sufficient resources (Lev. 25: 24-28). This was true also of bond-service (verses 39-54).

There were other means by which the poor were helped. When the crops were being harvested, a portion of the grapes or grain was to be left so that those in need could glean them for themselves. Furthermore if money was

loaned to them, no interest could be charged (Lev. 25:35-37), nor could the creditor hold as security any property that was essential to the borrower (Exod. 22:25-27). Another source of assistance occurred every seventh year which was a 'Sabbath' for the soil, giving it rest enabling it to 'recharge' itself. What grew 'of its own accord' was not to be gathered by the owner, but left specially for the poor and even the animals of the field.

The Word of God makes it quite clear throughout that the Lord is deeply concerned for the fatherless, the widow and the poor generally. Moreover the kingdom of God on earth stressed the material well-being of its subjects in many other ways 'That it may go well with thee' is a phrase that occurs a number of times and is invariably associated with physical benefits as in Deuteronomy 4:40, 'that thou mayest *prolong thy days upon the earth*', which makes it quite clear that this cannot refer to any future spiritual blessing in heaven.

God promised Israel exceptional fruitfulness from their fields and the increase of their flocks of cattle. For the land was one which 'the Lord thy God careth for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year, even unto the end of the year' (Deut. 11:12). 'There shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle' (Deut. 7:13,14), and such blessings have been an experience unknown in any other nation. Even when Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness through their unbelief and disobedience, God still provided for all their needs in the miraculous gift day by day of the manna from heaven (Exod. 16:35). Nor did it cease until they actually entered the promised land (Josh. 5:12). Water was also provided miraculously (Exod. 15:23-25). During this long period in a desert when it would have been impossible to replace clothing, the Lord miraculously saw to it that neither their clothing or shoes wore out for 40 years (Deut. 8:4; 29:3-5). Nehemiah later on wrote that during the wilderness journey, Israel lacked nothing (Neh. 9:21).

Another extremely important matter was the question of health and this was all the more pressing when travelling in adverse conditions through a hot desert. The nation had not moved more than three days through this territory before God promised 'I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord Who healeth thee' (Exod. 15:26). Later at Mount Sinai the Lord said, 'I will take sickness away from the midst of thee' (Exod. 23:25) and subsequently, when the people came to the borders of the promised land, the promise was repeated, 'the Lord will take away from thee all sickness' (Deut. 7:15).

This being so, it can be understood that, being protected from the ravages of disease the span of life could be lengthened and obedience to the law made this certain, 'Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; *that thy days may be prolonged*, and that it may go well with thee, *in the land* which the LORD thy God giveth thee' (Deut. 5:16). It must be emphasised here that 'living' in connection with keeping the law, always referred to *physical life* and never to eternal life after death. In no way did the Old Testament teach that eternal life could be secured by keeping the law or by works or merit of any kind and thus it was *not* contrary to the teaching to be given later in the New Testament on this vital subject. When we realise the importance that God places on health in the outworking of His kingdom on earth we can begin to appreciate why healing took such a prominent place in the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus to Israel when, as He declared, the kingdom was near. This healing ministry continued during the Acts period, through the ministry of the apostles to the same people of Israel who were so closely linked by the Lord in the establishing of His kingdom on earth.

Coming to other matters which affected the lives of God's earthly people, we note as a general principle that the benefits which were divinely conferred on them demanded some effort on the part of man. Thus the manna from heaven had to be gathered daily according to instructions, for the wisdom of God does not encourage laziness. Regarding the productivity of the land 'which flowed with milk and honey' while, as we have seen, this was specially given by the Lord, yet normal care and wisdom had to be exercised, so that its productivity might be maintained.

In their warfare, if it was necessary to force an entrance through gates or walls, no tree that produced food was allowed to be cut down (Deut. 20:19,20). In hunting birds, only the young could be taken from the nest, the mother must always be spared (Deut. 22:6,7). This ensured the perpetuation of the species, and as we have seen before, the land must lay fallow for one year out of every seven for its regeneration and future fertility (Lev. 25:4).

In other respects the matchless wisdom of God is seen operating for the well-being of His earthly kingdom and the subjects of it. Specially relating to *rest and relaxation* were laws given so that physical and mental health would be constantly enjoyed. God's promise of freedom from disease was nevertheless to be accompanied by wise living.

The people of Israel were to rest one day in seven and one year in seven (Lev. 23 and 25). In addition to this there were special Sabbaths, feasts and convocations which ensured that physical strain was always avoidable. The rush and strain of modern days was impossible under the law of God.

Not only was adequate rest and change given, but the laws of *sanitation* were most comprehensive and even superior to our modern ideas. There were constant injunctions for the priest to wash himself and his clothes (e.g. Num. 19:5-8). When Israel went to war there were strict regulations concerning latrine disposal (Deut. 23:9-14).

Here is a testimony of a Christian doctor:

'Water-borne and fly-borne diseases, such as dysentery and enteric fever, have been the scourge of armies in the field even more than of stationary populations. In the South African War the loss of life from these diseases was greater than from wounds. It was not until the Great War of 1914-18 that effectual precautions were put into practice. Yet all through the centuries the remedy was at hand if the generals had troubled to read their Bibles, and observe the directions given for the disposal of excreta by burial' (*Modern Discovery and the Bible* p. 122 by Dr. A. Rendle Short).

With regard to the eating of meat, certain offerings were to be eaten on the day they were sacrificed. In other offerings the meat could be eaten the second day, but after this it must be burned (Lev. 7:15-18; 19:5-7). This was essential in a hot climate where meat would putrefy rapidly.

Coming into a tent where there was a dead body rendered the person unclean for a week and every *uncovered vessel* in the tent was likewise unclean. Touching a dead body had the same effect and the remedy was the ashes of a burnt heifer plus *running water* (not stagnant water in a vessel), and this was applied on the third and seventh days and in addition the unclean person must wash both his clothes and his person (Num. 19:14-21) on the seventh day. Modern laws of hygiene are not stricter than this!

Thus, in many ways, some of which have been mentioned here, the wonderful wisdom of God the Ruler, legislated for the joy and well-being of His earthly subjects.

In the law of God given through Moses, a divine expression was given of His earthly kingdom, first of all from the spiritual side reflected in the ten commandments, then in the sacrificial law which dealt with sin resulting from infringement of that law. This section of the Mosaic law was highly prophetic, for it declared in type and shadow that 'without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (remission)' (Heb. 9:22). Death resulted from sin entering the world (Rom. 5:12) and this penalty must be borne if ever there was to be forgiveness and sins cancelled and put away. There was no intrinsic value in the sacrifice of any animal, for 'it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins' (Heb. 10:4). Their only value was in the prophetic foreshadowing of THE 'Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29) by His atoning death on Calvary's cross.

The third section concerned the daily life and health of the people of Israel which we have just considered. Bearing in mind the plan of God to bring in His righteous kingdom all over the earth through human intermediaries, we can now understand why Israel takes such an important role in the Bible. We first of all have the expression of that kingdom in Israel's divine economy with the final intention of their spreading the good news of it over the earth, so that the knowledge of the Lord and His redemption will 'cover the earth as the waters cover the sea'.

It was for this reason alone that God made clear through Moses that Israel was to be the principal nation of the earth. It was certainly not because of any *innate* goodness or ability that they were chosen for this great role. In Exodus 19:5,6 God had said:

'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*'.

We find this reiterated in the book of Deuteronomy:

'... thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and *thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee*' (Deut. 15:6).

`And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be *His peculiar people*, as He hath promised thee ... and to *make thee high above all the nations* which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be *an holy people unto the LORD thy God*, as He hath spoken' (Deut. 26:18,19).

`And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God ... *that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth ...* ' (Deut. 28:1).

`And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and *thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath ...* ' (Deut. 28:13).

There can therefore be no doubt that God's choice of this people was for one great object - to represent Him and His truth and to be His mediators for bringing in His kingdom upon earth, in which righteousness and justice would reign supreme and peace, abiding joy and satisfaction would abound. This also explains why the Jew was *first* in the New Testament both for the gospel and for judgment (Rom. 1:16; 2:9). Because of their unique position in God's sight, in addition to their many blessings, God entrusted to them the holy Scriptures:

`What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? *much every way*: chiefly, because that *unto them were committed the oracles of God*' (Rom. 3:1,2),

and Paul sums up their unique privileges in Romans 9:3-5:

`... my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth *the adoption (sonship), 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 of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever.* Amen'.

The Psalmist in Psalm 147:19,20 concurs:

`He sheweth His Word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel. *He hath not dealt so with any nation*: and as for His judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the LORD'.

We have seen that Israel can never realise their divine goal by their own works or merit. They stand as law-breakers in God's sight. But under the New Covenant of grace, ratified by the Lord Jesus on the Cross, they will attain to all that God intends for them at His Second Coming:

`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 (Israel): For this is My covenant unto them, *when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance (change of mind on His part)*' (Rom. 11:26-29).

The Kingdom shown forth prophetically in the Feasts of the Lord

The seven feasts of Jehovah detailed in Leviticus 23 give a wonderful foreview of the kingdom of God as it affects the earth with Israel as its centre, and the Lord ruling in and through them. Their order is as follows:

(1) The Sabbath	}	
(2) The Passover		
	}	50 days
(3) Unleavened Bread		
(4) Pentecost	}	
Interval		
(5) Trumpets - the first day	}	The
(6) Atonement - the tenth day		seventh
(7) Tabernacles - the fifteenth day	}	month

Israel's religious year spread over the first seven months commencing with Abib (April). It is noteworthy how the number seven is stamped upon the Lord's dealings with His earthly people. That this number has a special significance in the Bible cannot be doubted. It is the number of spiritual perfection and completion and is connected

first of all with creation or renewal in Genesis 1. The work of seven days is described and we do not enter here into the problem whether these are days of 24 hours or longer periods, though it must be pointed out that the periods of seven we are considering are all days of 24 hours, and the reference to the Sabbath and creation in Exodus 20:10,11 also demands this. When we come to the last book in the Bible, Revelation, which deals with the winding up of God's purposes, there are so many sevens that it is possible that not all of them have yet been discovered, if we take into account the occurrence of words and phrases as well.

It is helpful to note how the number seven relates to the economy of Israel in the Old Testament:

- (1) Seven days, ending with the Sabbath.
- (2) Seven weeks leading to Pentecost.
- (3) Seven months completing the nation's religious year.
- (4) Seven years, the seventh being the Sabbath in which the land rested and was not cultivated.
- (5) Seven times seven years brought one to the Jubilee, to which we have already alluded.
- (6) Then there was a span of seventy years captivity for Israel in judgment which was brought about by Nebuchadnezzar with God's permission.
- (7) Lastly we have Daniel's seventy sevens of years which bring to completion God's dealings with Israel.

It is clear that the sabbatical principle underlies God's purpose for Israel. With regard to the feasts of Jehovah, God started with the Sabbath. Experimentally man had to commence with the truth of Passover which wonderfully set forth the real Passover, the offering of the Lamb of God for the sin of the world. As with the type, so with the antitype; He was 'without spot or blemish'. Because of this He needed no Saviour and therefore could be the Saviour of sinners who had this great need.

The word 'Sabbath' comes from a Hebrew word which means to cease, to come to an end, to rest. In Genesis 2:2 we are told that God *rested* on the seventh day, not because He was tired, but because of its typical value in His purpose. In Hebrews 4:9 we read, 'There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God' with the marginal reading for 'rest', 'a keeping of the Sabbath'. It is a translation of the Greek *sabbatismos*.

Now we have seen that the Sabbath day was one of God's wise provisions for adequate physical and mental rest for His people and the Lord Jesus confirmed this when He said 'The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath' (Mark. 2:27). Many consider Sunday to be the sabbath day but one would think the reverse was the truth judging by the way some Christians treat it! God starts with rest and ends with it. When the purpose of the ages is at last reached, the true Sabbath will then dawn, when all tension, problems, and sin are ended and perfect peace and joy reign for eternity.

Because 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23) and this of course included Israel, we must all start experimentally with *Passover*, realising the glorious fact that 'Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us' (1 Cor. 5:7), He bearing the punishment for our sins, by dying in our place and stead. He indeed was 'made sin, (or a sin-offering) for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Cor. 5:21) and trusting Him, and this all-sufficient offering of Himself on the cross, we can have an 'exodus' from bondage just like Israel of old, and enter into freedom, from the slavery of sin and self.

Closely linked with Passover was the feast of unleavened bread which took place *the next day* (Lev. 23:5,6). As leaven in the Bible is always a type of sin and is never used with a good meaning - unleavened bread must typify the opposite, namely righteousness in thought and action and this in experience, is what should immediately follow the glorious deliverance of Passover in the life of the believer. This is what God is teaching by this 'picture', but how lamentably Israel so often failed to express it and how often we, as believers in Christ, do exactly the same! We are certainly not saved *by* good works, but as Ephesians 2:8-10 teaches, we are saved 'unto good works' which should be the outward expression in practice of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Linked with Passover and unleavened bread was 'Firstfruits' (Lev. 23:10,11) and the New Testament clearly interprets this for us:

`But now is Christ *risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits* of them that slept ... *Christ the firstfruits*; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming' (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

Firstfruits set forth resurrection without which the gospel is not complete. We do not worship a dead Christ, but One Who ever lives `to make intercession for us' (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25) Who also said, `because I live, ye shall live also' (John 14:19). Too often Gospel preaching is limited to the cross of Christ, but this is only half of the `good news'.

Fifty days later the feast of Pentecost was ordained for Israel, sometimes called `the Feast of Weeks'. Keeping strictly to interpretation and not application, the significance of this for the nation is shown when the *real* Pentecost occurred which is recorded in Acts 2 under the ministry of Peter, who relates the happenings on this day to the prophecy of Joel (Acts 2:16). This is concerned with the equipment of the faithful among Israel by the Holy Spirit and the giving of evidential miraculous gifts for the proclamation of the gospel, and the kingdom teaching following the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. We shall deal with this more fully when we reach the New Testament.

After the feast of Pentecost, nothing more happened in Israel's religious year until the last month of that year which was the seventh. Then we have the concluding feasts of the Lord, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Harvest-Ingathering closely following one another. The fact that these are related together in time and find their fulfilment in the *last* month, is a sure guide to their interpretation. They must relate to Israel at the *end of the age* and the establishment of the earthly phase of the kingdom of God.

The period in between Pentecost and Trumpets must cover this age, but no revelation is given as to its character. There is certainly no disclosure of the calling of the Body of Christ, which was a `mystery' or secret until revealed to the apostle Paul and then made known through him in Ephesians and Colossians and his prison ministry. In Leviticus 23:22 there is a reference to the `poor and the stranger' in this interval of time, just a slight hint and shadowing forth of those of this age who are by nature Gentiles `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' (Eph. 2:12). They are poor indeed of themselves, but how superbly rich they are in Christ in a calling that reaches to the highest heavens where Christ is now enthroned (Eph. 2:5-7), associated with riches of grace and riches of glory!

The first feast to be celebrated in the seventh month was Trumpets (Lev. 23:24). This foreshadows the re-gathering of Israel at the end of the age to the promised land and the setting up of the kingdom at the return of Christ:

`And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth (or land) mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 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' (Matt. 24:30, 31).

`And the *seventh angel sounded*; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, *The kingdoms of this world* are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever' (Rev. 11:15).

`But in the days of the voice of the *seventh angel*, *when he shall begin to sound, the mystery (secret) of God should be finished*, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets' (Rev. 10:7).

There can be no doubt from these Scriptures that the symbolic sounding of trumpets relates to the commencement of the earthly kingdom and is brought about, not by any Christian activity of itself in this present age, but by the return to the earth of the King of kings and Lord of lords to rule and reign, which is His right.

The Feast of Atonement follows this and sets forth Israel's future conviction of sin and final salvation by the Lord. What individual sinners have to learn now of God's way of salvation by faith in Christ, the nation of Israel will have to learn in just the same way in the future, otherwise they will be absolutely unusable by God. Israel's feast of atonement for sin was accompanied by sorrow and mourning `ye shall afflict your souls' (Lev. 23:27). Zechariah looks forward to the *real* Day of Atonement when he writes concerning the Lord's words:

`And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the *spirit of grace and of supplications*: and they shall look upon Me Whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son ... the land shall mourn, every family apart' (Zech. 12:10-12).

`Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and *they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds (the tribes) of the earth (land) shall wail because of Him*' (Rev. 1:7).

`And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: *and then shall all the tribes of the earth (land) mourn ...* ' (Matt. 24:30).

Isaiah asks the question, `Shall a nation be born at once?' (66:8) and the answer is `yes', because it is no more difficult for God to save a multitude than for Him to save one person.

The last two feasts gloriously set forth the kingdom set up (Tabernacles and Ingathering of the harvest) (Lev. 23:34-42). It pictures restored Israel in absolute safety and peace at last, none daring to make them afraid:

`... I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree' (Zech. 3:9,10).

`... they shall beat their swords into ploughshares ... neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and *none shall make them afraid*: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it ... and the LORD shall reign over them in Mount Zion (Jerusalem) from henceforth, even for ever' (Micah 4:3-7).

In Exodus 23:16 where we have another reference to the harvest or ingathering, `the feast of Ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field', the Septuagint reads for ingathering, *sunteleia*. The disciples evidently had this in mind when they asked the Lord concerning the end of the age (not `world' as A.V.), `Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the *end (sunteleia)* of the age?' (Matt. 24:3).

It is significant that the feast of the Lord picked out for observation after Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity was the feast of Tabernacles (Ezra 3:4; Neh. 8:14-17). Furthermore, as God's kingdom will finally extend to all nations of the earth after the Second Advent, Tabernacles is ordained for the Gentile nations as well (Zech. 14:16-19).

Thus we see that Jehovah's feasts, ordained for Israel in Leviticus 23, set forth in type and shadow the unfolding purpose of God relating to the earth. Two of them have been fulfilled, Passover and Firstfruits. Pentecost has been partly fulfilled and those of the seventh and last month, which we have been considering, await fulfilment in the future at the Lord's Second Advent.

CHAPTER TWO

The Kingdom of God in the Book of Judges and the Kings of Israel and Judah

After the life and death of Moses, God appointed Joshua in his place and promised to aid and guide him as a leader as He had done for Moses. `As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee' (Josh. 1:5). The leaders who followed Joshua were termed *shophetim* or judges. These were likewise raised up by God. `The Lord raised up judges ... and when the Lord raised them up judges, the Lord was with the judge ...' (Judg. 2:16-18). Their chief function was not only leadership, but restoration back to God when the nation departed so frequently from the Lord. They restored the authority of law in a dark and dangerous time when `every man did that which was right in his own eyes' (Judg. 17:6) bringing about declension and anarchy, such as we see around us today, when God and the standards of His Word are being despised and ignored.

Israel's twelve judges were mediators for God like Moses and Joshua. Gideon's words make this clear:

`The men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: ... And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: *the LORD shall rule over you*' (Judg. 8:22,23).

They were given a special enduement of the Spirit commencing with Othniel (Judg. 3:9,10). The same was true of Gideon (6:34), of Jephthah (11:29) and Samson (13:24,25; 15:14) and this continued into the initial period of Israel's kings (1 Sam. 10:1,6; 16:13). In spite of the darkness and difficulties of this period, the Lord, as Israel's Ruler, protected the small nation of Israel and saw to it that the expression of His kingdom was not obliterated by the powerful pagan nations around.

The last and greatest of the judges was Samuel and he was a link between this period and the rule of the kings which followed. 'And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground' (1 Sam. 3:19). It was not till the end of his life that a crisis regarding rule arose:

'... all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now *make us a king to judge us like all the nations*' (1 Sam. 8:4,5).

This was the climax of Israel's declension at this time of anarchy, for it was no less than a rejection of theocracy and the Lord's words made this very clear to Samuel, 'they have not rejected thee, *but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them*' (1 Sam. 8:7).

As a result there was a change of administration to that of the kings, which, while God allowed it, was an insult to Him. Peters in his *Theocratic Kingdom* says:

'No deeper insult could scarcely be offered to God than such a request indicated. This is seen by considering the Being Who condescended to be their Ruler, the blessing He had promised, and the design He had in view in thus becoming, in a direct manner, King over the nation' (1:226).

No wonder Samuel denounced the people saying, 'Ye have this day rejected your God' (1 Sam. 10:19) and adding, 'your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king' (1 Sam. 12:17).

Why did God allow such a thing to happen? We can only feel that sometimes the only way people will learn whose minds are made up along wrong lines, is by suffering. The trap that Israel fell into was to be 'like the nations'. In this age the same temptation comes for the believer to be like the world around us, forgetting that those outside Christ are being controlled by Satan and the powers of darkness (Eph. 2:1-3; 6:12). Far from satisfying the believer, the world and its tempting offers can only lead away from Christ, satisfaction and peace of mind. It can never be the other way round.

The Lord therefore *permitted* Israel to have a human king, though He warned them through Samuel of the consequences. In 1 Samuel 8:10-18 Samuel describes the character and possible tyranny that such a king would exact with all the misery that would follow, but in spite of this, the people would not listen. They said again 'Nay; but we *will* have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations ...' (verse 19,20). Samuel made all this known to the Lord and the divine reply was 'Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king' (verse 22). Thus it was that Saul, the people's choice, was installed as king of Israel.

Saul commenced well and God did not withhold His Spirit from him 'And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him (Saul); and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them' (1 Sam. 10:10). It was not long, however, before he began to degenerate by his disobedience, till God said to Samuel:

'How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from *reigning over Israel*?' (1 Sam. 16:1), and a little later on we read:

'But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him' (1 Sam. 16:14).

His declension after this was rapid, and he ends his career by resorting to a spiritist medium, for which God judged him and took away his life:

'So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit (a medium) to inquire of it; and inquired not of the LORD: therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse' (1 Chron. 10:13,14).

So much for the people's choice of Saul, the son of Kish. God now intervenes with *His choice*, David the son of Jesse.

It is significant that the Lord in His foreknowledge had put on record that the choice of a human king by Israel rather than Himself would take place in the future. The Lord therefore laid down laws clearly governing the type of person who would fill this office and meet with His approval:

‘When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, *I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me*; Thou shalt in any wise set him a king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose ... he shall not multiply horses to himself ... neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold ... it (the law) shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life ...’ (Deut. 17:14-20).

The earthly kingdom of Old Testament history reached its zenith of power and glory under its first three kings, each of whom held his throne by the permission of Jehovah. David was indeed God’s choice. He said to Samuel:

‘How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for *I have provided Me a king among his sons*’ (1 Sam. 16:1).

‘Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him (David) in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward’ (1 Sam. 16:13).

At the end of his life, David indicates the Lord’s choice of his successor:

‘of all my sons, (for the LORD has given me many sons,) He *hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel*’ (1 Chron. 28:5).

It is important to note that Solomon, the last of the kings directly chosen by God, is also the last king of the united kingdom of Israel. From Saul to Solomon there was a tremendous expansion and transformation of Israel’s kingdom. The great military achievements of David opened the way for the more peaceful work of Solomon. The Philistines, for long the most powerful foes of Israel, were defeated and brought under subjection (2 Sam. 5:17-25). The city of Jerusalem was captured and made the capital of the nation (2 Sam. 5:6-10). The hostile kingdoms of Moab, Ammon and Edom were reduced to tributaries. Other kings, noting what had happened, came to David to seek peace (2 Sam. 8:2-15).

Solomon, when he commenced his reign, proceeded to expand the kingdom by fortifying strategic points (1 Kings 9:15-19). He greatly increased in wealth which became fabulous, but this was in the Lord’s will, given because of the wise choice in his youth of wisdom from God rather than riches. This wisdom became proverbial:

‘So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom. And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart’ (1 Kings 10:23,24 and see 1 Kings 3:5-14).

But the gift of wisdom from God *is of no avail if it is not used*. And this was the reason why Solomon failed lamentably. Although he was ‘wiser than all men’ (1 Kings 4:31), he ended his days as a common idolater. Not only this, but his failure to use his wisdom in obedience to the Lord was the cause of his backsliding. He transgressed the divine rules, that God had laid down for observance by kings, to which we have already alluded. He multiplied horsemen and chariots, the equivalent of modern armaments (1 Kings 10:26-29); he kept a harem of 1000 women and multiplied wives (1 Kings 11:1,3,4), taking them from pagan nations around, with the consequence that they ‘turned away his heart after other gods’ (verse 4). Moreover it meant that his sons had pagan mothers and were influenced by their false religion. As he grew in power his ambitions increased and he engaged in tremendous building projects and for this he exacted a levy of 30,000 men from all Israel, who were forced to labour in Lebanon one month in every three. This was like the bondage in Egypt! No wonder then that when Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, came to the throne, the people approached him and said:

‘Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee’ (1 Kings 12:4),

but Rehoboam unwisely taking the advice of young people rather than the older and more experienced ones, gave the people a contemptuous refusal and actually threatened to increase their burdens (verses 13-15). The result was

rebellion and the splitting of the kingdom into two parts as God had warned Solomon would happen because of his sin:

‘Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee (that is idolatry - see previous verses), and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe (Judah) to thy son for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen' (1 Kings 11:11-13).

This political disaster had been foreseen in a remarkable way by Samuel and now it had come to pass, spoiling the purpose of God that a *united* Israel should be central to His earthly purpose and Jerusalem the capital and chief city of the world.

‘And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. And Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear (plough) his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your olive yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles' (1 Sam. 8:7-20).

The amazing wealth of Solomon and his court is detailed in 1 Kings 4:22-24 and 10:21-25 ‘all king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver: it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon'. Gold and precious objects flowed into the kingdom in great quantity (1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:1,2,14,22). He made silver to be as stones (verse 27). In spite of all this, he found by experience that real satisfaction and contentment can never come from material things and he expressed this in the book of Ecclesiastes (see 2:1-11).

It was all ‘vanity and vexation of spirit' (Ecc. 2:11) or put in modern language it was utterly empty and meaningless. Would that this message could be sounded out today when the great god of materialism is worshipped by millions and they are deceived into thinking that this is going to bring them lasting joy and satisfaction.

In the years following the reign of Solomon under the kings of Israel and Judah, the political and spiritual decline became swift and certain. After Solomon, kings ceased to be chosen directly by Jehovah. They took the throne either by inheritance or force, the nation finally sinking so low that foreign powers dictated who should occupy the throne (2 Kings 23:34; 24:17).

With one or two exceptions, the kings of the divided nation were degenerates who led the people into further disaster and declension. However, it is important to note that, as the scene darkened, God raised up true witnesses for Himself in the ministry of the prophets who became His immediate spokesmen, for He will never allow Himself to be without faithful witness to His truth. Their ministry was paralleled by that of the judges who sought to bring the people back to the Lord when they had gone into apostasy. The prophets were more than predictors of the future. They dealt with the nation's needs, spiritual and moral, that were relevant to the times in which they lived. But at the same time, in their writings, they produced a body of prophetic truth that would guide and encourage the

faithful remnant in Israel during the 'many days' that the nation would abide 'without a king' and 'without an ephod' (Hos. 3:4). The prophetic ministry therefore covered the final decline and end of the historical kingdom.

Not only did they speak and write to strengthen the faithful, but they constantly warned the nation of the consequences of their sin. The 70 years slavery in Babylon should have taught Israel that divine election does not abolish human responsibility. Yet comparatively few listened and heeded. The attitude of the majority was 'prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits' (Isa. 30:10). The last thing they wanted to hear was punishment for their continued rebellion and failure.

What is remarkable and most important to grasp is that, in spite of all the declension of Israel, there is not the slightest intimation that God's unconditional covenants with Israel were broken or can ultimately be rendered null and void. Men may utterly fail in their response to the Lord, but He never fails to keep His Word and His promises. 'I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed' (Mal. 3:6) and further He says, 'My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips' (Psa. 89:34).

Concerning the kingdom covenant Jeremiah writes:

'For thus saith the LORD; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel ... If ye can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne' (Jer. 33:17,20,21).

When we take all the abject failure of Israel into consideration, how wonderful it is to realise afresh that God's great kingdom purposes for earth and heaven must stand, and finally receive a glorious fulfilment, although this great goal may take a long time to attain through man's failure.

The end of the Theocratic Kingdom of the Old Testament

There is some diversity of opinion as to the exact time the historical kingdom of God in Israel ended. Some regard the 70 years captivity in Babylon as the terminus; others would take it to the beginning of the New Testament era.

But there is one thing that was very evident and that was the constant presence of the Lord with His earthly people, symbolised by the shekinah-glory from Sinai onwards to the point where Ezekiel saw this glory slowly departing from the Temple and finally vanishing. The prophet dates this in 'the sixth year' of the captivity of king Jehoiachin. The prophet, in a vision, is shown the terrible apostasy of the people in Jerusalem. He himself was a captive in Babylon, but the vision showed clearly what was going on in the land of Israel. He is shown 70 of the elders of Israel worshipping idols, 'creeping things and abominable beasts' which had been painted on the Temple walls (Ezek. 8:10). At the north gate of the house Ezekiel sees 'women weeping for Tammuz' (8:14), a heathen god, corresponding to the Greek Adonis. The worship of this god was accompanied by licentious orgies and was so bad that it was finally suppressed by Constantine.

Then the prophet is shown the 'inner court' where twenty-five men were worshipping the rising sun and *these men were priests, the religious leaders of the nation* (8:16). God's solemn verdict is given in verse 18:

'Therefore will I also deal in fury: Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in Mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them'.

Jehovah's patience had run out with the idolatrous nation and now He determined to withdraw His presence from His earthly people and lay them aside for an indefinite period. Concerning their rulers God said to the king:

'"O profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until He comes to Whom it rightfully belongs; to Him I will give it."' (Ezek. 21:25-27 N.I.V.).

The kingdom had come to its end as far as the Old Testament is concerned. As Hosea expressed it:

'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*' (Hos. 3:4,5).

As we have seen the outward symbol of the Lord's presence with Israel was the shekinah-glory which began to be associated with Israel at the beginning of the historical kingdom at Sinai, when 'the Lord descended upon it in fire' (Exod. 19:18), so that 'the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai' (Exod. 24:15, 16).

It was at this point that Israel received the laws of the kingdom and its constitution, ending with the Tabernacle, which was filled with the glory of the Lord (Exod. 40:34). Later, in the time of Solomon, when he had completed the magnificent Temple in the land of Israel, we read that:

'the fire came down from heaven ... and the glory of the LORD filled the house' (2 Chron. 7:1).

In the interval we are assured that 'the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light' (Neh. 9:19). Thus the shekinah glory was the visible evidence of the personal presence of the Lord in the kingdom of Israel throughout its history up to Ezekiel's day. However, the prophet describes in chapters 8-11 the vision of this glory slowly departing from the nation, as Jehovah withdraws His presence from this people who had sunk so low in idolatry and apostasy. He did it as though reluctantly, for first of all the glory was gone up 'to the threshold of the house' (9:3); and later it 'stood over the threshold' (10:4) and then the cherubim lifted up their wings and 'the glory of the Lord *went up from the midst of the city*, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city' (11:23) and from this time onwards the symbol of the visible presence of God vanished.

Later on a temple was built to replace the majestic one Solomon had erected, but we have no record of God's glory there. Three outstanding events combine to show that the end of the historical kingdom of Israel had come which had lasted approximately for eight centuries.

(1) Israel had filled their cup of iniquity 'till there was no remedy' (2 Chron. 36:11-16) and now God transferred world supremacy to Gentile power. This was seen in the dream given to Nebuchadnezzar recorded in Daniel 2 and interpreted by Daniel under God's guidance. Babylon was to be the 'head of gold' (Dan. 2:38) followed by three Gentile empires in unbroken succession. With the kingdom of Babylon we have the beginning of 'the times of the Gentiles' described by the Lord Jesus in Luke 21:23, 24 and this will go on until the end time of this age and His Second Coming to the earth, when once more the 'God of heaven' will establish the kingdom with saved and restored Israel as its centre, never again to be spoiled or interrupted (Dan. 2:44).

(2) The prophet Jeremiah reveals God's ban, putting an end to the succession of Solomon's family to the throne of Israel. This concerned Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim. He was known by two other names, Jeconiah (Jer. 24:1) and Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6). The solemn utterance of the prophet is recorded in Jeremiah 22:29,30:

'O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah'.

Jehoiachin and his successor Zedekiah were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon and they finally died there. There appears to be a difficulty in the fact that Jehoiachin actually had a son in captivity, through whom the family line culminated in Joseph, the husband of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:12-16). But Joseph was not the father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the seed of Mary, descended from David through Nathan (Luke 3:31) and not through Solomon.

Jehoiachin was therefore written 'childless' so far as the *genealogical register of the royal family line*.

(3) The third significant event was the withdrawal of the glory of the Lord from Israel to which we have alluded. While there was a measure of restoration to the land after Israel's 70 years of captivity, yet the nation never had full possession of it, and the long dark time of Israel's rejection described by Hosea commenced when Israel would be 'many days without a king, and without a prince and without a sacrifice', until the future time of Christ's Second Advent when they will 'return and seek the Lord their God ... and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days' (Hos. 3:4, 5). Those days are still future to us now.

In spite of all this, we must not make the mistake that many have done, that at the end of the Old Testament Israel was cast off by the Lord. God's providential care was still over the apostate nation, for, as we have seen, they were declared by God to be an *eternal* nation, at the very centre of His kingdom plan for the earth, and the specific gracious promises given to the patriarchs concerning *the seed* and *the land*, cannot be fulfilled without them. No amount of spiritualising will give an adequate fulfilment of these wonderful promises and moreover we see at the end of Ezekiel's prophecy the glory of the Lord returning to Israel in exactly the same order as it left (Ezek. 43:1-7). The prophet describes a temple that will yet be built and in it God declares that His glory will fill it (43:5) and He adds concerning it:

'... the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, *where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever ...*' (verse 7).

One thing should be abundantly clear and that is that God's earthly kingdom can never be established by human effort. It awaits the time when the Lord Himself will write its laws in the hearts of its citizens through the New Covenant made with Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:33) and when its Ruler will be none other than the Messianic King, Christ Himself, perfect in character, wisdom and power. This will mean that God will once more intervene in human affairs, just as He did at the exodus of Israel from Egypt and mount Sinai when the kingdom commenced. If this is not true, then there is absolutely no hope whatsoever for this world. The Lord Jesus foretold a time of unparalleled trouble world-wide, such as had never been experienced before and would never again be repeated, declaring that unless God intervened, there would 'no flesh be saved' (Matt. 24:15-22). In other words, man would annihilate himself, and we know only too well that he now has the ability to do just this.

However He assures the disciples *there will be divine intervention*, and that is nothing less than His return to the earth 'with power and great glory' (verse 30). At long last the One Who is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' will bring the nightmare of man's sinful dominion to an end and for the first time since the fall of Adam mankind will know what perfect rule and justice is, for 'He will reign in righteousness' the world over.

CHAPTER THREE

The Character of the Messianic Kingdom of the Old Testament

It is a significant fact that, as the nation of Israel declined and slid backwards from the Lord and the truth committed to them, the witness of the prophets grew, and in the darkness around them their testimony to the earthly kingdom of God shone with increasing brightness. One thing is certain - God never leaves Himself without a witness.

However, when we examine the major and minor prophets of the Old Testament, we are confronted with such a wealth of material, that it is not possible to give an exhaustive treatment of it in this volume. All we can do is to note its main features and then ask ourselves, is this the kingdom that is carried forward into the New Testament, or is something entirely different presented there?

Perhaps the most concise summing up of the divine purpose revealed in the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament is found in Jeremiah 31:10:

'... He that *scattered* Israel will *gather* him, and *keep* him, as a shepherd doth his flock'.

There is abundant warning to Israel of God's judgment for their sin and backsliding. This meant that they would lose the unique position they had been given as being the first nation on earth in the great kingdom purpose. But this was to be for a limited if unspecified time only, for their forgiveness and restoration to that former position was ensured by the New Covenant of grace and the unconditional promises made to the patriarchs concerning *the seed* and *the land* with which we have dealt in previous chapters. Gentile nations are also dealt with, but only as they come into contact with Israel and impinge upon the plan of God through them.

In considering the testimony of the Old Testament prophets concerning the kingdom of God and its future, we must remind ourselves that this kingdom is not just spiritual or just material, but a blend of both, the spiritual side being first and foremost. G.H.N. Peters expresses this in these words:

`This kingdom, although visible with a world dominion, is also necessarily spiritual. This proposition is the more needed since we are charged with gross carnality, etc., because we insist upon retaining the plain grammatical meaning assigned to the kingdom in the holy Scriptures. While a purely material, naturalistic kingdom, without spirituality is unscriptural, so likewise an entire spiritual kingdom, without the sanctified union of the material or natural, is utterly opposed to the Word of God' (*The Theocratic Kingdom* III, 460).

The Old Testament is perfectly clear that there can be no spiritual future for the people of Israel until the New Covenant of grace with them is put into operation by God. They will finally have to toe the line at the cross of Christ, just as each individual sinner must do if he is ever to be saved, and then God will write His law *in their hearts* and give them a deep knowledge of Himself and His purposes and forgive all their sins (Jer. 31:31-34). A *new heart or mind* will be given to them and the *Spirit of God* put within them (Ezek. 36:22-29). And the words of the Lord Jesus in John 3:3 confirm this: 'Except a man be born again, *he cannot see the kingdom of God*'.

There can be no doubt then concerning the spiritual character of God's earthly kingdom. But as the knowledge of this spiritual kingdom spreads over the earth through a regenerated and restored Israel, it is bound to have a profound effect on the natural and material condition of the world.

Let us now consider some of the leading features of this kingdom as delineated by the prophets of the Old Testament. All is bound up with the personal return of Christ to the earth to take the reins of government, to banish the darkness and gross failure of Gentile rule and oppression.

(1) *Righteousness*. For the first time since the fall of man in Eden, the world will know what it is to have *absolutely righteous government without fear or favour*.

`Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness ...' (Isa. 32:1).

`Say among the heathen (Gentiles) that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: *He shall judge the people righteously*' (Psa. 96:10).

The Lord is indeed the Sun of *righteousness* (Mal. 4:2. See also Isa. 11:4,5).

As a result of the new birth and the new heart and spirit given to them by the Lord, all Israel will finally be righteous:

`Thy people (Israel) also shall be *all righteous*: they shall inherit the land for ever' (Isa. 60:21).

`... that they (Israel) might be called *trees of righteousness*, the planting of the LORD, that He might be glorified' (Isa. 61:3).

`For as the earth bringeth forth her bud ... so the Lord GOD will cause *righteousness* and praise to spring forth before all the nations' (Isa. 61:11)

`Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a *righteous Branch*, and a King shall reign and prosper, and *shall execute judgment and justice in the earth*. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS' (Jer. 23:5,6).

That a 'new heart' or mind will be given by God to Israel is clearly expressed in the Old Testament:

`For I will set Mine eyes upon them (Israel) for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down ... And I will *give them an heart to know Me*, that I am the LORD: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart' (Jer. 24:6,7).

`But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel ... I will put My *law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts*; and will be their God, and they shall be My people ... for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (Jer. 31:33-34).

`And I will give *them (Israel) one heart, and I will put a new spirit with in you*; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh: that they may walk in My statutes, and keep Mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God' (Ezek. 11:19, 20).

`For I will take you (Israel) from among the heathen (Gentiles), and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your

filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. *A new heart* also will I give you, and *a new spirit* will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put *My Spirit within you*, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them. And *ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers*; and ye shall be My people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses' (Ezek. 36:24-29).

Here then is the spiritual foundation given by God for a restored and regenerated people of Israel through whom He can finally work out His kingdom purposes on this earth.

(2) *Peace*. Since the time of Gentile supremacy commencing with Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon, this is what all nations have been seeking for in vain. Human peace has merely been a cessation of hostilities with unrest and dissatisfaction continuing underneath.

Nor can man attain to this desirable condition by his own efforts, for the root cause of war is sin, greed and the desire to dominate, and never can he eradicate this terrible fault in his make-up.

However, the prophets make clear that when He Who is the Prince of peace returns and takes control, then at last *real* peace will obtain over the whole earth, for He alone can and will deal with sin and failure and will abolish armaments and war which spring from it.

'He maketh wars to cease *unto the end of the earth*' (Psa. 46:9).

'In His days shall the righteous flourish; and *abundance of peace* so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river *unto the ends of the earth*' (Psa. 72:7,8).

'And He (Christ) shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: *nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*' (Isa. 2:4).

(3) *Joy*. With divine peace is lasting joy, for stress and strain will be removed. The ever present struggle and 'rat race' will cease to be and quiet assurance and contentment will take their place.

'The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of Isles be glad thereof' (Psa. 97:1).

'And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and *everlasting joy upon their heads*: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away' (Isa. 35:10).

'Sing unto the LORD a new song, and *His praise from the end of the earth ...*' (Isa. 42:10).

These and many more Scriptures testify to the constant joy and praise that will be evident everywhere when God's kingdom is set up and dominates the earthly scene.

(4) *Holiness*. This is linked with righteousness. Thus we read of the holy land, holy city (Jerusalem of the future), holy temple and holy people:

'In that day shall the branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious ... and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem' (Isa. 4:2,3).

'Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean' (Isa. 52:1).

'In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD ...' (Zech. 14:20,21).

(5) *Justice*. One thing that has been the concern of politicians has been the conception of fair play or justice for all. As pointed out previously this is impossible of attainment by human means owing to man's sinful nature which so often results in greed, selfishness and oppression. One cannot alter the basic nature of mankind by regulations or exhortations.

But one of the great characteristics of Christ's rule over the earth is *justice for all*, specially for the poor and needy. This is but an expansion of His righteousness which we have just considered:

`For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder ... Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to *establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever*. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this' (Isa. 9:6,7).

`... *but with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions for the poor of the earth*' (Isa. 11:4 N.I.V.).

`He shall judge the poor of the people, He *shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor* ... He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in His sight' (Psa. 72:4,12-14).

`Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a *King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth* ... and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS' (Jer. 23:5,6).

There is no doubt whatsoever that the world will never experience righteous and absolute fair rule until He Who is `the King of kings' returns and takes complete control.

(6) *The knowledge of God*. There is no doubt that man's failure is not only due to his innate sinfulness and frailty, but also to his ignorance of God, His character and His ways. The prophecy of Isaiah opens with God's lament over the ignorance of His earthly people Israel, in spite of their training by priest and prophet:

`Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth ... The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: *but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider*' (Isa. 1:2,3).

Israel had fallen lower than animals; for animals recognised their owners, but Israel refused to do so, hence their abysmal failure. However, all this will be rectified in the millennial age for then `the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea' (Isa. 11:9). First, redeemed and restored Israel will come to a full knowledge of God under the terms of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33,34; Isa. 54:13), and then, as the greatest missionaries of all time, they will take this knowledge to the ends of the earth with consequent blessing that is hard to appreciate at the present time of Christ's rejection.

(7) *Freedom from Oppression*. Another characteristic of the coming kingdom on earth which is linked with the Lord's administration of justice is freedom from oppression of any kind, social, political or religious oppression will not be tolerated.

`He (the Lord Jesus) will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; *He will crush the oppressor*' (Psa. 72:4 N.I.V.).

`I the LORD have called thee (Israel) in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to *bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house*' (Isa. 42:6,7 and see 49:8,9).

With the binding and imprisonment of Satan, so that he is not able to deceive the nations for 1000 years, a colossal hindrance to the establishment and maintenance of the kingdom will be removed by God (Rev. 20:1-3). In fact, it is difficult to imagine earthly conditions that are free from this terribly sinister power that is now designated as the `god of this world' (2 Cor. 4:4), who blinds the minds of all unbelievers and energises the present world system, which is utterly opposed to God and all His great redemptive purpose.

The 20th chapter of Revelation is the only Scripture that gives us the *length* of the Messianic mediatorial kingdom on this earth. Six times in this chapter its duration is said to be 1000 years hence the title `millennium' which means a thousand (Rev. 20:2-6).

The amillennialist takes exception to the literal interpretation of 1000 in this context. Some go so far as to say this is the only reference to a millennium in the Bible. This is foolish, for the Old and New Testaments give full descriptions as we have seen, of this glorious time. If they mean its *length*, then it is correct.

But on what sound grounds of interpretation do they take part of this chapter literally, but spiritualise the word `thousand'? The words of Dean Alford are to the point here:

`It will have been long ago anticipated by the readers of this commentary, that I cannot consent to distort its words from their plain sense and chronological place in the prophecy, on account of any consideration of difficulty, or any risk of abuses, which the doctrine of the millennium may bring with it. Those who lived next to the Apostles, and the whole church for 300 years, understood them in the plain literal sense, and it is a strange sight these days to see expositors who are among the first in reverence of antiquity, complacently casting aside the most cogent instance of unanimity which primitive antiquity presents. As regards the text itself, no legitimate treatment of it will extort what is known as the spiritual interpretation now in fashion. If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned, where certain *souls lived at the first*, and the rest of the dead lived only at the end of a specified period after that first, - if in such a passage the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave, - then there is an end to all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything. If the first resurrection is spiritual, then so is the second, which I suppose none will be hardy enough to maintain, but if the second is literal, then so is the first, which in common with the whole primitive church and many of its best modern expositors, I do maintain, and receive as an article of faith and hope'. (*New Testament for English Readers* on Revelation 20).

These are wise words and they apply as much to the word `thousand' as to the resurrections dealt with in this chapter of the Revelation. When one realises that most amillennial interpretations of the doctrine of the millennium make it start with the resurrection of Christ and apply the earthly kingdom teaching of the Word of God to the *present age* with its utter spiritual darkness, sin, rebellion against God; its oppression and greed, devastating world wars culminating in a time described by Christ Himself as the worst in all the world's history and will never be repeated (Matt. 24:21,22), one asks whether this is not interpretation gone mad? If the present time is that which Zechariah 14:9 reveals as the time when `Jehovah shall be *King over all the earth*' and His reign in righteousness extends the world over, then we might as well shut up the Bible, for it ceases to mean what it says and can have no certain message for us in any respect whatsoever.

Some see a difficulty in accepting the reign of Christ for 1000 literal years when there are statements in Scripture that His reign is endless. The angel reveals to Mary before His birth that `of His kingdom there shall be no end' (Luke 1:33) and Daniel 2:44 asserts that the kingdom that God will set up will `stand for ever'. There is really no contradiction here when one carefully considers 1 Corinthians 15:24-28. Here we are taught that the kingdom is finally restored to the Godhead (note that it is *God* Who is all in all, not just the Father (verse 28)). When this occurs Christ's reign as Mediator finishes, and perfection attained, for sin and death having been abolished, there is no more need for a Mediator. His kingdom then merges into the eternal kingdom of God and is no longer a separate entity. Thus His rule continues for ever.

The Messianic kingdom, revealed in such glowing colours in the prophets, concerns not only the saints living at the Lord's Second Advent but must also include many in the Old Testament dispensation who looked forward to it by faith. They will attain it in resurrection .

`Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt' (Dan. 12:2 N.I.V.).

Among the former will evidently be David who will act as Christ's vice-regent:

`But they (Israel) shall serve the LORD their God, and *David their king, whom I will raise up unto them*' (Jer. 30:9).

`And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it' (Ezek. 34:23,24).

`And David My servant shall be king over them ... and My servant David shall be their prince for ever' (Ezek. 37:24,25 and see also Hos. 3:4,5).

Some assert that these allusions to David refer to Christ, but the fact remains that in Scripture the Lord Jesus is never called David. He is `the Son of David' (Matt. 22:41-46 and 14 other occurrences), a Branch unto David (Jer. 23:5), the Seed of David (John 7:42; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8), the Root of David (Rev. 5:5), the Root and Offspring of David

(Rev. 22:16) but never David himself. Ezekiel 34:24 and Jeremiah 30:9 make it clear that David is referred to as separate from God and can only be the David of the Old Testament.

Another important feature of the earthly part of the kingdom of God is that, when it is set up, sin will be dealt with summarily and not allowed to fester and grow. This is absolutely vital to the permanence of this kingdom and its righteous rule. Scripture makes it quite clear that the reign of Christ will be with a 'rod of iron'. In other words there will be strict discipline and control. The references to the 'rod of iron' rule are found in Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27; 12:5 and 19:15.

When one considers the state of the world at the present time with its ungodliness and rebellion against God and the fact that prophetic Scripture indicates that this will grow worse as this age comes to its end, it is surely not surprising that, initially at least, the returning Christ will use His almighty power in no uncertain way to bring His enemies under control.

Psalm 110 is quoted seven times in the New Testament (Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42; Acts 2:34; 1 Cor. 15:25-28; and Heb. 1:13; 10:13) and it pictures the Lord Jesus reigning 'in the midst of His enemies' (Psa. 110:2). Psalm 101:8 reads:

'Morning by morning will I uproot all the lawless of the land, that I may cut off out of the city of Yahweh, all the workers of iniquity'. (Rotherham)

If God found it necessary to do this in the Old Testament dispensation, He surely will repeat it during the millennium where there are His enemies and those who render Him 'feigned obedience'. The Authorised Version marginal notes in Psalms 18:44; 66:3 and 81:15 give the translation 'feigned obedience'. Brown Driver and Briggs' Lexicon gives the meaning of *Kachash*: 'Be disappointing, deceive, fail, grow lean' and in reference to the Psalms in question, their note reads: 'Cringe, come cringing, make a show of obedience'.

In Deuteronomy 33:29 where the same word is used we read: 'And Thine enemies shall be found *liars* unto Thee'. In each case the Septuagint uses *epseusanto*, 'they lied'. It is evident therefore that the millennium, blessed though it is and world-wide, is not the perfect state. Deception and death are still there, needing the restraining hand of the Lord to keep control for not all the seed of Satan have been removed at this point.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Regathering of Israel and the Re-shaping of the Land of Palestine

If God's unconditional promises are to be fulfilled which were made to the patriarchs concerning an *everlasting seed and an everlasting land*, then it is obvious that the present condition of Israel, scattered all over the world, must be altered and the nation gathered back to this land of promise. The same God Who warned Israel that this world-wide scattering would take place if they continued their idolatrous and rebellious ways, is the God Who has promised to regather them and this is absolutely vital to His earthly kingdom purpose as the previous studies have shown. Just as the scattering in judgment was literal, and no amount of spiritualising can alter this fact, so the bringing of the nation back to the large part of the Middle East as detailed in Genesis 15 must be literal too. 'He that scattered Israel will gather him' (Jer. 31:10).

The testimony of the Word of God on this point is so clear and voluminous that one is amazed that Bible lovers could ever have missed it. We give some of the references here. In Isaiah 11:11,12 God speaks to Israel. 'And it shall come to pass in that, day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people ... and He shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and *gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth*'.

'Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: *bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth*; even every one that is called by My Name: for I have created him (Israel) for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him' (Isa. 43:5-7).

`For I will set Mine eyes upon them (Israel) for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know Me, that I am the LORD (Jehovah): and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart' (Jer. 24:6,7).

`I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen (Gentiles). And ye shall know that I am the LORD (Jehovah), when *I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up Mine hand to give it to your fathers'* (Ezek. 20:41,42).

Thus saith the Lord GOD; When *I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered*, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen (Gentiles), *then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to My servant Jacob*. And they shall dwell safely therein ... they shall dwell with confidence ... and they shall know that I am the LORD their God' (Ezek. 28:25,26).

`Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed ... And I will *bring again the captivity of My people of Israel*, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. *And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God'* (Amos 9:13-15).

The whole of Micah 4:1-8 should be read. We quote verses 6-8 in the N.I.V.:

`... "I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. *The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and for ever ... the former dominion will be restored to you ...*'.

`Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee (Israel) and I will ... gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time *will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD'* (Zeph. 3:19,20).

There can be no doubt whatever that the regathering of the people of Israel takes an important part in the witness of the Old Testament prophets and they forecast a time which has never taken place in past history of this nation. A preparation for the fulfilment of these Scriptures has already occurred in the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and a representative number of them are now in Palestine. But let no one think that this fulfils the divine promises given above. The Jew only occupies a small portion of Palestine (Canaan), and as we have seen, the original unconditional gift to Abraham and his seed extends from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen. 15:18) and then there are still millions of Israelites scattered all over the earth. The final regathering, as before pointed out, will be *after* the Second Coming of Christ to the earth as He predicted in Matthew 24:

`Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days (the great tribulation verses 21 and 22) ... they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 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'* (verses 29-31).

The spiritual regeneration of Israel, so essential if they are ever to be a kingdom of priests as God intended, we have already dealt with when dealing with the New Covenant of grace. It is summed up by the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:25-29:

`... Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. *And so all Israel shall be saved*: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Israel): for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins ... For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance' (Change of mind on His part).

Not till then will Israel be ready to take the knowledge of the Lord to the ends of the earth, so that 'the knowledge of the LORD shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea' and the Lord's kingdom purpose for the world reaches its fulfilment. It is clear that, in the millennial age, not only will restored and converted Israel be the

chief nation, but the city of Jerusalem will be the chief city of the earth. The great cities of the world will then have to take second place. Jerusalem is God's city and from it light and blessing will radiate:

‘And it shall come to pass *in the last days*, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it ... for out of Zion (Jerusalem) shall go forth the law, and the word *of the LORD from Jerusalem* ... nation shall not lift up sword against nation, *neither shall they learn war any more*' (Isa. 2:2-4).

‘In those days shall Judah be saved, and *Jerusalem shall dwell safely*: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness' (Jer. 33:16).

‘The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye (Israel) know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain: *then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more*' or better as the N.I.V. translates ‘never again will foreigners invade her' (Joel 3:16,17).

‘Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and *Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth*; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain ... Yea, *many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD*' (Zech. 8:3,22).

From these prophetic Scriptures we can see that the Lord will yet claim Jerusalem as His own city, cleanse and sanctify it so that ‘every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD' (Zech. 14:20,21) and this city, so often devastated in the past shall yet be secure permanently and the centre of the world's worship.

But not only this, the word of prophecy indicates that it will be the chief city of the earth from a commercial standpoint. It is important to grasp that, at the Lord's Second Advent, the topography of Palestine, specially around Jerusalem will be altered by the Creator by reason of a great earthquake which is yet to split the Mount of Olives into two parts. The last chapter of Zechariah gives us details of this physical upheaval which occurs when the returning Lord will arrive at the Mount of Olives (14:4), the place from which He ascended at His first coming. The valley thus formed will be a way of escape for persecuted Israel at this point. Not only this, the prophet foretells that a stream of Living waters will issue from Jerusalem half of it flowing to the eastern sea, the Dead Sea, and half towards the western sea, the Mediterranean (verse 8). This will miraculously take away the saltiness of the Dead Sea which will afterwards teem with luxurious vegetation and fish. Ezekiel 47 describes these ‘living waters' in detail and they are also referred to in Joel 3:18 and Psalm 46:4.

Zechariah 14 goes on to give particulars of other alterations in the topography of Southern Palestine. We give it in a modern version which gives the meaning more clearly than the Authorised Version:

‘The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah (the Jordan Valley). But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure' (Zech. 14:10,11 N.I.V.).

The whole hill-country specified will be levelled, or become a plain but Jerusalem will be ‘lifted up' and become settled in her place and upon a high hill the house of the Lord will be built, giving it a towering position in the country for miles around. Isaiah refers to this as we have seen, in chapter 2, verse 2:

‘It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S (Jehovah's) house *shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills* .

Micah 4:1 confirms this verse, so that Jerusalem and its exalted temple will become the centre of God's governmental rule of the world, and the place to which ‘all nations shall flow' for instruction and guidance. Every physical obstacle which might hinder the ‘living waters' in their two-fold direction will be ‘changed' and turned into a plain.

Not only do we find that God is going to remodel as it were the land south of Jerusalem through earthquake action, but also the gulf of the river Nile and the river Euphrates. In Isaiah 11:15,16 we read:

'The LORD will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind He will sweep His hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that men can cross over in sandals. There will be a highway for the remnant of *His* people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt' (N.I.V.).

This action on the Euphrates will make access to Jerusalem and the Temple much easier from the east. Moreover in drying up the gulf of the Nile, the Suez Canal will be blotted out. Isaiah 19:4-9 also predicts the drying up of the river Nile. There are also other significant verses in Isaiah 33:20-23:

'Look upon Zion, the city of our festivals; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its ropes broken ... It (*Jerusalem*) *will be like a place of broad rivers and streams. No galley with oars will ride them, no mighty ship will sail them ...* ' (N.I.V.).

Needless to say at no time in recorded history has the river Nile dried up, the Euphrates split into seven smaller streams nor has Jerusalem been a 'place of broad rivers and streams'. These prophecies look to the end time of the Lord's return and the setting up of the earthly kingdom. It is meaningless to say that no 'galley with oars' or 'gallant ship' will pass a city if it is miles from the sea, and without a navigable river.

Zechariah 14:4, 5 tells us that as a result of the great earthquake splitting the Mount of Olives a very great valley reaches to Azal. Rollins, in his *Ancient History* marks two names close together near the site of Ashkelon, namely Afcalon-Azol. Jeremiah 47:6,7 seems to refer to this. Azal is apparently a new place yet to have this name on the Mediterranean coast. When we remember that the Mediterranean Sea is 1300 feet above the level of the Dead Sea, we can well imagine what would happen if a 'very great valley' extended from Azal on the coast as far as the Jordan Valley in the east. The rapid rise of water at the Dead Sea would cause the Jordan to find its old river bed and flow down to the Gulf of Akabah. This would probably turn Jerusalem into a port; certainly into a place of 'broad rivers and streams' of Isaiah 33:21. Is this **God's answer to the problem of the Suez Canal**?

The gulf of Suez will be destroyed and the land slightly raised, and where the delta of the Nile and the Suez Canal now exist, men shall walk dry shod. This means that shipping must pass through Jerusalem making this city even more important. Not only will the Jerusalem of the future be the spiritual centre of the earth, it will be the commercial centre too. The reader may consult the accompanying map (drawn by Charles H. Welch) on page 64 which visualises these vastly important happenings.

It is significant too that Ezekiel 5:5 says:

'Thus saith the Lord GOD; This is Jerusalem: I have set it *in the midst of the nations* and countries that are round about her'.

Ezekiel 38:12 speaks of a power coming against Israel 'against the people that are gathered out of the nations (Israel) that dwell in the *middle of the earth*' (American Standard Version). The margin for 'middle' reads 'Hebrew, navel'. Just as the navel is the centre of the body, so the Lord has placed Jerusalem in the 'navel' or centre of the earth, so that geographically, politically and spiritually it will finally be the most important city of the world.

Zechariah ends his prophecy by stressing the spiritual pre-eminence of Jerusalem. It will be obligatory for every nation to be represented at the feast of Tabernacles held each year at this city:

'And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth *unto Jerusalem* to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain ...' (Zech. 14:16-18).

and here is another example of the divine discipline that will exist during the millennium whereby God will keep control over the earth.

Before we pass on to another aspect of the kingdom it may be as well to comment on the frequently quoted but little understood verse, Habakkuk 2:14:

'For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, *as the waters cover the sea*'.

One may ask the meaning of water covering water, but it can be understood when we interpret it of the earthly kingdom age when the living waters issuing from Jerusalem flow down to the Dead Sea, cover it, and blot out its intense saltiness and 'heal' it so that it can abound with fish and vegetation. Wherever these waters flow they bring *life*, and this is a picture of what the knowledge of the Lord will do to the inhabitants of the earth, bringing life in the place of spiritual death.

There are other features of God's kingdom which may be mentioned. The promised land will experience increased fertility and productivity. The many Scriptures that teach this may be summed up in the statement in Amos 9:13. Then the plowman will overtake the reaper because of the rich response of the land. The Lord will restore the early (spring) and latter (autumn) rains upon which this country depends so much. Irrigation will not be a problem any longer. Health will increase and because of this life will be lengthened:

'No babe shall die there any more in infancy, nor any old man who has not lived out his years of life; he who dies youngest lives a hundred years; anyone dying under a hundred years must be accursed by God' (Isa. 65:20 Moffatt).

It was not for nothing that so many of the evidential miracles which the Lord performed in His earthly ministry were ones of bodily and mental *healing* and Hebrews 6:5 calls them 'powers (miracles) of the world (age) to come', that is the millennium.

And so we might go on bringing out from the prophetic Scriptures the characteristics of the time when the Lord Jesus as King of kings will return to this earth, take it under His divine control and at last bring peace, justice, and lasting prosperity both spiritually and materially. However, we feel enough has been considered to show that the 1000 year reign of Christ is not one of complete perfection (that awaits the creation of a new heaven and earth in the ages that follow) for in the millennium sin and death are still there. Yet one can say with truth that it is the most favoured time the world will have known since the fall of Adam.

The words of G.H.N. Peters in his *Theocratic Kingdom* are to the point here:

'The prophets, with one voice, describe this one kingdom, thus restored, in terms expressive of the most glorious additions. They predict from the Psalmist down to Malachi, a restoration of the identical overthrown kingdom, linked with the most astounding events which shall produce a blessedness and glory unexampled in the history of the world ... since the overthrow of the Theocratic Davidic kingdom, these predicted events have not taken place as delineated, and therefore the predicted covenanted kingdom has not yet appeared ... It is the same kingdom overthrown that receives those additions, and not another kingdom that obtains them, hence no professed kingdom, however loudly proclaimed or learnedly presented, should, lacking these, be accepted by us ... Those additions are so great in their nature, so striking in their characteristics, so manifesting the interference of the Supernatural, that no one can possibly mistake them when the kingdom is restored ... After the downfall of the Davidic kingdom, the prophets predict this kingdom as future (*The Theocratic Kingdom* 1:248).

While more can be said concerning the presentation and character of God's kingdom on earth as portrayed in the Old Testament we feel enough has been brought forward to show its majesty and the great blessings, spiritual and material, that will flow from the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the inauguration of His righteous rule and control followed by the world-wide witness of a restored and saved Israel. The fact of the long period of waiting since the first Advent causes no problems when one remembers the astounding patience and long suffering of God, 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (2 Peter 3:9). This was the reason given by Peter to his critics who sarcastically asked, 'Where is the promise of His coming? for ... all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation?' (verse 4).

And another reason is the Lord's great work in the calling out, saving and completing the church, the Body of Christ which is the great divine feature of the present time covering the period of Israel's blindness and rejection. We shall be dealing with this when we come to the New Testament. Meanwhile we can rejoice in the One Who continues to 'work all things after the counsel of His own will' (Eph. 1:11) in spite of the opposition of Satan and men.

The kingdom of God is sure and certain. His triumph will be complete and when this is realised, every problem of man will be solved and every barrier to God removed and the long awaited kingdom will prevail for ever.

CHAPTER FIVE

**The Testimony of the New Testament
concerning The Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God in the earthly ministry of John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus

We pass on now to the testimony of the New Testament concerning the kingdom of God. And the burning question is, whether this kingdom as presented in the New Testament means exactly what it did in the Old Testament books. There are many expositors who would give a decisive 'no' to this query. They would insist that, in the New Testament, God's kingdom is entirely spiritual, residing in the hearts and minds of those who are saved.

Before we can come to any conclusion about this, we should seek to discover how the New Testament writers regarded the Old Testament, i.e. how they interpreted it. There are some 400 references to the Old Testament and one thing is clear. The New Testament authors refrain from the allegorical method current in those times, particularly Philo's writings. 'It is written' is regarded as settling its meaning and words are therefore used in their *normal* sense. The Apostle Paul declared that he had taught none other things than 'the prophets and Moses did say should come' (Acts 26:22,23) and if there had been any doubt of the Old Testament's meaning, such a statement would have been valueless. Furthermore, the believers at Berea checked Paul's teaching with the Old Testament (Acts 17:10,11) and this would have been impossible if its meaning had been uncertain. The Lord Jesus Christ too made constant reference to the Old Testament. He reprimanded His enemies because they did not believe Moses. He said:

'For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?' (John 5:46,47).

And after His resurrection He took the same attitude. He chided the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and said:

'O fools, and slow of heart to believe *all* that the prophets have spoken' (Luke 24:25-27).

What the prophets wrote must therefore have been understandable otherwise such a charge would have been unjust. Furthermore, as we have seen, we have a divine guide in the interpretation of the prophetic kingdom in the Old Testament, for the prophecies which set forth His first coming and proclamations of the kingdom were all fulfilled *literally*. The place of His birth was literal - Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The evidential miracles that He wrought of bodily healing were *literal*, as Isaiah 35:5,6 had predicted. There were no less than fourteen prophecies literally fulfilled in the twenty four hours at the crucifixion.*

This being so, when we compare the way the kingdom is presented in Old and New Testaments we can only conclude that they are one and the same. For had the New Testament doctrine of the kingdom of God differed from the Old Testament presentation and content, it would have been essential for this to have been stressed at the beginning of John the Baptist's and the Lord's ministry to avoid misunderstanding.

But what do we find? In the Gospel records the kingdom is presented without any explanation whatever. Nor do we ever find anyone asking for such an explanation. This evidently was not needed, for the Old Testament had made abundantly clear the character of this kingdom and the Lord and His disciples spoke to the earthly people of Israel to whom had been committed the 'oracles of God' i.e. the Old Testament (Rom. 3:1,2) and therefore such explanation was unnecessary.

G.N. Peters in his *Theocratic Kingdom* observes:

'The New Testament begins the announcement of the kingdom in terms expressive of its being previously well known ... the preaching of the kingdom, its simple announcement, without the least attempt *to explain* its meaning and nature, the very language in which it was conveyed to the Jews - all pre-supposed that it was a

*For this evidence see the author's *The Unfolding Purpose of God* pp 10-14 *The Berean Publishing Trust*.

subject *familiar to all*. John the Baptist, Jesus and the Seventy, all proclaimed the kingdom in a way without definition or explanation that indicated that their hearers *were acquainted with its meaning* (1:181).

There was no intimation given that the New Testament kingdom was different in any way from the Old Testament conception and Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, was reprimanded by the Lord for not understanding the basic requirements of His kingdom which the Old Testament had made clear (John 3:10).

The Announcement of the Earthly Kingdom

In the Nativity accounts of the Gospels the link with the Old Testament is clearly indicated. In Matthew's Gospel there are fourteen literal fulfilments of Old Testament prophecy introduced by such words as 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by (*hupo*) the Lord, through (*dia*) the prophet' (1:22; 2:5,15,17,23; 4:13,14,15; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9), thus firmly linking the kingdom about to be announced with the Old Testament. John, the son of Zacharias and Elizabeth, will go before Christ 'in the spirit and power of Elijah' to prepare the way for a prepared people according to the prophecy of Malachi (Luke 1:17; Mal. 3:1). The angel Gabriel reveals to Mary that her Son:

'shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the *throne of His father David*: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end' (Luke 1:32,33).

The 'throne of David' would not be understood as the throne of God in heaven, nor the 'house of Jacob' to be the church, the Body of Christ. Mary would have understood them in Old Testament terms and in no other way and this is confirmed by her song of praise. She refers back to the promise of help 'to His servant Israel in remembrance of His mercy, as He spake to *our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever*' (Luke 1:54, 55).

Zacharias, in his prophetic utterance, speaks of 'the Lord God of Israel', of 'the redemption of His people', of 'the house of His servant David', of 'the holy prophets of God' of the Old Testament who promised that Israel would be 'saved from their enemies', of God's 'holy covenant' and 'the oath' sworn to Abraham and the visitation of the 'dayspring (Sun-rising) from on high' (see Mal. 4:2).

Simeon, we are told, looked 'for the consolation of *Israel*' (Luke 2:25-33) and Anna, a prophetess, speaks of 'all them that were looking for the redemption of *Jerusalem*' (Luke 2:36-38). Matthew begins his account with the genealogy of Christ, but puts 'the Son of David' (the king), before the son of Abraham, because Matthew's Gospel presents the Lord Jesus as the King of Israel and the kingdom so intimately connected with this people. The wise men came and searched for the One 'that is born *King of the Jews*' (Matt. 2:2). When Herod enquired of the chief priests and the scribes as to where Christ should be born, they said to him:

'In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall *rule My people Israel*' (Matt. 2:5,6).

It may seem of little consequence to know the exact place where Christ should be born. The virgin Mary was living at Nazareth, but God's Word is always Truth and must be fulfilled to the letter. Consequently the providence of God arranges that the journey must be made to Bethlehem and there Israel's divine Ruler was born, which the Old Testament had so clearly prophesied in connection with the establishment of the kingdom of God.

Later on, at the close of His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus approached the city of His rejection and death, namely Jerusalem. He then instructs two of His disciples to get a colt, the foal of an ass (the colt and its mother) and to say 'the Lord hath need of *them*' (Matt. 21:3). This fulfilled we are told, the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9:

'Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, *thy King cometh unto thee*, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass' (Matt. 21:5).

Two animals are mentioned in the prophecy and two are used at the fulfilment when *Israel's King* presented Himself for the last time to the nation of Israel. Here again we get another strong link between the Old Testament prophecies of the King of Israel descended from David from the human angle, being fulfilled to the letter in the New Testament and not in any spiritualized way.

We find another link with the Old Testament kingdom in the account of John the Baptist's imprisonment when his faith began to waver. To confirm him the Lord Jesus sent back two of John's disciples to remind him:

'... Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them' (Matt. 11:4,5).

If John had been mistaken in his conception of the Old Testament kingdom, now was the time to correct it. But the Lord did nothing of the kind. Instead He directed John to Isaiah 35:5,6:

'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing ...'.

and in doing this He gave valuable guidance as to the interpretation of this prophecy. Did He ignore its literal meaning and spiritualize it? Many expositors would do this and imagine they were doing the correct thing and getting to the heart of the prophecy. But they would be wrong, for each item was being fulfilled *literally* in the Lord's ministry and it is noteworthy that out of the six items mentioned, no less than *five* relate to human needs which are purely *physical*. Only one could be regarded as spiritual and that is the gospel that was being preached.

Thus, John's faith would be restored by taking the Old Testament prophecies of the kingdom in the normal literal sense of the words and obviously, with this divine example, we should do the same if we value true understanding of the Word of God.

In Mark's account of the commencement of the Lord's ministry we get a statement of the gospel which the Lord Jesus proclaimed:

'Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand (near): repent ye, and believe the gospel' (Mark 1:14,15).

Now we have no right to insert items into this 'good news' which are not there in the divine record. We have no mention of sin here or the atoning death of Christ. This 'good news' relates to 'the kingdom' and its nearness and it was preached to the kingdom people, the people of Israel, a people already 'prepared' by the Lord by the revelation of the Old Testament (Luke 1:17), a people who had already been instructed in type and shadow that 'without the shedding of blood, there is no remission' (forgiveness Heb. 9:22). It announced that the prophecies of the kingdom of God on earth were now possible of fulfilment, that the King was now present and the kingdom therefore was 'at hand' or near. This they were commanded to believe and turn in repentance (change of mind) to the Lord.

By doing this they would experience a 'new birth' and so be fit and ready to enter into it (John 3:3). Thus we see that God's kingdom, as it relates to the earth, is neither wholly spiritual nor wholly material, but a blending of both. *Basically*, it is spiritual, but when established must and will have physical and material results which will finally affect the whole world.

Nothing less than this adequately sets forth the rule of God over the earth, as portrayed in the holy Scriptures. It will then be the time when the earthly kingdom prayer will begin to be fulfilled:

'... Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done *in earth as it is in heaven*'.

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven

Before we go any further we must consider the Scriptural meaning of the above phrases. Are they identical or has each its own peculiar meaning? We first of all notice that 'the kingdom of heaven' is confined to the Gospel of Matthew where it occurs 32 times. Its sphere is defined in the 'Lord's prayer' - 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done *in earth as it is in heaven*' (Matt. 6:10) and further exemplified by the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount in His quotation from Psalm 37:9 'the meek shall inherit *the earth*' (Matt. 5:5 and see Ps. 37:9,11,22,29,34). Needless to say this is not the equivalent of 'going to heaven' if words mean anything at all. This kingdom is the realization of the promise of Deuteronomy 11:21, 'the days of *heaven upon the earth*' and the fulfilment of that which

Nebuchadnezzar dimly saw, namely that 'the heavens do rule', and 'the Most High ruleth in *the kingdom of men*' (Dan. 4:25, 26). In other words it is the kingdom set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The kingdom of God is wider in scope and is as universal as the sovereignty of God over the whole creation which includes heaven as well as earth. Consequently we find this phrase in Paul's writings as much at the end of his life as at the beginning. This we will deal with later on.

In the Gospels the two phrases are sometimes used interchangeably as the following references show:

- 'Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 4:17).
- 'The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye' (Mark 1:15).
- 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 5:3).
- 'Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God' (Luke 6:20).
- 'Suffer little children ... for of such is the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19:14).
- 'Suffer the little children ... for of such is the kingdom of God' (Mark 10:14).
- 'That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 19:23).
- 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God' (Luke 18:24).
- 'He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he' (Matt. 11:11).
- 'He that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he' (Luke 7:28).
- 'It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven' (Matt. 13:11).
- Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God' (Luke 8:10).

There are five passages in Matthew where He departs from the normal and uses the phrase 'the kingdom of God' (Matt. 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31 and 43). Because these two phrases are sometimes used interchangeably in the Gospels, we must not assume that they are identical in meaning in all their occurrences in the New Testament. The kingdom of heaven is the mediatorial kingdom of the Old Testament that we have been studying and seen that it is related to God's dominion on the earth which is realized at the Second Advent when 'the Son of man comes in His kingdom' (Matt. 16:28) and takes control, whereas, as we have pointed out, the kingdom of God is all-embracing including the heavenly phase of God's sovereignty. The reason why they can be used interchangeably in the Gospels is that the lesser aspect (the kingdom of heaven) is included in the greater (the kingdom of God). We can say with truth that London is in England, or that it is in Great Britain, but it would be erroneous to conclude from this that England and Great Britain were identical terms.

To Israel alone was the kingdom of heaven made known and the reason for this should surely be clear from our Old Testament study, for God had determined that they should be the centre of it and the means for making it known, spreading its knowledge over the whole earth and Jerusalem should be its centre and capital city. Those who ignore the Old Testament in the consideration of the kingdom theme, bring upon themselves difficulties which are unanswerable. The Apostle Paul insists that Christ was a minister of the *circumcision* (*Israel*) for the truth of God, to confirm the *promises made unto the fathers* - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the purpose that blessing should ultimately reach the whole world:

The Saviour said to the Gentile woman:

'... I am not sent *but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*' (Matt. 15:24).

These words are perfectly clear and are those of One Who said 'I am the Truth' (John 14:6). Moreover not only was His earthly ministry limited to Israel but He placed the same limitation on the ministry of the twelve:

'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' (Matt. 10:5,6).

Those who spiritualize and ignore the Old Testament are bewildered by these statements and wonder, if they are true, how He can be the Saviour of the *world* at the same time, but the problem is of their own making and comes from disregarding the testimony of the Bible *as a whole* concerning the great subject of God's kingdom. The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to His earthly people was absolutely crucial for them and the working out of God's

earthly kingdom purposes. The long awaited kingdom of the Old Testament was now near with the presence of the King in their midst. Christ said:

`But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons (and He did), *then the kingdom of God has come upon you*' (Luke 11:20 R.S.V.).

`... Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21).

The latter verse is a favourite one with spiritualizers who stress that it exists in the mind of the believer only. But the context is definitely against this view. Dean Alford, in his *New Testament for English Readers*, writes:

`The misunderstanding which rendered these words "within you" meaning this in a spiritual sense, "in your hearts", should have been prevented by reflecting that they are addressed to the *Pharisees* in whose heart it (the kingdom) certainly *was not*'.

M.R. Vincent quotes Trench saying 'the whole passage of the kingdom of heaven being within men, rather than men being within the kingdom, is modern' (*Word Studies in the New Testament* Vol. 1. p. 401).

In the Person and presence of the divinely appointed King, the kingdom was already 'in the midst of' men (see A.V. margin) regardless of their attitude, whether for or against Him. It was therefore 'at hand' or near, and this was stressed both by John the Baptist and the Lord in their proclamation of the good news (gospel) of the kingdom. Because of this fact, one thing must of necessity follow, Israel must come to a definite decision as to their reception or rejection of their Messiah and King.

This was the most vital and crucial point in their history, but from the beginning the leaders had made their attitude clear. It was one of complete antagonism. They were openly displeased with His cleansing of the Temple and His healing of the impotent man on the sabbath day. They hated His denunciation of them. He called them 'hypocrites', 'a wicked and adulterous generation' (Matt. 16:3,4) the 'publicans and harlots' would go into the kingdom before them (Matt. 21:31). They are 'children of hell', 'blind guides' who 'strain at gnats and swallow camels', 'full of extortion and excess', 'whited sepulchres filled with dead men's bones', a 'generation of vipers' (Matt. 23:15,24,25,27,33). They were 'of their father, the devil' (John 8:39-44).

All this only increased their hatred and determination to get rid of Him. What about the general public? At first the Lord's ministry produced tremendous interest, for the disciples reported to Him 'all men seek for Thee' (Mark 1:37). But it was superficial. They were only interested in the external effect of His miracles. We read, 'many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles that He did, but Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, *because He knew all men*' (John 2:23-25). The excitement became so intense that they attempted to take Him by force to make Him a king (John 6:15). On the surface, this looked as though the people were now ready to accept His regal claims, but later on in the chapter the Lord unmask the empty enthusiasm. He said:

'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but *because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled*' (6:26).

The same falseness was evident at Nazareth. In the synagogue 'all bear Him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth' (Luke 4:22). But a few moments later, when the Lord mentions blessing for a Gentile they were 'filled with wrath and rose up and thrust Him out of the city and led Him to the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, *that they might cast Him down headlong*' (verses 28, 29).

Near the end of the Lord's ministry we have the record of the crowds crying 'Hosanna' and within a few days the same people were shouting 'Crucify Him, we have no king but Caesar'. Even His family and friends, who were nearest to Him, misunderstood His actions and words. 'They went out to lay hold on Him, for they said, He is beside Himself' (Mark 3:21).

It is evident in the eleventh and twelfth chapters of Matthew's Gospel, that events were working to a crisis. We read:

'Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not' (Matt. 11:20).

And this was in spite of the fact that these evidential miracles were those foretold in the Old Testament identifying Him as Israel's Messiah and King (Isaiah 35:5,6). The Lord goes so far as to say that even Sodom would have repented if they had witnessed such tremendous works (verse 23). How true it is that much light inevitably brings much responsibility (compare Amos 3:2). It is impossible for it to be otherwise.

The Lord Jesus then presents Himself as the One greater than the Temple with its priesthood (12:6), greater than the prophet Jonah (verse 39), and greater than king Solomon (verse 42) and in each of these capacities, Prophet, Priest, and King He was rejected by the nation. The most favoured generation since the fall of man deliberately turns away from Him Who is 'King of kings, and Lord of lords' and in so doing was rejected by the Lord Himself. It is important to note Christ's insistence on the culpability of 'this generation'. They were 'evil', 'adulterous', 'faithless and perverse' (12:39; 16:4; 17:17). No wonder He said the kingdom would be taken from *them* and given to another nation (see Matt. 21:43). Here we must take care and not assume that this must mean a Gentile nation, for the word is used of Israel in John 11:51 and Acts 24:17. We have seen previously that the clear testimony of the Word of God is that God's covenants and promises to Israel are irrevocable as Jeremiah 33:24-26, Romans 9:3-5; 11:25-29 and other Scriptures clearly show.

The fulfilment of these divine promises may be interrupted through the nation's failure, but they can never be altered or abrogated. Hosea revealed that through Israel's apostasy, they would be laid aside in unbelief temporarily and become *lo-ammi* - 'not My people'. Yet there would be restoration and they would become 'My people' again (Hosea 1:9,10; 2:23). The final restoring of Israel will produce the nation that finally believes, is saved and re-commissioned by God as our Old Testament studies revealed. The difference between these two 'nations' is moral and spiritual, not racial.

The rejection of the Lord by the nation of Israel clearly recorded in Matthew 11 and 12 is followed by a change in His ministry. For the first time the Lord Jesus introduces parables into His teaching as the query by the disciples in Matthew 13:10 makes evident. Furthermore, a study of the Lord's reply as to why He spoke in parables gives us a very different conception of parables from the popular view of them. Too often parabolic teaching has been construed as an easy way of teaching children and beginners by giving them simple stories as illustrations. But this idea is demolished by what the Lord actually said:

'And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given ... Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear' (Matt. 13:10-16).

Surely it is evident from these words that parables *veil truth*, rather than making truth simpler and easier of understanding. The leaders and the people had deliberately closed their eyes and deafened their ears to the Lord's ministry so that, instead of divine understanding, darkness and misunderstanding inevitably followed. The Lord's quotation from Isaiah 6, one of three solemn occurrences in the New Testament, showed clearly the cause of their rejection of Him and His regal claim. Each of these quotations occurs at a time of great crisis for Israel (Matt. 13:14,15; John 12:37-40; Acts 28:17, 23-28) and are of supreme importance in the outworking of the purpose of the ages which relates to the kingdom on earth.

Not only do we have the first occurrence of parables in Matthew 13, but also of the word 'mystery'. It is important to realize that this word in the original does not signify something puzzling or mysterious, but rather that which is *secret* and cannot be known unless it is revealed. By rejecting their Messiah, Israel had blinded their own eyes and in consequence the Lord Jesus now veils the truth from them in presenting it in parabolic form and speaks of secrets (mysteries) in connection with the kingdom of heaven. Failure is usually in the background of this word 'mystery'.

There are eight not seven parables of the kingdom of heaven recorded in Matthew 13, and they are grouped as shown on the next page.

It is noteworthy that the four parables spoken *outside* the house to the multitudes give the *external* aspect of the kingdom of heaven that was ending in failure, whereas the second four, spoken *inside* the house privately to the disciples, give the internal God-ward aspect of the kingdom and reveal its fulfilment at the end of the age in spite of human rebellion and Satanic opposition.

A 1-9 The <i>Sower</i> . The sowing of seed into four kinds of ground.	}	
a They (Israel) did <i>not</i> understand.	}	
B 24-30. The <i>Tares</i> . Good and bad together. Separated at the harvest (the end of the age); the bad are cast into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.	}	The first four parables spoken <i>outside</i> the house to great multitudes.
C 31,32. The <i>Mustard Tree</i> . One tree.	}	
D 33. The <i>Leaven</i> . Hid in three measures of meal.	}	
D 44. The <i>Treasure</i> . Hid in a field.	}	
C 45,46. <i>Goodly Pearls</i> . One pearl.	}	The last four parables spoken <i>inside</i> the house to the disciples.
B 47-50. The <i>Drag net</i> . Good and bad together Separated at the end of the age; the bad are cast into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.	}	
a They (disciples) <i>did</i> understand.	}	
A 51,52. The <i>Scribe</i> . The treasure opened to those in the house.	}	

Other parables throw further light on different aspects of the earthly kingdom. The nobleman who goes to a far country to receive a kingdom for himself and return. The citizens of the nobleman show their hatred by saying 'We will not have this man to reign over us' (Luke 19:14) and their cry, 'we have no king but Caesar' (John 19:15) was an accurate forecast of Christ's rejection by Israel. When he returns, the nobleman (Christ at His Second Advent) rewards His servants for their work during His absence. But He executes judgment on the citizens who rejected Him at His first coming, the implication being that Israel will maintain its enmity and blindness till the end of the age and the time of the Lord's Second Coming back to the earth to reign.

No clue is given as to the length of the interval between the comings of the Lord, but there is no warrant for treating it as a revelation of the nineteen centuries of this present era, for in the parable the Lord returns *within the lifetime* of the same servants to whom He had committed the money. The Acts of the Apostles gives us the key to this problem.

From Matthew 16:21 we have the second dating in the Gospel, and now for the first time the Lord Jesus reveals that His rejection was certain and that it would end in death:

'From that time forth *began* Jesus to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day' (Matt. 16:21).

That it really was the first time He had spoken directly of His death is seen by Peter's amazement and denial of its possibility (verse 22). The disciples had never conceived that it was possible for the kingdom to fail, and that, after all the Lord's wonderful teaching and the outstanding evidential miracles which confirmed His Messiahship. He had shown Messiah's authority in the realm of disease as He healed the leper and many others suffering from fever and paralysis. He had demonstrated His authority in the demonic realm (Matt. 8:16,17); in the human realm (8:18-22;

9:9); in the realm of nature (8:23-27); in the realm of sin (9:1-8); in the realm of death (9:18-26); in the realm of blindness (9:27-34).

And yet, in spite of all this, He reveals that He must die at the hands of the leaders of the people! But there is something that *must take place first*. He had said that *He must go to Jerusalem* (Matt. 16:21) not only to die there, but before that to make His official presentation of Himself as Israel's King and so fulfil to the letter the prophecy of Zechariah centuries before:

‘Tell ye the daughter of Sion, *Behold, thy King cometh unto thee*, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass' (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-5).

As a preparation for this the Lord appoints a band of seventy messengers who are sent ahead of Him to prepare for the coming of the King:

‘After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come' (Luke 10:1).

The mission of the Seventy was narrower than that of the Twelve. The latter were sent to all ‘the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:6). The Seventy are commissioned to go only where the King will come on His last journey to Jerusalem. Once again they were to stress the nearness of the kingdom whether they were received or not, saying, ‘the kingdom of God is come *nigh*' (Luke 10:9).

A combination of circumstances resulted in great crowds of the people of Israel being at Jerusalem. This is stressed in the accounts of the four Evangelists, for each of them records this most important event in the history of the kingdom. Great multitudes followed Him (Matt. 19:2). Luke says ‘the people were thick together' (11:29); ‘there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode upon one another' (12:1) and ‘there went great multitudes with Him' (14:25).

The raising of Lazarus had also caused a stir. ‘Much people' had come ‘that they might see Lazarus also, whom He had raised from the dead' (John 12:9). The fact that Lazarus was alive made it impossible to deny the reality of the miracle. On top of this the annual Passover was at hand which always brought large numbers of Jews to Jerusalem both of those in the land and also of the Dispersion who lived abroad.

Thus the overruling of God saw to it that a large and important section of the chosen nation was assembled at Jerusalem to witness the regal entry of the Messiah into the capital city as the King of Israel. The people's actions showed their awareness of the occasion. ‘A very great multitude spread their garments in the way' (Matt. 21:8) thus forming a carpet, an act reserved only for those of the highest rank (cf. 2 Kings 9:13). In addition to this they strewed His path with palm branches (John 12:13), a demonstration in the East to welcome a king or conqueror.

Their joyous cries are recorded by each of the Evangelists ‘Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord' (Mark 11:10). ‘Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord; peace in heaven and glory in the highest' (Luke 19:38). ‘Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord' (John 12:13). Up to this time He had enjoined silence upon His followers concerning His claims as Messiah. Now He declares that ‘if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out' (Luke 19:40). The official presentation had arrived.

Thus occurred the most outstanding day of Israel's history, when the Lord came in triumph to the capital city of Jerusalem and presented Himself as their King, thus literally fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy. He then asserts His Lordship by cleansing the Temple a second time and casting out all that sold and bought in it. Thus His authority as King was asserted. This was followed by more evidential signs of healing, for Matthew says ‘and the blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple and He healed them' (21:14).

The crisis point was reached in His moving lament over Jerusalem:

‘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!' (Matt. 23:37).

`How often *would I ... but ye would not*'. Here we have the problem of divine sovereignty combined with human responsibility which is insoluble to us limited humans. But *both are true* and not antagonistic to each other. There are many creeds that express one at the expense of the other and thereby only get half the truth, and unbalanced at that.

Whether we can understand it or not, *both are true*, and if we are wise, we shall always keep this in mind. We must never think God was play-acting in these last great scenes of Israel's history in the Lord's earthly life. Chafer points out:

`This first offer of the kingdom had been typified by the events at Kadesh-Barnea. There, this same nation, which had already tasted the discomforts of the desert, were given an opportunity to immediately enter their promised land. Thus left to choose, they failed to enter (through their unbelief, Heb. 3:19), and returned to forty more years of wilderness wandering and added judgments. They might have entered the land in blessing. God knew they would not; still it was through their own choice that the blessing was postponed. Later they were brought again to the land after their judgments and afflictions in the wilderness. This time, however, it was without reference to their own choice' (*The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* p. 56).

So in the same way, their unbelief and rejection of Christ resulted in postponement of God's earthly kingdom purposes. Although the Lord Jesus broke His heart over His hardened people and their city, He made it clear that this rejection would not and could not be for ever:

`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*' (Matt. 23:39).

And God's prophetic Word makes it clear that at the Lord's Second Advent, Israel will look on Him Whom they pierced and will mourn and at last be convicted of their sin and turn to Him Who is their Saviour, Messiah and King. Then the millennial kingdom will become a reality!

CHAPTER SIX

The Kingdom of God in the Acts of the Apostles

We now pass on to consider the kingdom of God as it is presented in the Acts of the Apostles and here, we are on ground so important, that wrong interpretation and misunderstanding will cloud the whole issue. A correct appreciation of this book is absolutely vital if we are to have a sound Scriptural understanding of the working out of God's kingdom purposes after the crucifixion. There are eight references to the kingdom in the Acts (1:3,6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

It is important to note that the end of Luke's Gospel overlaps his record of the Acts of the Apostles chapter 1. In both these contexts we find the Lord instructing His disciples in the Old Testament Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 1:1-4). The subject was 'the kingdom of God' (verse 3). What favoured people these disciples were to hear the Living Word expound the written Word and that for six weeks! In spite of this it might have been possible for some of them to have misunderstood what the Lord said, but this is ruled out by the definite statement in Luke 24:45 '*Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures*'. We mention this because some do not hesitate to point out what they consider to be mistakes on the part of the Apostles in the early chapters of the Acts. Although they live nearly 2000 years later and have not this personal instruction from the Lord Jesus, they know better than these favoured disciples!

Arising from what the Lord had taught them for forty days and the divine understanding He had given them, they put a question to Him:

`When they *therefore* were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou *at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel*?' (Acts 1:6).

The word 'therefore' indicates that their query was the natural outcome of the teaching He had given them and is not to be regarded as inferior intelligence on their part, still less incompetence on the part of their divine Teacher. It should be obvious that the earthly kingdom purpose and Israel's central place therein are still dominant in the revealed will of God. The Greek word translated 'restore' means to restore something to its former place or state. It

does not indicate something new, but *to bring back something that existed before*, and this can be nothing other than the theocratic kingdom of the Old Testament which we have been considering and the word 'Israel' can only mean the historical nation, the literal descendants of Abraham.

The Lord Jesus made no attempt to correct the disciples for asking such a question regarding the kingdom, which would have certainly been necessary if this kingdom had become entirely a spiritual one, disassociated from the earthly people. The only thing He could not answer was the *time element*. *When* that kingdom would be restored was conditional, just as it had been at the time when John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus announced that this kingdom was near. Israel was then put to the test. It could not have been otherwise, unless one can entirely rule out human responsibility when divine truth is proclaimed, in which case there is no point whatsoever in proclaiming truth at all. Israel was now, in the wisdom of God put to the test once more as we shall see. To have revealed the result of this test before it was applied would have cancelled the resulting responsibility. The Lord was too wise to reveal the fact that although His longsuffering still held for the people of Israel He knew they would refuse once more to repent and turn back to Him. As we said before, God was not play-acting. His mercy and patience with this people was amazing and real, as is perfectly clear when this portion of the Word of God is studied without bias and tradition gripping the mind.

The next thing we find in the record is the concern of the eleven to fill the gap left by the apostasy of Judas. The number twelve must be made up. This can be well understood if the earthly kingdom purposes are still continuing, for in that kingdom the Lord had made a promise that when it was set up, the *twelve* apostles should sit on *twelve* thrones, judging the *twelve* tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Note it was *twelve* thrones not eleven. Who was qualified to fill such a position? The condition is stated in Acts 1:21,22:

'Wherefore of these men which have companied with us *all the time* that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, *beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us*, must one be ordained to be a *witness with us* of His resurrection'.

This agrees with the words of Christ in John 15:27:

'Ye shall also *bear witness*, because ye have been *with Me from the beginning*'.

The thought here is the capacity to bear personal testimony from being an eye-witness, to the life and works of the Lord Jesus from the commencement of His public ministry right through to the Resurrection.

Two men fulfilled these conditions, Joseph, surnamed Justus, and Matthias (Acts 1:23), and the apostles looked to the Lord to indicate which man was His choice. Matthias was chosen, and the reader should notice that on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit and His divine power *rested on Matthias equally with the eleven*, indicating that no mistake had been made in this matter. Matthias was certainly God's choice and the number 12 (Israel's number) had been restored. Those who talk of 'apostolic mistakes' here are really accusing the Holy Spirit of error in enduing the wrong man.

This restoration would have had no meaning at all if Israel had been rejected at the Cross, and if the earthly kingdom, of which Israel is the centre, had been laid aside by God.

The next great event that followed was Pentecost and it is vital to get its proper setting in the second chapter of Acts. So many think that it was the beginning of a *Gentile* church, that close attention must be given to the Scriptural facts. Passover was one of the feasts of Jehovah given in Leviticus 23. We have already alluded to them (see page 42). First there was Passover (typical of Calvary) and Unleavened Bread (the new Christian walk, verses 5-8), then Firstfruits (Resurrection 9-14), followed by Pentecost (Restoration 15-21).

The events recorded in Acts 2 were the beginning of fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. Peter asserts in explanation of the happenings of that day:

'This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel' (2:16).

In endeavouring to understand the meaning of the day of Pentecost we shall be wise therefore if we heed these divine clues and do not go wider than the scope of Joel's prophecy. This book, under the illumination of the Holy

Spirit, will do more to give us a correct interpretation of what this feast means in the outworking of the purpose of God than all the traditions of men. There, the quotation from Joel occurs in a setting of *restoration*. God says:

'I will *restore* to you (Israel) the years that the locust hath eaten' (Joel 2:25).

Verses 26 and 27 end up with:

'Ye shall ... praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you ... ye shall know that *I am in the midst of Israel*, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and My people (Israel) *shall never be ashamed*'.

Then *immediately follow* the words which the Apostle Peter quoted in Acts 2:16.

The prophecy of Joel reveals the *restoration* and rich blessing of Israel after judgment for her sins and God's punishment of her Gentile oppressors. No wonder the disciples asked the Lord, 'Wilt Thou at this time *restore again the kingdom to Israel?*' (1:6). The words of Joel are divided by the expressions 'I will pour' and 'I will show' with seven points relating to each:

I will pour out My Spirit		
(1) upon all flesh	}	Sevenfold beginning at Pentecost
(2) Sons		
(3) Daughters		
(4) Old men		
(5) Young men		
(6) Servants		
(7) Hand maids		
I will show wonders		
(1) Heavens	}	Sevenfold conclusion
(2) Earth		
(3) Blood		
(4) Fire		
(5) Pillars of smoke		
(6) Sun		
(7) Moon		

Acts 2 records the beginning of the Spirit's outpouring on Israel as the Old Testament prophets had predicted. Had they responded the second set of sevens touching the physical creation would have followed and the day of the Lord would have led to the Second Coming of Christ and the setting up of the kingdom. What was only partially fulfilled at Pentecost will be completely fulfilled at the end of this age, for God's Word cannot fail in any particular (Matt. 24:29,30).

Those who were saved at this time were a nucleus of the coming kingdom - a 'firstfruits' as James expresses it (James 1:18). We now come to the third chapter of the Acts and there is no doubt that this is one of the most vital chapters of the New Testament. Its import has been missed by so many which is quite amazing considering that its testimony is so clear. It commences with the healing of the lame man outside the Temple who had been in this condition since birth. At Peter's word he was instantly and wholly healed. This was a great miracle, for the man was well known, and even the rulers of Israel had to admit that 'a notable miracle' had been done (Acts 4:15,16). The result was the gathering together of a great audience to see the man who was now walking, leaping and praising God (Acts 3:8-11 and cf. Isa. 35:5,6).

Peter used this opportunity to deliver a most important speech which extends to the end of the chapter. He addresses his hearers as '*Ye men of Israel*' (3:12) and '*brethren*' (verse 17). His authority comes from 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Jacob, *the God of our fathers*' (verse 13) and in closing he reminds them that they are 'the children of the prophets and of the covenant *which God made with our fathers*'. This was the great unconditional one made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning the *seed* and the *land*. Israel indeed were lame

like the man in front of them, lame and crippled through their unbelief and hardness of heart. Peter tells them in effect that what God had just accomplished for the lame man, He could do for them also, even though they had killed their Messiah, the Prince of life (verses 13-15). In spite of this climax sin, they had not put themselves beyond the pale of mercy and forgiveness. The Saviour had prayed 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34) and the Acts contains the record of this amazing extension of mercy by a long-suffering and compassionate God to His unbelieving earthly people Israel.

The crucial point in Peter's speech is reached in chapter 3 verse 19. We give it in the Authorized Version and then a Modern Version, the New American Standard Version:

'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. 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 3:19-26 A.V.)

'Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that *He may send Jesus Christ appointed for you*, Whom heaven must receive until the period of *restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time*. Moses said, the Lord God shall raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren; to Him shall you give heed in everything He says to you. And it shall be that every soul that does not heed that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. *It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed*. For you first, God raised up His Servant, and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways' (Acts 3:19-26 New American Standard Version).

The importance of these verses can scarcely be sufficiently emphasized. God's mercy had not yet run out towards the people of Israel and so they are commanded by Him, through Peter's lips to repent, to change their attitude of mind and turn back to God. If they did this their sins would be completely forgiven and blotted out and even though they had just murdered their Messiah and King, and then, what is so often missed by readers and students of the Bible, *Christ would be sent back to them*. This was a stupendous offer with tremendous implications. It was nothing less than the Second Advent of Christ being a possibility at this time and the picking up again of the threads of the earthly kingdom which had been broken by the rejection and crucifixion of One Who was the King of Israel.

Immediately following this the time of *restoration* spoken of so fully by the Old Testament would *then* set in. The disciples question 'wilt Thou at this time *restore again the kingdom to Israel*', seen in this light, has real point and relevance and was the natural outcome of the forty day's instruction they had received from the risen Saviour. This 'time of restoration' which was the theme of all the Old Testament prophets was nothing less than the great earthly mediatorial kingdom we have been studying. It was indeed good news for sinning Israel and comprised that 'gospel of the circumcision' (Israel) referred to in Galatians 2:7,8 which was related to the apostleship of Peter.

The word 'converted' in Acts 3:19 A.V. means *to turn* and this was the continual Old Testament command to Israel for restoration to divine favour when they had sinned and backslidden.

'When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, *even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God ... He will not forsake thee*' (Deut. 4:30,31).

`When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against Thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess Thy name (i.e. repent), and *turn from their sin*, when Thou dost afflict them; then hear Thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy servants' (2 Chron. 6:26,27).

`Remember, I beseech Thee, the word that Thou commandest Thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: *but if ye turn unto Me* ... though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence ...'(Neh. 1:8,9).

`The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers ... Thus saith the LORD of hosts; *Turn ye unto Me*, saith the LORD of hosts, and *I will turn unto you*, saith the LORD of hosts' (Zech. 1:2,3).

In each case the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) uses Peter's word translated `be converted' for the word `turn', so this Apostle's command to Israel in Acts 3 was not new to Israel, but reinforced what the sacred Scriptures had emphasized repeatedly in the past.

Peter goes on to remind his hearers that, as the chosen race and human channel for the kingdom, they were the children of the prophets (Acts 3:25) and he adds:

`... 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*'.

Once again we are back to the key text in Genesis 12 which is the germ of the great kingdom purpose devised by God, showing plainly that His plan for the blessing of mankind through Israel was still in mind if only Israel would repent and turn back to Him. All this is missed or glossed over if something entirely new is introduced at this juncture, combined with the erroneous idea that Israel had already been set aside by God. And if this was true, it is inexplicable why the Jew was still *first* all through the Acts period.

Peter ends his discourse by saying:

`Unto you (Israel) *first* God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you' (Acts 3:26).

The apostle Paul, in his speech recorded in chapter 13 stresses the same truth. He said:

`... It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you (Jews)' (verse 46).

Why was it *necessary* unless Genesis 12:1-3 was still in mind? As the record of the Acts shows Paul *always* went to the Jew first (see Acts 14:1; 17:1,10; 18:1-4,19) and in Romans he asserts that the gospel was to the *Jew first* as was also judgment on the part of God (Rom. 1:16; 2:8,9). The Lord was concerned that the thousands of Israelites called `the Dispersion' living *outside Palestine* should hear the offer of mercy as those *in the land* had done under Christ's earthly ministry. Consequently to every new centre that Paul took the gospel in Asia Minor he first of all went to the *synagogue* and this was just as true when at length he arrived at Rome as a prisoner (Acts 28:17, 23).

Romans was the last epistle Paul wrote during the time covered by the Acts and in Romans 10:18 he asks:

`But I say, Have they (Israel) not heard? *Yes verily* ...'.

but this would not have been true before Paul's ministry commenced to those Israelites living outside the land. The *whole nation* had now come under the great responsibility of hearing for the second time the offer of mercy and the possibility of establishing the kingdom with the return of Christ, upon their repentance, and the Lord, in His infinite patience and longsuffering, awaited the outcome right throughout the period covered by the Acts.

In the early chapters of the Acts, it was not just `to the Jew first' but to the Jew *only* and such Gentiles as were associated with Israel must have been proselytes (Acts 2:10), that is, converts and sympathizers with Judaism. The popular idea that, on the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to Gentiles as well as Israelites and that they were included in the 3000 saved is quite untenable. Pagans would not be allowed to participate in the feasts of Jehovah, nor would they be interested in them, except through curiosity. Furthermore Peter's attitude to Cornelius and the attitude of the mother church at Jerusalem described in Acts 10 and 11 is incomprehensible if Gentiles were present.

It required a *special vision from God* to induce Peter to deal with the Gentile Cornelius, nor can this be attributed to narrowness and bigotry on Peter's part for he was simply being obedient to God's commands for separation from

the surrounding Gentile nations as laid down in the Old Testament. When the Apostle came up to Jerusalem we are told:

`... they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to *men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them*. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them ...' (Acts 11:2-4).

Peter has to justify his action before the assembly and the record continues:

`When they (the Jerusalem church) 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),

which would have been entirely meaningless if Gentiles had been addressed and saved before this point. Moreover we have the astonishment of the believing Jews that accompanied Peter recorded in chapter 10:

`While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. *And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished*, as many as came with Peter, *because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost*' (verses 44 and 45).

Later on we shall deal with the importance of the admission of the Gentile during the Acts period and in doing this, we shall take care to keep to the Scripture record and reject popular ideas which have become associated with this subject.

There is no doubt that a crucified Messiah presented a great problem to the Jew, who looked for a strong deliverer from the yoke of Rome. Peter answers this in his first speech by stressing the resurrection of the Lord Jesus to show His identity and right to the throne of David. This had formed an important part of the unconditional covenant by God recorded in Old Testament Scripture with which we have already dealt. That Messiah, as a true descendant of David would sit on his historic throne, God had sworn with an oath:

`The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne' (Psa. 132:11),

and this is what Peter emphasizes in Acts 2:29-31:

`Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David ... 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*; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ ...'.

This produces another sure link with the Messianic kingdom of the Old Testament.

The resurrection of Christ in the Acts specially stresses two facts which are practically always overlooked:

- (1) the restoration of the throne of David, as promised by God with an oath (Acts 2:29-31) and
- (2) the giving of repentance (a change of heart and mind) to the people of Israel (Acts 5:30,31).

Peter's answer to the high priest's charge against him and his associates is recorded in Acts 5:29-32:

`Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers *raised up Jesus*, Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to *give (in order to give) repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins*. And we are His witnesses of these things; and *so is also the Holy Ghost*, Whom God hath given to them that obey Him'.

Many are the truths which flow from the supremely important fact that Christ rose from the grave as the conqueror of death and now lives for ever for His people. These are often dealt with in Christian literature, but the two effects of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus mentioned above are nearly always ignored or passed over. *Yet they are absolutely necessary for the correct interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*. One cannot help feeling that they present too many problems to some interpretations that are considered 'orthodox'. David's throne is a vital element of the Messianic kingdom and the repentance of Israel is absolutely crucial to its establishment, as the third chapter has shown, and if realised, would have been followed by His Second Advent to the earth and the setting up of that great kingdom planned by God.

When one considers the total content of that remarkable chapter one cannot imagine how words could have made any plainer the reality of this divine re-offer of the King and His kingdom to the nation of Israel. It may be objected that the word 'kingdom' does not occur, but the *reality* of it does in the phrase 'the restoration of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' (Acts 3:19-22,24).

It is noteworthy that the Lord specifically foretold of such an offer in His earthly ministry. In parabolic form, a certain king makes a wedding feast for his son (Matt. 22:1-7). Two invitations are sent out to those 'who were bidden'. The first one describes the ministry of John the Baptist and the Lord and the result was 'they would not come'. The second one announced that the feast was 'prepared', 'the oxen and fatlings killed' and 'all things were ready'. This sacrificial element clearly looks to the redemption accomplished by the Lord's death at Calvary and the ministry that followed during the Acts. Again the call is rejected with violent opposition following. 'The remnant took His servants and entreated them spitefully and slew them' (verses 5 and 6). This literally happened as the Acts record clearly shows with imprisonment and death for the disciples and those associated with them. There is no further invitation, but judgment falls. The king sends forth his armies, destroys the murderers and burns their city - a prediction of the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Again in Luke 13:6-9 we have the parable of the barren fig tree. The people of Israel are likened in Scripture to at least 3 trees, the fig, the olive, and the vine. The three years that the owner came seeking fruit from the fig tree is a distinct reference to the three years of the Lord's public ministry to Israel. In their opposition and hardness of heart they were indeed 'barren', but instead of being cut down at the end of the three years the tree is given a further respite:

'Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down' (verses 8 and 9).

The respite and further opportunity to produce fruit corresponds to the re-offer of divine mercy in the Acts, but it is not till the end of the book that the tree is 'cut down', but not uprooted, otherwise Israel could have no future in God's purpose. And Romans 11 assures us that He Who cut off 'the branches' of Israel, can and will graft them in again (verses 23,24) at His appointed time which will be at the Second Advent of Christ, when the 'Deliverer shall come out of Sion and turn away ungodliness from Jacob (Israel)', for 'the gifts and calling of God are without repentance' (i.e. change of mind on His part, verse 29).

Thus we see that both figuratively and literally, the Acts period is a further opportunity for Israel to repent and turn back to God and then her divine destiny would have been fulfilled in the bringing in of the mediatorial kingdom.

The Evidential Miracles of the Acts

In Luke's record of the Acts there are some 30 specific miracles recorded, many of them being as spectacular as those contained in the four Gospels. Not only this but there are at least nine statements concerning the prevalence of miracles during this period.

'Many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles' (2:43).

'By the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people' (5:12).

'... they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them ... and they were healed every one' (5:15,16).

'And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people' (6:8 A.S.V.).

'The people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did' (8:6).

'The Lord ... granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands' (Paul and Barnabas 14:3).

'Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them' (15:12).

'God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them'(19:11,12).

Lastly, on the island of Melita (Malta) there is the healing of the man with dysentery and *'others also which had diseases in the island came, and were healed'* (28:9).

It is noteworthy that these miracles were just as much in evidence at the end of the Acts as at the beginning. It is sometimes represented that miracles are found at the beginning of Luke's record and then soon fade out. They do nothing of the kind, but are an integral part of the history of the book and go on to the conclusion. Then they cease as far as Scripture is concerned. After the Acts period Paul now has to leave Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. 4:20). Epaphroditus was desperately ill, *'sick unto death'* but the Apostle cannot heal him. Timothy, in his physical weakness, is advised to take a *'little wine for his often infirmities'* (1 Tim. 5:23) and this from a man who had accomplished such spectacular healings previously! These were close friends and valued fellow-workers. We may be sure that the Apostle would have healed them had he still the divine ability to do so. All he can say now is that the Lord had mercy on me in healing them, as well as healing them for their own sakes (Phil. 2:25-27).

But the Acts miracles were by no means confined to healing. They included the casting out of demons (5:16; 16:16-18); raising the dead (9:36-42; 20:7-12); physical wonders (4:31; 8:39); miraculous deliverances (8:19-22; 16:26); immunity from ordinary dangers (27:23-26; 28:3-5); immediate judgment on some who opposed (5:11; 13:11); direct angelic ministry (12:7-8,23); and miraculous visions and communications (9:3-6; 10:9-16).

The miracles performed by the Lord Jesus were His divine credentials. Peter states:

'Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know' (Acts 2:22).

It was not that Christ performed miracles that proved His Messiahship - for Satan can work these, and at the end of this age the Word of God warns us that many will be deceived by the man of sin *'Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders'* (2 Thess. 2:8, 9 and see Rev. 13:11,13-15).

The miracles of the Gospels and Acts were those predicted by the Old Testament as being characteristic of Messiah's coming and ministry (Isa. 35:5,6). They were *signs*, that is, they signified truth to Israel who alone possessed the countersign, the Old Testament Scriptures (Rom. 3:1,2). This was the fulfilment of the promise given by the Lord in Mark 16:17,18:

'These signs shall follow them that believe; In My Name shall they cast out devils (demons); they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover'.^{*}

All these things were important features of the Acts period. Hebrews 2:3,4 confirms this:

'... so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?'

These signs and wonders were therefore a confirmation to those of Israel who believed (1 Cor. 1:6,7) and a divine witness against those who believed not (1 Cor. 14:21,22). As long as the chosen people exist as a nation in covenant relationship to God these evidential miracles persist, but when Israel is set aside in unbelief at the end of Acts they cease.

Note we do not say that *miracles ceased*. God's power has not lessened. He can still heal and work miracles in this age, if He chooses to do so. But they are not evidences of the mediatorial kingdom of God relating to the earth.

* If anyone has a difficulty in accepting the text of these closing verses of Mark's Gospel we refer them to Dean Burgon's spirited defence of them. We suggest that the doubts about them expressed later on by scholars arose from the absence of instantaneous and miraculous healing after A.D. 70, leading them to question their genuineness.

Those of the Gospels and Acts were special miracles attesting the truth of this earthly kingdom. They were nearly all *public* and *spectacular* in character. At least 20 of the Acts miracles were seen by witnesses, sometimes by great multitudes, as on the day of Pentecost. Some of these miracles produced holy 'boldness' and godly 'fear' among believers (Acts 4:29-31). Some silenced the most vehement opposers who could not deny their genuineness. They were forced to admit, 'that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem and we cannot deny it' (4:15,16).

There can be no doubt from holy Scripture that they were of a special class and were linked with the confirmation of the earthly kingdom and at the conclusion of the Acts the age of great public miracles came to an end. To take them out of this divine setting and context as is so often done today, can be dangerous, for it gives Satan, the great enemy of God and the believer, the opportunity to travesty these miracles and so deceive the unwary. This is why that even during the Acts when they spoke their testimony, God gave the gift of *discerning of spirits* to believers which enabled them to infallibly sift the true from the false. Hence the warning in 1 John 4:1-3.

Some will admit the absence of such miracles in the present age, but they argue that this is due to the unspirituality of the Lord's people and if there was a revival and deep concern with regard to the things of God, these miracles would take place again. This is largely the attitude of the present Pentecostal movements. The answer to this is clear. There have been great spiritual revivals in the past and outstanding spiritual leaders have arisen such as Luther, Calvin and others but *there have been no corresponding revivals of great public miracles such as occurred in the Acts*.

Now in this era, we have the silence of God (see *The Silence of God* by Sir Robert Anderson, published by Kregel in U.S.A.), a silence of abounding grace. Moreover, at the time of these miracles special Pentecostal gifts as detailed in 1 Corinthians 12 occurred. And that these had primarily no connection with spirituality is clearly evidenced by the fact that the most unspiritual and carnal church, the one at Corinth, had an abundance of these Pentecostal gifts!

Before we leave the consideration of the miracles which occurred during the Acts period, it is well to see the contrast between the first miracles performed by Peter and Paul. Peter commences by *healing a Jew* as detailed in Acts 3:1-9, typical of what God was prepared to do for Israel in spiritual healing and restoration if only they would turn to Him, whereas Paul's first miracle blinded a Jew (Acts 13:6-11) for a season, a prophetic foreview of the spiritual blindness that was to fall on the nation in the last chapter of Acts (28:25-28) for their wilful turning away from the Lord. In the case of Elymas, it was not permanent, but 'for a season' (13:11) and we know from Romans 11 that Israel's blindness is also not permanent, but until 'the fulness of the Gentiles be come in' (Rom. 11:25), although their period of darkness has been a long one, nearly 2000 years up to date.

Before this happened, Paul warned them, in his first recorded speech:

'Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you' (Acts 13:40,41).

At the same time he reminded them of the privileged position God had given them in His plan to use them to reach the Gentile, in fact to reach the whole world with the gospel and the kingdom message. In doing this Paul quoted Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6:

'For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee (Israel) to be a light of the *Gentiles*, *that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth*' (Acts 13:47).

This is a very concise summing up of Israel's position in God's plan. In the latter quotation from Isaiah, it is difficult to determine whether Christ is referred to or Israel, but it is true of *both* and in this verse Paul condemns the Jew who was opposing. It is important to understand that, during the Acts, Gentile blessing was *through* Israel and Gentile believers were associated *with* Israel, but never *apart* from them. 'Rejoice, ye Gentiles, *with His people* (Israel)' (Romans 15:10). Such were partakers of Israel's spiritual things (Rom. 15:27).

As we go on with our study a further link between the book of the Acts and the Old Testament is seen by the fact that there are at least twenty quotations from the Old Testament in the Acts either in fulfilment of what was then

happening or prophetic of what would take place in the future. The opening chapters then of this book are not the beginning of an entirely new purpose as is so often taught, but a continuing of what had already been revealed of the divine plan of the kingdom in the Old Testament and declared to be 'at hand' in the ministry of the Lord Jesus to Israel. The history of the Acts continues further what the Lord *began* to do and teach (Heb. 2:3) regarding this kingdom. Israel and Israel's hope, as described in the third chapter dominate the Acts. It is such a pity that there are expositors of this most important part of the New Testament who turn a blind eye to this and seek to minimise or explain away Israel's position here. In doing this they throw away a divine key to its interpretation and no wonder they get enmeshed in contradictions with the epistles written during this period and afterwards.

The fact remains that the amazing offer of forgiveness and the sending back of the Messiah recorded in chapter 3 is stressed in all the epistles written during the Acts. It surely should be obvious that the doctrine of the epistles written at this time must go hand in hand with the doctrine of the Acts and any interpretation that does not harmonize with this must be suspect.

As the Second Advent of Christ was a possibility during the Acts, (and it must have been if the third chapter is true, for God does not trifle with His promises) then the epistles written during this period will reflect this teaching. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9,10 we are told that the Thessalonian saints were 'waiting for His Son from heaven' and Paul does not hesitate to include himself among those who are 'alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord' (1 Thess. 4:15-17).

The second epistle was written to the same Christians to correct false impressions concerning His second coming, but it was still described as 'their gathering together unto Him' (2 Thess. 2:1), a time when they would be able to 'rest' from their acute suffering and trials, and this was not to be at death, but at the revelation of Christ from heaven (1:7).

How anyone can make this refer to the Second Advent yet future to us passes comprehension. How could an event which would not take place for more than 1900 years later release them from their present severe testing! But if this coming was then really near and possible of fulfilment, then this promise had real meaning and gave them real hope to endure.

Coming to 1 Corinthians we read in 1:6,7 'so that you come behind in no gift *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*', and in 7:29 '... *the time is short*: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none'. Why? because 'Maran-atha', 'the Lord cometh' (1 Cor. 16:22), yet after the Acts, the Apostle urges widows to get married (1 Tim. 5:14). To the Roman believers Paul wrote, 'the God of peace *shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly*' (16:20) for 'the night is far spent, *the day is at hand*' (13:12). In Hebrews 10:37 we read 'for yet a *little while* and He that shall come will come and *will not tarry*'. Again in 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul writes 'now these things ... were written down for our instruction, upon whom *the end of the ages has come*' (R.S.V.).

To these references we must add the testimony of Peter, James and John. Peter declares that '*the end of all things is at hand*' (1 Pet. 4:7). James asserts that '*the coming of the Lord draweth nigh ... the Judge standeth before the door*' (James 5:7-9). John, in his first epistle states '*it is the last time* (literally *the last hour*), even now there are many antichrists *whereby we know that it is the last hour*' (time, 1 John 2:18).

With all these Scripture references, there should be no doubt in the minds of those who believe the Word of God that the promise of the return of Christ in Acts 3 to bring in the kingdom, which *all the prophets* had foretold, was a glorious reality, and was held tenaciously by those who had been saved by grace at this time.

The only alternatives seem to be that Christ did not return because of the indifference and unreadiness of believers or that they made a mistake and it was nothing more than wishful thinking on their part. The former is not true, as it has not the support of Scripture, and the latter is just the opinion of modernism which does not hesitate to say that Christ also made a mistake with regard to His Second Coming.

The Mounting Opposition of Israel in the Acts

In this respect we find that the attitude of Israel as recorded in the Acts follows the same pattern as the Gospels. Instead of being overwhelmed with gratitude for God's offer of mercy and forgiveness for their great sin of murdering their Messiah-King and the promise of His return to them if they repented, Israel and their leaders hardened their hearts all the more and the savage persecution of believers foretold by the Lord commenced. Stephen is stoned to death. Peter is thrown into prison, James is executed. Paul is likewise imprisoned on more than one occasion and also stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19,20). His long list of sufferings, recorded in 2 Corinthians 11 vividly brings before us the tremendous cost of faithfulness at this time. The opposition to the ministry of the Apostles came consistently from Israel and not from the Gentiles. In fact, at the beginning, Rome protected Paul.

No wonder the Lord's verdict on the nation is expressed in Romans 10:21 :

'But *to Israel* He saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying (contradicting) people'.

Those loving hands were stretched forth to forgive, receive and bless this chosen nation, but they would have none of it. Rather they persevered in their opposition to the Lord and His ministers, going farther away from Him and deeper into the darkness of rejection.

As we have seen, Paul always went *to the Jew first*, asserting that it was *necessary* to do this (Acts 13:46), necessary because of Israel's key position in the outworking of God's purposes for His earthly kingdom. And this goes right on until the end of the book and is just as apparent in the last chapter as the earlier ones. It is therefore quite incorrect to place the present laying aside of Israel in unbelief at any point prior to Acts 28.

True it is that Paul turned away *locally* from the Jews when they made it quite evident that they violently opposed his ministry (see Acts 13:45-48; 18:5,6) and then appealed to the Gentiles, is clear from the record, but it was only a *local* turning away for afterwards we are told that the Apostle, in going to a new place, goes straight to the synagogue and witnesses there once more (Acts 14:1, 18:19 etc). In chapter 20 we have a summary by Luke of Paul's speech to the elders of the church at Ephesus and this is important because of the light it throws upon his ministry up to this point. He says to them:

'And now 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 20:20-27).

Here are the marks of faithful ministry. Of the truth Christ had revealed to him and commissioned him to make known, Paul had kept back *nothing*; he had made known *everything*. Would to God that all servants of the Lord could truthfully say this!

But the implications of these statements are often missed. During the period covered by the Acts, Paul wrote seven epistles, if we include Hebrews[#] (although this is not popular among scholars today). These are Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Hebrews and Romans. After the Acts we have seven more, five of which are linked with prison, they are marked with an asterisk: *Ephesians, *Colossians, *Philemon, *Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and *2 Timothy. We insist that the seven epistles written during the Acts period must reflect the conditions and the doctrine of the Acts. There cannot be a dichotomy here, the Acts teaching one thing and the epistles of this period teaching another in contradiction.

If Paul had made known everything and kept back nothing in doctrine which Christ had given him, then he must have revealed the later teaching concerning the Body of Christ given in Ephesians and Colossians. But in the latter epistles this is linked with a *secret* (*mystery* A.V.) which God had hidden *in Himself* and was undiscoverable till He made it known through Paul the prisoner (Eph. 3:1-11; Col. 1:24-28). Moreover this church is not an evolution from

[#]The case for the Pauline authorship of Hebrews is dealt with in *Perfection or Perdition* by Charles H. Welch and Stuart Allen, published by The Berean Publishing Trust, 52a Wilson St., London EC2A 2ER.

the Acts, but a *new creation* (Eph. 2:13-16 and note that 'make' in verse 15 should be translated 'create') and this new creation is called *one new man*. Nowhere in his Acts epistles does Paul use the word *mystery* or secret, concerning the calling and constitution of the Pentecostal church, nor does he reveal the unique *Headship* of Christ to His Body which is vital to its relationship with Him and is so stressed in Ephesians and Colossians.

This he would have been compelled to do in the early epistles if it had formed a part of his commission during the Acts, otherwise the claim to have kept back nothing and revealed everything concerning the church would have been empty and untrue. If we will only keep to what is written, it would be much safer. The apostle Paul in Romans 11 describes that church as the faithful Jewish remnant - the 'remnant according to the election of grace' (verse 5), to which had been added believing Gentiles. When the apostle Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 it was in a context of restoration for Israel and the last verse reads:

'And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and *in the remnant whom the LORD shall call*' (Joel 2:32).

Now the faithful Jewish remnant is indissolubly linked with the Messianic kingdom and the return of Christ to set it up and this is therefore in complete accord with the trend of God's purpose throughout the Acts.

We come to Paul's speech before king Agrippa recorded in Acts 26. In this speech Paul gives a clear testimony as to the contents of his ministry up to that time. He says:

'And now I stand and am judged for the *hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers*: unto which promise our *twelve tribes*, instantly serving God day and night, *hope to come*' (verses 6 and 7).

There are several important points here. His hope, he declared, was linked with the promise God had made with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There can be no doubt to what this refers. Earlier in this study we have shown that God made unconditional promises to them concerning an eternal *posterity* (a seed) and a large portion of *land* as their home in the Middle East of which Palestine is only a portion. For this, he says the *twelve tribes were waiting*. Note, it is *twelve tribes not ten* as some would have us believe. Again we are reminded of the fact that Israel had *not* been cast off by God even as late in the Acts as this. In Romans, the last epistle he wrote in this period, he states 'God hath *not* cast away His people (Israel) which He foreknew (Rom. 11:1,2). One would have thought this would have settled the matter for all who believe and frame their doctrine solely on the Word of God. But no, Israel was cast off at the crucifixion we are told or at the death of Stephen, or at Acts 13, anywhere but where inspired Scripture places it and that is at Acts 28. Not only this, but in verses 22 and 23 of Acts 26 he says:

'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'.

This statement is valuable because it shows us that the Apostle was keeping his witness within the bounds of the Old Testament. This being so, he could not have been revealing the mystery, the great Secret concerning the Body of Christ, for the simple reason that it was *not* revealed in the Old Testament, but at this time was 'hid in God' (Eph. 3:9).

When we reach the 28th chapter, we come to the second great crisis point for Israel. The first had been when Christ presented Himself publicly as Israel's Messiah and King (Matt. 21). This later one occurred at the time when it could be said with truth that the Dispersion (Israelites living outside the land of Palestine) had heard the gospel and the great re-offering of the kingdom equally with those Jews living in the land. And now they had to decide one way or the other whether they would repent and turn back to the Lord, but their attitude all along made it only too clear which way it was going to be.

Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar, so that in the providential governance of God, he arrives at Rome as a prisoner. He tells us in his Roman epistle that he had often planned to visit Rome and meet the believers there, but had been prevented (Rom. 1:13). He hardly imagined that his visit when it occurred would be as a prisoner, not as a free man, although he knew and recognized the fact that he was the 'prisoner of Christ Jesus' (Eph. 3:1). He certainly did not regard himself merely as a prisoner of Nero. Before he reached Rome, he had been shipwrecked on Melita (Malta) and there exercised his divine gift of healing, evidently several times, for he not only

healed the father of Publius of dysentery, but others which had diseases in the island (Acts 28:8,9). Not only this, but he had been bitten by a poisonous snake, yet felt no ill effects, so the Lord's promise in Mark 16:17,18 was still operating.

On arrival at Rome, as was his habit, he called the chief of the Jews together to tell them the reason for his action. It was because, he said 'for the *hope of Israel* I am bound with this chain' (verse 20). Now the hope of Israel is *not* identical with the hope of the Body of Christ, although there are those who would like to make it so to avoid the awkward problem for them with the presence of the nation so late in the Acts. They assert that the 'hope of Israel' means Christ personally. There is a measure of truth in this of course, for the Lord Jesus is the hope of *all* His people, both earthly and heavenly. But if this was the case, why did not Paul say so? No one exalts the Lord Jesus more than the Apostle and there is no reason whatsoever why he did not remind the Jews that Christ Himself was their hope if this was what he wanted to stress. What is fatal to this idea is that *Paul had already described Israel's hope in Acts 26:6,7* which we have already considered, that *is the fulfilment of God's promises to the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning the seed and the land*. Anyone who ignores this, is refusing to face Scriptural facts.

Paul further describes this hope in Romans 15 by quoting from Isaiah 11:

'... Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in Him shall the Gentiles hope (not trust as in A.V.). Now the God of (that) hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing ...' (verse 12,13).

Now Isaiah 11 is a great Millennial chapter describing the righteous rule and reign of the Lord Jesus over the Gentile nations and the regathering of Israel to the land given to Abraham and his seed. This completely fits the context and the divine purpose described in the Acts concerning the mediatorial kingdom of the Old Testament and it does *not* fit either the calling or the hope and destiny of the heavenly people, the Body of Christ as revealed in Ephesians and Colossians now 'enthroned in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:6) and blessed with 'every spiritual blessing' THERE. Because of this the members of this company are urged to set their minds *there* and *not* on things on the earth (Col. 3:2 and note the marginal reading).

The next thing we read is that Paul fixed another meeting with the Jewish leaders at his lodging (28:23). Many of them came and he spent a whole day in which 'he expounded and testified of the *kingdom of God*, persuading them concerning Jesus both out of the law of Moses and out of the prophets from morning to evening' (verse 23). This could not refer to the Body of Christ, for it is *not* the subject of the Old Testament law and prophets, this company being 'hidden in God' at this time, thus belonging to God's *secret* purposes (Eph. 3:3,9). What he did speak about was obviously the things that pertain to the mediatorial kingdom of which Israel was the human centre and the theme of *all* the prophets (Acts 3:19-26).

The result of this long exposition was quite inconclusive. While 'some believed' (verse 24) there was no agreement among themselves and this only confirmed the fact that the attitude of the nation whether inside or outside Palestine was still the same, a hardness of heart and enmity against the Messiahship of Christ and as long as this persisted, the realization of the earthly phase of the kingdom of God was impossible.

It is quite evident that the apostle Paul realized here the mind of the Lord, for he quotes the solemn words of Isaiah 6:9,10 for the third and last time in the New Testament *as words of the Holy Spirit* to their fathers, and now to them also (verses 25-27). Each quotation of these verses had been made at a time of crisis in Israel's history. In the Old Testament, where it was first made, the time was one of rebellion on Israel's part, leading inexorably to the judgment of the captivity at Babylon and dispersion. The first quotation in the New Testament was given by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 13:13-15 after He had made it quite clear that He had been rejected as Prophet, Priest and King (Matt. 11 and 12). He addressed His solemn remarks to the leaders of the nation and told them that by their attitude of enmity and rejection of Him they were fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 6 in their spiritual blindness, deafness and hardness of heart.

The second quotation came at the crisis when after His triumphal entry of Jerusalem as their King the leaders of the nation again rejected Him. In fact they had already prepared to kill Him (John 11:53; 12:12-16,37-41). The third quotation and final crisis took place as we have just seen at the end of Acts, when together with the record of

the gospels, the Jews both inside and outside Palestine made clear their unyielding opposition and rejection of God's renewed offer to them of the realization of the kingdom by the return of Christ, that offer being conditional upon their repentance and turning back to God.

It was at this point that Israel went into their darkness and blindness which has persisted to the present time. Individual Jews have come to a saving knowledge of Christ, but the nation is still rejecting Christ as they did in New Testament days. As Isaiah 6 says, they have deliberately closed their eyes, deafened their ears and hardened their hearts against Him, neither will they change until they see the returning Christ in great power and glory when they will look on Him Whom they pierced and at last be convicted of their terrible sin of crucifying Him and then they will turn to Him and believe (Zech. 12:9-14). It will take nothing less than the glory of the Lord's Second Advent to the Mount of Olives to break Israel's stony heart and to put into effect the New Covenant of grace which God made between Himself and them, expressly dealing with the heart and mind (Jer. 31:31-37).

Their hardened condition now is the very *negation* of the New Covenant which only shows that it is not in operation today. It is a mistake to imagine that salvation by grace can only operate under the New Covenant. God's mercy and boundless grace can flow out to sinners today quite apart from covenant conditions. There can be no doubt that, from a careful and honest consideration of the Scriptures, Acts 28 is the point where the Lord set aside Israel in unbelief, not in Acts 2 or Acts 13. Here they became in the words of Hosea, *lo-ammi, not My people*. It is they who are at the centre of revelation, humanly speaking from Genesis 12 to the last chapter in the Acts and the great subject all through is the earthly phase of the kingdom of God.

Before we go any further, it is necessary for us to consider the Scriptural meaning of the word 'church'. There are so many and varying ideas concerning this word that our examination from Scripture is essential. It is used in at least six ways in the Word of God:

- (1) First of all it is used of Israel as a nation. Stephen calls them the 'church in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38). We shall have more to say about this later on.
- (2) The Jewish synagogue: 'and if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church ...' (Matt. 18:17). (Note that the word 'assembly' in James 2:2 is not *ekklesia*, the church, but *synagogue* and the phrase should be translated 'if there come into your *synagogue*').
- (3) The guild of Ephesian craftsmen mentioned in Acts 19:39,41, 'a lawful *assembly*'.
- (4) Separate assemblies in different localities: 'The church of God which is at Corinth' (1 Cor. 1:2). 'The churches of God' (1 Cor. 11:16; 1 Thess. 2:14). 'The churches of Christ' (Rom. 16:16).
- (5) 'The church of the firstborn' (Heb. 12:23).
- (6) 'The church, which is His Body' (Eph. 1:22,23).

It should be clear from these usages that care must be taken with this word. We sometimes come across the 'one church' in religious literature, but this never occurs in the Bible. There is one Body, but that is a different matter.

What comes as a surprise to many Christians is that the word 'church' is used of Israel as a nation. The original word means a 'called out company of people' for any purpose, Christian or secular. It is certain that Israel was a 'called out' nation by God and separated by Him from every other nation for the kingdom purpose that He had in mind. They were therefore a church in the Scriptural sense.

In considering the word 'church' as related to the people of Israel we should realize that this word as applied to themselves was a fact well known to the Jew. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, *the Septuagint*, was in common use in the New Testament era and freely used by the Lord and the Apostles and the word church (*ekklesia*) occurs in it some 96 times. It is usually the translation of the Hebrew word *qahal*, rendered 'congregation' in the Authorized Version and it is used of four other Hebrew words.

We give several examples of the Septuagint usage:

- 'And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the *church of Israel*'.
- 'And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, a *great church* ...' (1 Kings 8:22,65).
- 'And David said unto all the *church of Israel* ...' (1 Chron. 13:2).
- 'So Solomon, and all the *church* with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon ...' (2 Chron. 1:3).

`Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot in the *church of the Lord*' (Micah 2:5).

It is interesting to note that Hebrews 2:12 quotes the Septuagint version of Psalm 22:22. The Psalm reads:

`I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren; in the midst of the *congregation* will I praise Thee'.

The quotation in Hebrews reads:

`... I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren, in the midst of the *church* will I sing praise unto Thee' (2:12).

It is a mistake therefore to limit the word `church' to the Body of Christ as is so often done. In the *Scriptural* sense there is more than one church in the Bible, though there is only *One Body*: and that is the church ministered to by the Apostle Paul (Col. 1:23-25).

The usage of the word `church' in the Old Testament must be borne in mind when considering Matthew 16:18 and the Lord's statement `that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church ...'. The only church Peter would have understood from these words would have been those from his own nation, and if the Lord had meant the church which was later to be revealed in Ephesians and Colossians, then an explanation and corrective on His part would surely have been necessary, but such a corrective was not given by Him.

The nation of Israel was a church in the Biblical sense of the word, a called-out company of people, and so Stephen designates it as `the church in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38). This nation and specially the generation to which the Lord came in the flesh, was judged repeatedly as being `wicked and adulterous' by Him. But there had always been a *faithful remnant* right throughout its history and there was such in the Lord's lifetime and in the Acts period that followed. The Lord was building another church of Israel and *this is the argument in Romans 11* `Hath God cast away His people?' the Apostle asks and the answer is decidedly *no* `God hath *not* cast away His people (Israel)' (verse 2). The Apostle then refers to their past history of failure. Even in the black period of Elijah's day, God had reserved to Himself 7000 men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal (verse 4). The conclusion is:

`Even so then at this present time also (that of the Roman epistle) there is a *remnant according to the election of grace*' (verse 5).

This company was certainly a church in the Biblical sense and this remnant is therefore the Scriptural title of the Pentecostal church. It would be much better and safer if we kept to it, instead of applying titles of our own. This `called-out company' was predominantly from Israel, but during the Acts, the Lord's purpose widened to include Gentile believers. Why did He do this? Many would say because He was calling out and building up the Body of Christ. But *this is not the reason Scripture gives*. And to this most important point we now turn our attention.

The Reason for the Admission of the Gentiles during the Acts

While God had been concentrating His attention upon Israel in the Old Testament and also through the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus, the Gentile had not been forgotten. Even at the first, God revealed to Abraham that His plan was not restricted to Israel, but rather through them *all families of the earth* would finally be blessed (Gen. 12). This being so, Gentile blessing was never secret or hidden, as the calling of the Body of Christ was, so that God, in bringing the Gentile believer into blessing during the Acts, was not going outside His revealed purpose. But He was doing it `before the time' as it were.

His normal design was to use a saved and prepared Israel to reach the nations of the world. However, during the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles He was saving Gentiles and `grafting' them into the stock of Israel with an express purpose:

`I say then, Have they (Israel) stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall *salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for (in order) to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy*' (Rom. 11:11).

`... Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, *I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people*, and by a foolish nation I will anger you' (Rom. 10:19).

Here then is the divine reason given for Gentile salvation and blessing at this time, namely to *stir up the nation of Israel* to fruitfulness instead of sinking into unbelief and rejection of Christ. But how often is *this* reason given

when the book of the Acts is expounded? One can say with truth, practically never and so a divine key in exposition is thrown away.

In order to explain this further and enforce it, the apostle Paul gives the illustration of the olive tree and its grafts in Romans 11:16-24. We have before mentioned that Israel is often likened to trees in the Word of God. The nation is likened to a vine which God brought out of Egypt (Psa. 80:8), but a vine that failed to produce fruit (Jer. 2:21; Isa. 5:1-7).

In the same way it was likened to a barren fig tree (Luke 13:6-9) and also an olive tree:

'The LORD called thy name, A green olive tree, fair, and of goodly fruit ...' (Jer. 11:16).

This was the Lord's intention for this nation, but it became completely unfruitful through its backsliding and unfaithfulness. Yet God's great longsuffering still held for Israel even after they had crucified Christ as we have seen. They were still the Lord's 'olive tree' and could have borne fruit for Him had they turned back to Him and truly repented. Because of this, Paul does not hesitate to use this illustration of what was actually happening during the Acts and why the Gentile believer was admitted at this time.

As Paul travelled in his missionary journeys to fresh fields, he first of all took the gospel to the chosen people, the people of Israel and made this known to them and their hope. In every case the Jew opposed and often violently. Paul then told them they had had their opportunity and that he would turn to the Gentile as a result of their (Israel's) rejection. In parabolic language the Apostle describes this in Romans 11 as 'some of the branches being broken off' (verses 17, 20) because of their unbelief. This happened at Antioch and Corinth among other places. In their stead, the Gentile believer was 'grafted in' as 'a wild olive' grafted in to the true, to partake of the 'root and fatness of the olive tree' (verse 17).

Some have smiled on what they think to be Paul's ignorance of gardening, for normally, the 'choice' is grafted in to the 'wild'. However, they are ignorant of the fact the reverse practice is used in olive culture and even about A.D. 40, Lucius Columella, a Latin writer in agriculture, speaks of this very practice obtaining at that time. But the apostle Paul gives a warning to the Gentile believer who stood 'by faith' (verse 20):

'... Be not high minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed lest He also spare not thee*. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: *otherwise thou also shalt be cut off*' (Rom. 11:20-22).

These verses present an unsurmountable difficulty to the average evangelical expositor, for it appears to contradict what has been revealed in Romans 1 to 8, especially the closing verses of the last chapter of this section where the Apostle clearly states that nothing can undo the justification of the believer or separate him from the love of Christ:

'For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8:38,39).

If all this is true, and it certainly is, what is it from which the believer at the time of writing Romans could have been cut off? There can be only one Scriptural answer and that is *dispensational privilege*. These privileges gave the Jew, as the chosen of God much advantage *in every way* (Rom. 3:1,2) and some of these privileges were listed by the Apostle in the 9th chapter (verses 3-6) and an imposing list they are. The privilege of sharing these with Israel, or in the symbolic words 'partaking of the root and fatness of the olive tree (Israel)' (11:17) is what the unfaithful Gentile believer could and would forfeit. Once this is understood, there is no conflict with the previous chapters. Since the nation of Israel has been temporarily laid aside in unbelief and is unusable by the Lord in the present age, there are no Scriptural grounds for trying to make the olive tree position reflect the calling and constitution of the Body of Christ as revealed in Ephesians and Colossians, for *this is an impossible task*.

In the church of the Acts period, the Jew was still first and the Gentile believer partook of the nation's covenant blessings. This is certainly not a true description of the Body of Christ as revealed in Ephesians and Colossians written after Acts 28 when Israel was laid aside in unbelief and became unusable by God. Gentile members of the Body of Christ are *not* grafted into the olive tree of Israel with its earthly hope, for their's is not only a heavenly

calling in character, but in sphere and destiny, linked with the right hand of God where the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted 'far above all'.

In any case as we have indicated, there is no usable nation of Israel today into which they could be grafted. The Body of Christ is a calling and constitution where there is *neither Jew or Gentile*. In this church the status of each has disappeared and out of the two companies, Jew and Gentile, God has created *one new man* (Eph. 2:15,16) with the hope of the 'upward calling' (Phil 3:14) to the glory of heaven's holiest of all where the Lord Jesus is now enthroned and where God now reckons them *to be seated with Him in the heavenly places* (Eph. 2:6) and this sphere is above all that the mind can conceive (Eph. 1:19-23).

Before we leave the consideration of the kingdom purpose of God as revealed in the Acts of the Apostles, there is another aspect of truth that must be examined. While the hope of Israel is dominant all through this period as we have seen, God revealed something greater and higher for the response of faith. Genesis 13:14-17 and 15:18 define the extent of the earthly inheritance of Abraham and his seed, which was secured for them in and through Christ. But in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews an inheritance is revealed concerning which the Old Testament is silent:

'By faith Abraham ... sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country ... *for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*' (Heb. 11:8-10).

And not only Abraham, but those of his seed who are listed in this chapter and others previously who lived and exhibited the loyal faith of the overcomer, emulated him and his example. Of them it is said, '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*' (verse 16). This city is named in the twelfth chapter, verse 22:

'Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the *heavenly Jerusalem*'.

The Book of the Revelation describes this heavenly city in detail with all its glory and gorgeous colouring (21:10-27). There is a feature which we do well to notice. Though a heavenly city, *it does not remain in heaven*. Three times in this book we are reminded of this fact by the Holy Spirit:

'Him that overcometh ... I will write upon him ... the name of the city of My God, *which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God*'.

'And I John saw the *holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven*'.

'And he ... shewed me that great city, *the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God*' (Rev. 3:12; 21:2,10).

These verses describe the heavenly Jerusalem *as descending from heaven to the new earth, so that its final goal is an earthly one*, although it is distinct from the new earth. It is therefore unscriptural to regard this city as the equivalent of heaven, although it is most certainly heavenly in character.

Here is a sphere of blessing for the redeemed who are regarded by God as faithful and rewarded by Him as such. Surely we cannot doubt, as we read the stupendous words of Revelation 21, that this sphere is higher and more wonderful than the piece of land promised to Abraham, and it is confirmed by Hebrews 11:16:

'Now they desire a BETTER country, that is, an heavenly'.

God Himself describes this as being *better*, and therefore it must be so. He must have revealed the glories of this city to Abraham, as He did later to the apostle John. Being strong in faith, Abraham responded by believing *all* that God had showed him of this higher sphere of glory. The epistle to the Hebrews urges us 'to go on to full growth' (or maturity; perfection in the A.V.) and not to 'draw back to loss' (perdition in the A.V. 10:39) and God's people have always been divided into two classes. There are those believers who grow in grace and knowledge of God's Truth and whose faith reaches out to the best and highest that God has revealed in His Word. These go forward in faithfulness, regardless of any suffering or loss that this course of action entails.

The other class of believers, though saved, do not grow spiritually. They are more attracted by the world and all it offers. It is the NOW that they want; the hereafter with its divine rewards is unreal and means little to them. Such are described in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. They, by grace, are on the One Foundation - Christ, but are building upon Him with the shoddy materials of the flesh and the world, and in the day when 'every man's work will be tested' by

the fire of the righteous judgment of God, they suffer loss of *reward*, even though they themselves are saved (verse 15).

On the other hand the work and service of those believers who have progressed spiritually and come to spiritual maturity, 'abides' the test of God's holiness and they receive a *reward* (verse 14). It is most important to distinguish these two different though parallel lines of truth. Salvation is a free gift by grace and received by faith in Christ alone (Eph. 2:8,9). It is not by works or merit and cannot be earned by any human action, but is eternally secure in the Lord Jesus. In contrast to this, reward for faithful service *is* earned by the believer and is dependent on his Christian walk and witness and practical response to the claims of God's truth. Such reward can be lost by unfaithfulness or sowing to the flesh (Col. 2:18; 3:24,25; Rev. 3:11; 1 Cor. 3:14,15). The believer cannot *work for* his salvation, but he learns by grace to *work it out* in practice to the Lord's glory (Phil. 2:12,13), with the future day of testing in view. Any amount of Bible difficulties and false teaching today is caused by confusing these two differing aspects of truth or by emphasizing one at the expense of the other.

Thus we have those who say we can be saved today and lost tomorrow and those who accept this as truth can never have divine assurance of their salvation, and thus they have no secure ground upon which they can live, be saved and serve the Lord in this present life.

In confusing God's truth, they cannot see that 'He Who hath *begun* a good work in you (that is salvation) *will finish it* (see margin) until the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1:6). The vital work of salvation which only God can provide and start in the believer *is completed and finished by Him*, for God does not do His work by halves or leave things so fundamental to His great purposes to rest upon anything so insecure as human actions.

At the same time the righteousness of God will distinguish between the faithful and the unfaithful among His children and it cannot be otherwise. The Lord Jesus as the *righteous Judge* will make no mistakes or give any unfair verdict on the service and witness of the believer (2 Tim. 4:7,8).

The faithful ones described in Hebrews 11 not only believed God for salvation, but all His revelation afterwards and were willing to go through extremes of testing and suffering to obtain *that better country and city*, the heavenly Jerusalem, and the *better resurrection* attached to it (verse 35 and see verses 32-40). Like Moses, they had respect unto 'the recompense of the reward' (verse 26).

Thus we see that this higher sphere of blessing is for the faithful from Abel's time onwards, through Abraham's seed, and down to the time of the Acts of the Apostles. It was brought before the saved of the Pentecostal period and held out to them *as a reward*, as well as to believers of Old Testament days. Their *hope*, as we have shown, was Israel's hope, connected with the *seed* and the *land* and was the great mediatorial kingdom that looms so large in the Old Testament as its basis and brought near by the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus and the twelve.

Their *prize was the better country, the heavenly Jerusalem*, which is to come down from heaven and form part of the new earth at the goal of the ages. To these must be added the overcomers at the end of this age under the terrible tyranny of the Antichrist. The Lord gave to them the exhortation in Revelation 2:10, 'be thou faithful *unto death*, and I will give thee a *crown of life*'. This is the peak period of tribulation and testing in all the world's history as the Lord Jesus predicted in Matthew 24:21,22 :

'For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened'.

Many will doubtless give their lives for the Lord, rather than receive the mark of the beast and indulge in the worship of Satan whom he represents. However, the apostle John sees them receiving their *crown*, which speaks of *reward* and *reigning*, in Revelation 20:4 :

'And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them *that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands*; and they lived *and reigned* with Christ a thousand years'.

These will consist of the faithful of Hebrews 11 and form the 'church of the firstborn' (Heb. 12:22,23) and let us remember that the firstborn's position was one of *privilege*. They will not only *live* with Christ but *reign* with Him during the Millennium, sharing His administration of the earthly mediatorial kingdom from the heavenly Jerusalem. Later on, after the thousand year reign, when the creation of a new heaven and earth takes place John sees them forming the *Bride, the Lamb's wife* (Rev. 21:1,2,9,10).

This higher sphere of blessing then is one of *reward and privilege* and while the heavenly Jerusalem must be distinguished from the kingdom on earth during the Millennium, it is finally united with the new earth and leaves the heavens, as we have seen (Rev. 21:9,10, 24-27).

The Kingdom of God in the Epistles of the Acts Period

The word kingdom, relating to God's purpose, occurs 12 times in these epistles (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; 6:9; 15:24,50; Gal. 5:21; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 1:8; 12:28; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11). In these references the spiritual side of the kingdom is stressed:

'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' (Rom. 14:17).

Also its power:

'The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power' (1 Cor. 4:20).

There is privilege in belonging to it:

'... that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer' (2 Thess. 1:5),

and inheritance in it can be forfeited by sin (Gal. 5:21). There is nothing in these occurrences that contradicts what we have found so far. In fact the kingdom as proclaimed in the Acts and in the epistles written during this period must be the same. There cannot be two different kingdoms being preached by the same people at the same time. Had this occurred there would have been nothing but confusion among the people of God, specially among young converts. Any system of interpretation that needs this must be suspect and there are interpretations which do this very thing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Kingdom of God in the Post-Acts Period

We have seen that the mediatorial kingdom with Israel at its centre dominates the Acts and the evidential signs and miracles which are linked to it, feature as much in the last chapter (28) as at the beginning.

With the laying aside of Israel in unbelief at its conclusion, one of two things must happen. Either God will continue His earthly kingdom purposes, but find another channel to use instead of Israel, or He will suspend it until such time as Israel is convicted of sin, saved and restored and become usable again. It is the latter course of action which takes place. What 'draws near' in the plan of God, can 'withdraw' and be suspended if the conditions that He has imposed are not fulfilled.

However, the almightiness of the Lord and His matchless wisdom can overrule the failings of men and the enmity of Satan behind them all. What seemed on the surface to be a major victory for Satan in the failure of Israel and the setting up of the earthly kingdom the Lord overrules to make known another phase of His great kingdom purpose, this time relating to the heavens and not the earth.

From Genesis 12 to Acts 28, the purpose of the ages, centred in Christ, is taken up with making known and seeking to set up the rule of God upon earth, Israel being the human channel through which the message should have been proclaimed and the redemptive work of Christ being its basis. Many concentrate entirely on this aspect of God's kingdom and forget that He created the heavens as well as the earth and there cannot be any part of His creation that is without reason or purpose, and His dominion must extend to the highest heavens as well as the earth and the whole of the kingdom cannot be realized in all its fulness and magnitude until this comes to pass.

With the earthly kingdom in abeyance, God now takes the opportunity of revealing truth which He had kept absolutely secret, *hidden in Himself*, and when God hides truth in this way who can find it until He is pleased to reveal it?

In spite of this, there are those who persuade themselves that they can discover this hidden truth in the Old Testament, the Gospels, in fact anywhere but where it actually is revealed in the Word of God. It should be obvious that such conceptions must be wrong, however skilfully they are presented or however right they may appear to be.

The Apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write seven more epistles after the Acts and Israel's failure. Five of them are stamped with prison and are marked with an asterisk. They are *Ephesians, *Colossians, *Philemon, *Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, and *2 Timothy.* The two pastoral epistles of 1 Timothy and Titus were evidently written during the short period of Paul's release from his first imprisonment at Rome. 2 Timothy was his last epistle, written just before his martyrdom and the whole tone of the letter bears this out.

There are those who dispute this and maintain that Paul *thought* he had come to the end and finished the race when he wrote this epistle, not knowing that there was further ministry ahead of him. If this is true, then it must be stated that Paul was deceived in many respects, and made statements that were obviously false. This is serious indeed, for if it is so, how can we accept *any* statement in this epistle as being God's truth? Or for that matter anything else in his other epistles? The very foundations of Truth are undermined by such ideas and they are only made to bolster up false theological schemes. It is beyond comprehension how anyone who subscribes to the full inspiration of the Word of God and the need to obey the command of 2 Timothy 2:15 could concoct and put forward such false notions which just play into the enemy's hands.

It is in the Prison Epistles of Paul that we get the full revelation of the church which is the Body of Christ with Christ as its Head. No amount of quoting 1 Corinthians 12 can alter the fact that there is no headship of Christ revealed in this chapter and it is quite impossible to have the supreme fulness of Ephesian and Colossian teaching without this absolutely necessary Headship and relationship with Christ.

All life, light and spiritual wealth, riches of grace and riches of glory *flow from the Head*, and without Christ as such they cannot be realized. We have before stressed the absolute accuracy of the time element in the purposes of God, and those who fail to take this into account and read later truth into earlier passages of Scripture before it was revealed, make their own problems and difficulties.

The fact remains that the apostle Paul as the prisoner of Christ Jesus, states that by special revelation, the Lord Jesus had made known to him a secret (Mystery in the A.V.) which had been hidden from ages and generations, that is hidden in all past time and from all previous generations of people. The full implications of this must be faced if we desire to get the fulness of revealed truth with its exceeding spiritual riches, yet so few apparently seem to be willing to accept this and put it into practice.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:1-11 :

`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 (secret) ... that the Gentiles should be joint heirs, and a joint-body, and joint partakers of His promise in Christ Jesus (J. N. Darby) by the gospel (glad tidings) whereof I was made a minister ... that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all (men) see what is the dispensation (administration R.V. and J.N.D.) of *the Mystery (Secret) which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God ...*'.

In his seven earlier epistles written during the Acts of the Apostles Paul had revealed nothing like this. Although he claimed to be the 'steward of the mysteries (secrets) of God' (1 Cor. 4:1), he never used the word 'mystery' once to describe the church or the churches then in existence, nor should we expect him to do so. As we have seen, those churches were intimately linked with the earthly kingdom of Israel into which Gentile believers had been 'grafted'

* For a verse by verse exposition of these Prison Epistles of Paul see the author's *Letters from Prison*, (Berean Publishing Trust, 52a Wilson Street, London EC2A 2ER).

and that kingdom far from being a mystery or secret, was the main theme of the Old Testament Scriptures, so the Pentecostal church could never have been designated with truth as a 'secret hid in God'. Had it been so, the Apostle would have been bound to declare it. As he had asserted in Acts 20:20,27 he had 'kept back nothing' as a faithful minister of the Word but made known everything. Not only this, in the second chapter of Ephesians, Paul reveals that the composition of this new company was a fresh beginning, a *new creation*, by the Lord of Jewish and Gentile believers and as such could not have been an evolution from the Acts, even though it was based firmly upon justification by faith and the basic doctrine of redemption by the precious blood of Christ:

'Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances (decrees) *for to make (CREATE) in Himself of the twain (two, Jewish and Gentile believers) one new man, so making peace*' (Eph. 2:14-16).

To *create*, means a new beginning, not the patching up or improvement of something old.

Not only this, there are other features which make the Body of Christ, as revealed in Ephesians and Colossians, unique. A unique word is used of this company in Ephesians 3:6, *sussoma*, literally a joint-body, a body where each member shares fully and on perfect equality with the others. The word is not used in the Corinthian epistles or elsewhere for it could not be true while the 'olive tree' illustration obtained during the Acts (Rom. 11:16-23).

A unique Time Period. The choice of the Father of each individual member was described as being 'chosen (elected) in Christ *before* the foundation of the world', that is, *before creation* (Eph. 1:4). 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2 literally read '*before* age-times'. No other company of the redeemed is associated with such a period. The expression is only used elsewhere in Scripture of Christ Himself (John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20). Other companies of believers are declared to belong to that aspect of the kingdom which has been prepared by God, '*since* the foundation of the world' (Matt. 25:34). One must surely distinguish between *before* an event, and *since* an event. The importance of this heavenly company in the plan of God is surely emphasized by the timing of His choice which was *before* creation.

A unique Title. 'The church which is His Body, *the fulness* of Him that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:22,23). This title with its great content defies complete explanation. In Christ dwells '*all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*' (Col. 2:9). This church is *His fulness* and each member is '*filled to the full (complete) in Him*' (Col. 2:9,10). Such language is above anything given to Israel, wonderful though their blessings were. Ephesians and Colossians are predominantly the epistles of *fulness* (Eph. 1:10,23; 3:19; 4:13; Col. 1:19; 2:9).

A unique Status. Ephesians 3:6 gives the relationship of each redeemed member of this church. As we have before shown, there is a threefold emphasis on perfect equality in sharing between Jew and Gentile ('fellow-heirs', 'fellow-members' of the Body and 'Fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus') which could not exist as long as Israel was first in the outworking of the plan of God and the 'olive tree' figure obtained. In the Body of Christ, saved Jew and Gentile have lost their earthly status, the Jew with his many privileges in the flesh (Rom. 9:4,5) and the Gentile with his complete lack of them, being 'far off', 'aliens', Christless and Godless (Eph. 2:11-13). They are now brought together in complete equality and unity, everything that could have been a barrier being broken down by the Lord (Eph. 2:14-16).

A unique Sphere of Blessing. This is described as being in heavenly places where Christ is now enthroned 'far above all' (Eph. 1:19-21). The Lord Jesus must be localized somewhere for He has a glorified body. Likewise we are told that 'principalities and powers' (heavenly princes) exist also in these heavenly places and they obviously must be *somewhere* (Eph. 3:10). The Lord Jesus Christ has been exalted to the highest pinnacle of glory and the phrase 'in the heavenlies' is only another way of describing this supreme sphere, which elsewhere is expressed as being '*far above all heavens*' (Eph. 4:10). This shows us that heaven is a great deal more complex and wonderful than we realized. Ephesians 1:20-22 gives us the enthroned Christ in the heavenly places which is described as being far above anything the human mind can conceive. Ephesians 2:6 goes further and reveals the *Body of Christ enthroned there with Him*. It is surely impossible to get higher than the ascended and glorified Lord, so we can say with truth that *this is the climax of revelation for the redeemed of God*. With all their wonderful blessings, Israel had nothing equalling this. Never do we read in the Word of God that this nation will ever be exalted to the right hand of God. They were intended to be 'high above all nations' of the earth (Deut. 26:18,19) but never above the spiritual dignities that exist in the highest heavens as well as those on earth.

Before we leave this great theme, we must point out that we must learn to distinguish between what is *heavenly in character* and what is not only heavenly in character, but heavenly *in sphere of blessing*. The Hebrew believers to whom the epistle to the Hebrews was addressed were described as having 'tasted of the heavenly gift' (6:4). This gift was *heavenly in character*, but they certainly did not taste it *in heaven*, but on earth. The phrase 'in the heavenlies', expressing location is unique to the epistle to the Ephesians, where it occurs five times (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12).

As far as our studies have taken us we find that there are at least three spheres of blessing prepared by God in His redemptive purpose for the new heavens and earth:

- (1) The millennial earth and the new earth to follow 'The meek shall inherit *the earth*' (Matt. 5:5).
- (2) The heavenly Jerusalem which finally descends from heaven and forms part of the new earth (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2, 10, 23,24).
- (3) The right hand of God - the heavenly places 'far above all' (Eph. 1:19-21;2:6).

In each of these spheres God has a company whom He likens to the *firstborn son*, the position of *privilege*

- (1) Israel (Exod. 4:22)
- (2) the 'church of the firstborn' linked with the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:23).
- (3) The Body linked to the Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Firstborn of all creation because He created all things (Col. 1:15-18).

There can be no doubt whatever that in the Prison Epistles of Paul we reach the high water mark of divine revelation. As before stated no one can reach a more exalted position than that which the Lord Jesus now occupies in ascension. Is it any wonder that, in these epistles, Paul deals with the 'exceeding' things of God? One cannot help feeling that the Apostle found no human word to describe adequately the greatness or fulness of this supreme calling of God. Consequently 'exceeding' becomes one of his characteristic words in these letters from his prison. Here we have spiritual riches beyond dreams which await reception by faith. The word 'riches' occurs eight times in Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and 2 Timothy as follows:

'In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the *riches of His grace* which He lavished upon us ...' (Eph. 1:7 R.S.V.).

'... That you may know ... *the riches* of His glorious inheritance in the saints' (Eph. 1:18 N.I.V.).

'... in order that in the coming ages He might show the *incomparable riches of His grace*, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:7 N.I.V.).

'To me (Paul), though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles *the unsearchable riches of Christ* ...' (Eph. 3:8 R.S.V.).

'... that *according to the riches of His glory* He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man ... (Eph. 3:16 R.S.V.).

'And my God will supply every need of yours *according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus*' (Phil. 4:19 R.S.V.).

'To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are *the riches of the glory* of this Mystery (Secret)' (Col. 1:27 R.S.V.).

'So that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the Mystery (Secret) of God, namely, Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2:2,3 N.I.V.).

This colossal spiritual wealth awaits appropriation by faith, as the Holy Spirit gives the enlightening that we all need so much.*

* For a verse by verse exposition of the Prison Epistles of Paul, see *Letters from Prison* by the author, Berean Publishing Trust, 52a Wilson St., London EC2A 2ER.

When we trace the kingdom element in the seven epistles of Paul written after the Acts, we find that the word 'kingdom' occurs five times:

`For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the *kingdom of Christ and of God*' (Eph. 5:5).

`(The Father) Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the *kingdom of His dear Son*' (Col. 1:13).

`Onesimus ... Aristarchus ... Marcus ... Jesus called Justus ... These only are my fellow workers unto the *kingdom of God*, which have been a comfort unto me' (Col. 4:9-11).

`In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, Who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of *His appearing and His kingdom*, I give you this charge: Preach the Word' (2 Tim. 4:1, 2 N.I.V.).

`And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto *His heavenly kingdom*: to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen' (2 Tim. 4:18).

There are some teachers who hold that the Prison Epistles of Paul have no thought of kingdom teaching in them. The above references will show how wrong this is. What we can say with assurance is that the *earthly* kingdom does not figure in the epistles, but a kingdom in the highest heavens certainly does.

There is everything to link the calling of the Body of Christ with heaven and not with the earth. Those who perceive that this calling is separate from Israel the nation and Israel's hope, but at the end, link it with the Messianic kingdom on earth are making a great mistake.

The teaching of Ephesians and Colossians is that this church is blessed 'in heavenly places', a spiritual calling, with 'all *spiritual* blessings' (Eph. 1:3). The members are exhorted to set their mind on *things above, not on the earth* (Col. 3:1,2) and they are seen to be 'seated with Christ *in the heavenly places*', which is far above all human reckoning and so, it is completely disassociated from the earth in its spiritual constitution and destiny. Now, as we stated at the beginning of this study, God's final kingdom must embrace the heavens as well as the earth, for His sovereignty must extend manifestly over the whole creation and nothing can be outside it. Consequently it is a kingdom *in the heavens* which the Prison Epistles of Paul reveal, which are not only heavenly in character, but *heavenly in sphere*. And it is only when we get this wider conception of the Lord's kingly rule that we get nearer to understanding the vastness and wonder of the purpose of the ages centred in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:9-11 reveals that *every being in heaven* as well as on earth and under the earth (whatever that means) will finally bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the glory of the Father, showing that God's kingdom in earth and heaven must finally embrace all heavens and all that are in them. This obviously goes much wider than the Old Testament revelation for establishing His kingdom to the ends of the world.

Thus it is that the revelation of God through Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus, completes His great kingdom purpose, and those who omit this can only have a defective conception of its greatness and wonder.

The kingdom of the Son of His (the Father's) love into which the Body has been translated must therefore be the great spiritual kingdom of heavenly places where Christ is now enthroned. As we have seen that the kingdom of God is all-embracing its occurrences in Colossians cause no problem, but refer likewise to this heavenly calling in that kingdom.

It is significant that almost Paul's last thought in his last epistle, 2 Timothy, is of *the kingdom* of his prison letters. He says:

`The Lord ... will preserve me unto *His heavenly kingdom* ...' (2 Tim. 4:18).

Again, we stress that this aspect of the kingdom of God, is not only heavenly in character (like the earthly kingdom, when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven), but it will be enjoyed by the Body of Christ where they are now seen to be in God's plan, that is *enthroned with Christ, where He is now exalted* (Eph. 2:6). This is the

hope of this church in glory, and then the Body will be joined to its Head, the Lord Jesus, for which both He and each member of this company await.

Some of the early Brethren clearly saw this heavenly calling and its hope. We quote from C.H. Mackintosh:

`Every system of doctrine or discipline which would *connect the church with the world*, either in her present condition or her future prospects, *must be wrong* ...

... up to his (Paul's time) and even during the early stages of his ministry, the divine purpose was to deal with Israel ... the thought of Jew and Gentile, "seated together in the heavenlies" lay far beyond the range of prophetic testimony ... have we anything of the church in all this? Not a syllable. *The kingdom* was still the very highest thought'.

Coming to the ministry of Peter to Israel in Acts 3 he writes:

`... it was still the kingdom and not the great mystery of the church. Those who think the opening chapters of the Acts present the church in its essential aspect, have by no means reached the divine thought on the subject'.

Regarding Peter's vision recorded in Acts 10 he continues:

`... Peter never received a commission to unfold the mystery of the church. Even in his epistles we find nothing of it ... it was reserved for the great Apostle of the Gentiles to bring out in the energy and power of the Holy Ghost, the mystery of which we speak'.

Later on he states:

`Paul's gospel went far beyond them all (i.e. the other servants of God). It was not the kingdom offered to Israel on the ground of repentance, as by John the Baptist and our Lord; nor was it the kingdom opened to Jew and Gentile by Peter in Acts three and ten; *but it was the heavenly calling of the church of God composed of Jew and Gentile, in one Body, united to a glorified Christ by the presence of the Holy Ghost*. The epistle to the Ephesians fully develops the mystery of the will of God concerning this ... "He hath raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus". It is not He *will* do this, but "He hath" done it'.

He goes on to say:

`(The mystery) ... was not unfolded by the ministry of the Twelve, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles, because the testimony to Israel was still going on, and so long as earth was the manifested scene of divine operation, and so long as there was any ground of hope in connection with Israel, *the heavenly mystery was held back*, but when earth had been abandoned and Israel set aside, the Apostle of the Gentiles from his prison at Rome, writes to the church and opens out all the glorious privileges connected with its place in the heavens with Christ'.

C.H. Mackintosh continues to comment on the fact that so few believers have 'eyes to see' and the spiritual ability to grasp such exalted and wonderful teaching. The blinding power of tradition and the pull earthwards of the senses all combine to prevent this:

`We have seen how long it was ere man could take hold of it ... and we have only to glance at the history of the church for the last eighteen centuries to see how feebly it was held and how speedily it was let go. The heart naturally clings to the earth and the thoughts of an earthly corporation are attractive to it. Hence we may expect that the truth of the church's heavenly character will only be apprehended and carried out by a very small and feeble minority ... to understand all this requires a larger measure of spirituality than is to be found with many Christians.

... Those who will maintain Paul's gospel find themselves, like him, deserted and despised amid the pomp and glitter of the world. The clashing of ecclesiastical systems, the jarring of sects, and the din of religious controversy will surely drown the feeble voice of those who would speak of the heavenly calling and rapture of the church ... I am deeply conscious of how feebly and incoherently I have developed what I have in mind concerning the doctrine of the church, but I have no doubt of its real importance and feel assured that as the time draws near, much light will be communicated to believers about it. At present it is to be feared, few really enter into it' (concluding chapter in *Elijah the Tishbite* published by Loiseaux Bros. of New York. Italics ours).

These remarkable words are true and prophetic. There can be no doubt that this man of God clearly saw the kingdom purpose in the Scriptures relating to earth and heaven, that we have endeavoured to set forth in this volume. His comments are all the more remarkable considering they were written more than 100 years ago. In his day he found but few believers who were keen enough to search the holy Scriptures and see whether these things are so or not, like the Berean Christians of old (Acts 17:10-12).

Times have changed but little as regards spiritual hunger among the people of God. Concerning the world, conditions are infinitely worse, with the prevailing ignorance of God's Word and the denial of its truth. All who value it, should cling to it tenaciously and take every opportunity for making it known by voice and pen.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Kingdom of God in the Book of Revelation

When we come to the last book in the Bible, we are dealing with a part of Scripture concerning which there has been much controversy and division. Yet its main theme is perfectly clear. It is the book of the coming (Second Advent) of Christ which at last brings in the beginning of God's kingdom on earth. The word 'kingdom' is found seven times (1:9; 11:15; 12:10; 16:10; 17:12,17). Three references are to the kingdom of God and four to the opposing kingdom of Satan the deceiver. At the beginning we read 'Behold He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him' (1:7) and at the end is the Lord's promise, 'Surely I come quickly', to which is added the last prayer of Scripture, that of John, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (22:20).

G.N.H. Peters in *The Theocratic Kingdom* writes:

'It is only through this doctrine of the kingdom that the Apocalypse can or will be understood and consistently interpreted. The reason for this lies in the simple fact that it announces the Coming and the events connected with the Advent of the Theocratic King. Now to enter fully into its spirit and appreciate its force, to form an adequate conception of the testimony of Jesus either as a whole or in its several aspects, there must of necessity be a *previous acquaintance* with the covenants and a *correct apprehension* of the burden of prophecy based on those covenants resolving itself into the promised kingdom' (Vol. 3, p. 366).

The key words of the Revelation are all to do with the earthly kingdom. One word of special significance is the word 'throne' (*thronos*) which occurs no less than 41 times, 38 of which refer to God's kingdom and 3 to the kingdom of Satan (translated 'seat'). The great question as to *who will finally be on the throne* and control the earth is settled in this Book. The Satanic struggle that has characterised everything since his fall, which has been going on internally and externally, at long last comes out into the open and is completely resolved, because we read in 11:15:

'And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The *kingdoms of this world* are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever'.

Other characteristic words are: 'crown' (*diadema*) used and applied 3 times: to Christ 19:12; Satan 12:3 and to the wild Beast 13:1. Also 'crown' (*stephanos*) is used and applied 8 times: to believers 2:10; 3:11; 4:4; 4:10; to the rider on the white horse 6:2; to forces of demons 9:7; to Israel 12:1 and to the Lord as the Son of man 14:14.

Another feature of great importance to the interpretations of the Revelation is its vital link with the Old Testament. Old Testament language and references to this part of the Word abound, there being more than 500 of these which clearly indicate that the *Revelation will never be understood if there is ignorance of the Old Testament, especially the prophecy of Daniel*. This is supported by the Lord Jesus in His final discourse concerning His Second Coming and the events leading up to this, recorded in Matthew 24. In it He predicts a time of unparalleled trouble all over the world (Matt. 24:21,22) such as is mentioned in Daniel 12:1 and He refers to the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel (Dan. 9:26,27) in Matthew 24:15 and the whole conception is supported by the testimony of the Old Testament prophets, who reveal the pouring out of God's wrath and His judgments on the nations under Satan's domination at the end of the age.

The word 'wrath' (translating *thumos* and *orge*) occurs no less than 15 times, 14 of which refer to God and one to Satan (12:12), showing that the age of grace has finished and the anger of God has become a terrible reality. There are strong links between the Revelation and the book of Genesis:

<i>Genesis</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
The earth created (1:1)	The earth passed away (21:1)
Sun, moon and stars for earth's government (1:14-16)	Sun, moon and stars connected with earth's judgment (6:13; 8:12; 16:8)
Sun to govern the day (1:16)	No need of the sun (21:23)
Darkness called night (1:5)	No night there (22:5)
Waters called seas (1:10)	No more sea (21:1)
A river for earth's blessing (2:10-14)	A river for the new earth (22:1,2)
Man in God's image (1:26)	Man headed by one in Satan's image (ch. 13)
Entrance of sin (ch. 3)	Development and end of sin (chs. 21-22)
Curse pronounced (3:14,17)	No more curse (22:3)
Death entered (3:19)	No more death (21:4)
Cherubim in connection with man's fall and expulsion (3:24)	Cherubim finally connected with man's redemption and restoration (4:6)
Man driven out from Eden (3:24)	Man restored (ch. 22)
Sorrow and suffering enter (3:17)	No more sorrow (21:4)
Nimrod, a great rebel and king and hidden anti-God, the founder of Babylon (10:8,9)	The beast, a great satanic rebel, a king, manifested anti-God the reviver of Babylon (chs. 13-18)
The rainbow, a token of God's covenant with the earth (9:13)	The rainbow, showing God's remembrance of His covenant with the earth (4:3; 10:1)
Sodom and Egypt, places of corruption (chs. 13, 19)	Sodom and Egypt representing Jerusalem (11:8)
Man's dominion ceased and Satan's begun (3:24)	Satan's dominion ended and man's restored (ch. 22)
Sun, moon and stars associated with Israel (37:9).	Sun, moon and stars associated with Israel (ch. 12).

If expositors and Christians as a whole had only heeded the facts mentioned above, much that is completely unprofitable would never have been written concerning the Apocalypse. The divine setting of this Book is at the end of the age and refers largely to the last seven years (the last unfulfilled week of years related to Daniel's seventy seven's Dan. 9:24-27) a time of unparalleled darkness and persecution which will be ended by the coming of the Lord Jesus in power and great glory as He promised (Matt. 24:29-31; Rev. 19). In other words the setting of the Revelation relates to the time and the events described by the Lord in this important chapter in connection with the *end of the age* (not 'world' as A.V. verse 3). Much of the Revelation is clothed in symbolic language, the difficulties of which have been exaggerated and have resulted largely because the Old Testament commentary has been ignored and events in this age of grace have been strained to mean the fulfilment of its terrible judgments. The historicist interpretation of this Book has done great damage to its understanding. The tremendous events described in its chapters cannot be identified with past history. The confusion and disagreement among those who have tried to do so make this quite clear and in any case there is nothing in past history that measures up to the terribly solemn language that the Revelation contains.

When we are told that the great day of the wrath of God was fulfilled by the invasion of Rome by the Goths and Vandals (Barnes), or by the rout of the pagans before the military forces of Constantine (Elliot) or by the French Revolution (Cunningham) we are amazed at such triviality and of one thing we can be assured, namely that sinners need have no great fear of this day of divine judgment. That Israel figures right throughout this book is clear. Israelitish imagery is used from the very beginning. Thus we have references to the Temple, the Tabernacle, the Ark, the manna, the golden altar of incense, the rod of iron, Jezebel, Balaam, Egypt and its plagues and so on. The tribes of Israel are named in chapter 7 and the symbolism in chapter 12 unmistakably identifies it with this nation.

The predominance of Israel is seen by the following:

- (1) The seven assemblies are basically Hebrew Christian. All the imagery applied to them belongs to historical Israel of the Old Testament. Those 'that say they are Jews and are not' (2:9 and 3:9) has no meaning if these are entirely Gentile churches. Any Gentile element must be along the lines of the 'wild olive graft' (*see* Rom. 11) in which Gentile believers share the covenant blessings of Israel.
- (2) The 144,000 are of the 12 tribes of Israel (chap. 7).
- (3) The woman of chapter 12 represents true Israel.
- (4) The harlot of chapter 17 represents false Israel with its world wide dominance behind the scenes.
- (5) The Bride consists of the overcomers from the assemblies and the faithful from Abel onwards (*see* Heb. 11:8-10, 14-16; 12:22).
- (6) The New Jerusalem, the 'better country' (Heb. 11:16) which finally descends to the new earth.
The names of 12 tribes of Israel are on the 12 gates.
The 12 apostles are on the 12 foundations (cp. Heb. 11:10).

The spiritualizers seek to change Israel into the Body of Christ in order to identify the predictions of the Revelation with past events in this age. Dean Alford states:

'I am ... quite unable ... to point out definitely any period in the history of the world's civil power which shall satisfy the 42 months of chapter 13:5. As far as I have seen, every such attempt hitherto has been characterized by signal failure' (*Commentary on Revelation* Sec. 5).

The historicist makes a serious mistake in identifying the age of grace with the future age of judgment. We live now in a period where *grace reigns* and while as long as this is true, judgment and wrath are held back (Rom. 5:19-21). God is not now imputing sin in any judicial sense (2 Cor. 5:18-21), but there is an end to this age of grace and when this happens, the great Day of the Lord commences and this is one of wrath and judgment when He will 'punish the world for their evil ... in the day of His fierce anger' (Isa. 13:9-13).

The first coming of the Lord was for salvation, for He came not to judge the world but to save it (John 12:47). His Second Coming, on the contrary, is for judgment upon a world that has turned its back upon the gospel of grace and finally accepts the Antichrist instead of the Christ of God. Sometimes in the Old Testament, the two comings are brought together as though there was no interval between them. It is as if one views a range of mountains afar off and the peaks appear to be close to each other, yet when one comes near to them, or flies over them in an aircraft, one sees large valleys in between separating them, which were quite invisible at a distance. This age is like these invisible valleys. It was beyond the prophetic vision given to the Old Testament prophets.

Thus Isaiah links together 'The acceptable year of the Lord' with 'the day of vengeance of our God' (Isa. 61:1,2), but when the Lord Jesus read this Scripture in the synagogue, He stopped at 'the acceptable year of the Lord'. The 'Day of vengeance' figures in His Second Coming, not the first one. If this was not true He could not have said to His audience, '*this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears*' (Luke 4:16-21) for, as we have just seen, He came not to condemn but to save. But we search Isaiah 61 in vain for any interval of time between these two happenings.

We can now appreciate how the present 'dispensation of the Mystery' (secret, Eph. 3:9 R.V.), cannot be found in the Old Testament. Both the time and this particular truth were then 'hid in God'.

Other examples of this can be seen in Isaiah 9:6,7 where the birth of Christ and the exercise of His government are linked together, without any revelation of nearly two thousand years of rejection in between them. In Daniel

9:26,27 we leap from Messiah's First Coming to just before His Second Coming with the desolator and 'the abomination of desolation' placed by Christ just before this great event (Matt. 24:15-22). Luke 1:31,32 and 1 Peter 1:11 are further examples.

We believe the same thing occurs in the Book of Revelation. The 'churches' are there in chapters 2 and 3 but not the church revealed in Ephesians and Colossians. In the *final fulfilment* these are predominantly assemblies of Hebrew Christians living under the terrible reign of the Beast with its tremendous pressure to worship this monster and Satan behind him. This condition of things is described in chapter 13 with death as the end for the faithful. During the Acts of the Apostles a situation commenced which, if Israel had repented could have developed into the events described in this chapter. Hence the seven Asian churches were facing similar persecution and trials. This being so, we can well understand the word of the Spirit to the overcomer in 2:10 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'. Israel did *not* repent, consequently what happened in the Acts was only a partial fulfilment. The complete fulfilment awaits the end of this age, the last week (seven years) of Daniel's 70 x 7 years (Dan. 9).

Many interpretations of the Revelation separate the first three chapters from the rest of the Book and place chapter 4 onwards at the end of the age in the Day of the Lord. But John calls the *whole* Book a prophecy (1:3) and there are definite links between these churches and in the chapters that follow we shall exhibit this fact.

There has been a tendency on the part of some expositors to divide the Revelation into three parts, past, present and future, on the basis of the Authorised Version rendering of 1:19 :

'Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter'.

This view makes the future portion of the book commence with chapter 4.

However, no less an authority than Dean Alford points out that the word 'are' here means 'signify' and says:

'I would take *genesthai* (was or become) in the sense of happening, not in the wide ages of history, but in the *apocalyptic vision* ... *Ha mellei genesthai* (the things about to be, literally) will by analogy mean the things which shall succeed these, i.e. a future vision' (*Greek Testament* p. 559),

and so he translates the verse:

'Write therefore the things which thou sawest, *and what they signify* and the things which are about to happen after these'.

Rotherham likewise renders it:

'Write therefore what things thou hast seen *and what they are* (i.e. represent), and what things are about to come to pass after these things'.

Moses Stuart, like Alford, translates similarly 'what they signify'. And this is just what we find John doing:

'... the seven stars *are* the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks *are* the seven churches'.

In other words he is fulfilling the command of the Lord in telling us what the symbols (stars and candlesticks) *represent* and then goes on to record further visions given him of which the rest of the book consists.

Verse 19 therefore is a very shaky foundation for the idea of dividing the Revelation into three parts, past, present and future. The *whole* is called a prophecy in 1:3 and we therefore accept it as such.

A difficulty may be raised by asking, did these churches exist in John's day? The answer is yes, but that does not mean that they *completely* fulfilled the prophecy revealed in chapters 2 and 3. We must ever bear in mind that some prophecies may be only partly fulfilled, leaving the complete fulfilment to a later date. Our studies in the Acts of the Apostles should help us here. We saw that Joel's prophecy was only partly fulfilled at Pentecost. The time that followed could have been an introduction to the great Day of the Lord with the personal return of Christ to set up the earthly kingdom. But this depended on the repentance and turning of Israel to God (Acts 3:19-26) which did not materialise. Had it done so, all the events described in the Revelation could have taken place at that time. An age that could produce a Herod that accepted divine worship (Acts 12:20-23) and a monster like Nero, could easily have

given birth to the Antichrist the man of sin, and the wild tyrannical Beast of Revelation 13. In fact the apostle John declared in his first epistle that already there were 'many antichrists' which proved that the end was at hand - it was 'the last hour' (literally, 1 John 2:18). We must constantly remember that what God causes to 'draw near' He can withdraw, if circumstances do not conform to His will.

Consequently the assemblies described in Revelation 2 and 3 were living in a dangerous time, very near to the Lord's coming, but with the non-repentance of Israel, that coming and the earthly phase of the kingdom went into abeyance and we believe that when similar circumstances occur at the end of the age, the Revelation will have its complete fulfilment and be 'Truth for the time'. This does not mean that *application* of the principles laid down in this book cannot be made by Christians undergoing trouble and persecution during this age. But *application* must not be confused with *interpretation* and Interpretation of Scripture must first be settled before any application is made, otherwise misunderstanding and confusion will result.

The book has as its aim the strengthening and encouragement of the 'overcomer', for it is to *such* that this part of Scripture is addressed, to enlighten, guide and help them during the most terrible and searching time in the world's history as the Lord Jesus described it in Matthew 24:19-22.

It is unthinkable that God would leave His people to grope their way at such a crucial time without a special word from Himself. The Revelation, Daniel, Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians 2 and other Scriptures will then be the special divine guide for His faithful people.

A careful study will show that the churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are linked with the rest of the book.

<i>The Churches</i>	<i>The rest of the book</i>
<i>Smyrna</i>	
Warning of tribulation and imprisonment (2:10).	Great Tribulation (7:14)
'Faithful unto death' (10)	Two witnesses killed (11:7)
	Starvation for the faithful (13:16,17)
<i>Pergamos</i>	
Hold fast My Name (2:13)	Fear Thy Name (11:18)
Satan's throne (13)	Christ <i>reigning</i> (1:15)
New Name (17)	New Name (19:12)
<i>Thyatira</i>	
The woman Jezebel (2:20)	True woman (12:1)
Rod of iron (2:26,27)	Rod of iron (12:5)
False prophets (2:20)	False Prophet (16:13)
<i>Sardis</i>	
Undefiled garments (3:4)	144,000 undefiled (14:1)
Walk in white (4)	Bride in white (19:8)
<i>Philadelphia</i>	
Temple and city of My God (3:12)	New Jerusalem (ch. 21)
Not denying My Name (8)	Name of the Beast (13:17)
<i>Laodicea</i>	
White raiment (3:18)	Bride in white (19:8)
Sup with Me (3:20)	Supper of the Lamb (19:9)
	Supper of God (19:17)

These are some of the correspondencies. There are others which the Bible student can find by careful comparison and altogether it demonstrates that chapters 2 and 3 are a vital part of the book and are linked with the remaining chapters.

To separate them as some do, and make them into periods of history covering the present age is to trivialise their message. There must, first of all, be something directly in common between the symbol and what it represents and there is none between the conception of a church and a period of history. In any case, those who adopt such interpretations cannot agree as to what period of time fits each of the churches and as most of them believe in an 'any moment' Second Advent of the Lord clearly this would be impossible if long periods of history had to run their course before the time represented by the last church Laodicea, came into being.

The Lord's Day

Just what does John mean when he says 'I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day'? Does he mean that on one Sunday he received the visions he describes? If so then this is the only New Testament Scripture that gives the day of the week on which it was written and this does not give us useful information as to its date when the month and the year are left out. In view of these facts one wonders why it was included at all, for it does not yield any basic help as to the interpretation of the book.

We should also ask ourselves, would those to whom the book was addressed understand the expression to mean Sunday? The answer is a definite 'no' for the simple reason that our Sunday is always described in the New Testament as 'the first day of the week' (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). There is no evidence of any kind that Sunday was called the Lord's day before the Revelation was written and as Revelation 1:10 is the only occurrence in the Bible of the words 'the Lord's day' we cannot use this in the argument. In fact there is no clear ground in early Christian literature for calling Sunday the Lord's day until nearly a century later. If John had wanted to convey the thought that one Sunday he received a revelation from God, then he had the normal expression, namely, 'the first day of the week', which would have been understood by all.

The expression 'the Lord's day' must mean the same thing as 'the Day of the Lord'; the difference lies only in the emphasis. As this is so, we definitely have Scripture usage as a guide, for this latter phrase occurs 16 times in the Old Testament and 4 times in the New. A parallel expression is found in 1 Corinthians 4:3 which literally reads 'man's day' as the margin indicates, the construction being the same as Revelation 1:10. 'Man's day' means the day when man is judging, as is shown by the context. Revelation 1:10 takes us to a future time when God and not man shall be the judge, when God will be exalted and man abased (see its first occurrence in Isaiah 2:10-22 and notice the likeness to Rev. 6).

The Old Testament 'Day of the Lord' is consistently set forth as a solemn day of wrath, judgment, destruction and darkness. It is not used once as a time of peace and blessing. Isaiah 13:6-13 is typical:

'Howl ye (referring to Babylon), for the Day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a *destruction* from the Almighty'.

Verses 9-13 come close to the imagery of the Revelation:

'Behold, the Day of the LORD cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger ... for the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine ... in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of His fierce anger' (see Matt. 24:29).

Joel likewise describes this day or period:

'Alas for the Day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come' (1:15).

'... For the Day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness ...' (2:1,2),

and all the other occurrences are in line with this conception of judgment and wrath. It is a time when God breaks into history and takes an evident hand in world affairs at the height of its darkness, wickedness and rejection of Himself.

Now we ask, does this fit the book of Revelation? The answer is clear, it does, it fits perfectly. The great prophetic period, the Day of the Lord, is what Revelation is all about. Much light is thrown upon it when we compare the Old Testament references with this last book of the Bible, such as we cannot get by interpreting the phrase as merely referring to a Sunday.

There are four references where John tells us that he was 'in spirit' (literally). They are 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; and 21:10. He had a similar experience as Ezekiel of old:

'The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones' (Ezek. 37:1 and *see* 11:1,24; 40:2).

Just as Ezekiel was taken in vision by the Spirit to see things future as well as present, so the Spirit took the apostle John in visions into the Day of the Lord and enabled him to see and put into writing the facts concerning the terrible period with which this age will close.

The great conflict of the ages, which comes out into the open and to its climax in the Book of Revelation, may be summarised in a twofold form:

Two Seeds

'Her seed' (Eve) (Gen. 3:15)	'Thy seed' (the serpent - Satan) (Gen. 3:15)
'Wheat' (Matt. 13:24, 25)	'Tares' (the children of the wicked one--Satan) (Matt. 13:38, 39)
'Harvest' (the end of the age).	'Harvest' (the end of the age).
'gather into barn' (Matt. 13:30)	'Bind in bundles to burn them' (Matt. 13:30)

Two Cities

'Salem' (Gen. 14:18)	'Babel' (Gen. 10:8-10)
'Jerusalem' (Isa. 52:1, 9)	'Babylon' (Rev. 14:8 to 17:5)

Two Mysteries (Secrets)

The secret of godliness God manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16)	The secret of iniquity The man of sin manifested in the flesh (2 Thess. 2:3,6)
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Two Anointed Ones

The Lord's anointed (Psa. 2:2,6)	The anointed cherub (unfallen Satan) (Ezek. 28:14-19)
'The Lord hath anointed Me' (Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18)	

Two Dynasties

'David' (Psa. 89:20-37; Luke 1:31-33; Hosea 3:5)	'Nebuchadnezzar' (Dan. 2:37,38)
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Two Fulnesses

'Israel ... their fulness' (Rom. 11:12)	'Fulness of the Gentiles' (Rom. 11:25)
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Two Women

`The Bride' (Rev. 21:2, 9)

`The Harlot' (Rev. 17:3)

Two Sets of Miracles

`Signs and wonders ... and gifts of the Holy Ghost', `to confirm' the testimony of the King and the earthly kingdom (Heb. 2:3,4; see also Acts 2:22)

`After the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders'. `to deceive' (2 Thess. 2:8-12)

Two Trinities

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14)

The dragon, the beast and the false prophet (Rev. 13:1-4; 17:8; 19:20)

Two Resurrections

`Now is Christ risen' (1 Cor. 15:20)

`His (the beast's) deadly wound was healed' (Rev. 13:3,11)

Two Comings (Parousia)

The Lord's Second Coming (Matt. 24:29,30; 1 Cor. 15:23)

The man of sin (2 Thess. 2:8,9)

Two Sons

The Son of God (Matt. 3:17)

The son of perdition (2 Thess. 2:3)

Two Mystic Numbers

Jesus 888 (by Gematria)

The Beast 666 (Rev. 13:18)

Two Names (in forehead)

The Father's Name (Rev. 14:1)

The Beast's name (Rev. 13:16, 17)

Two Building Materials

Precious stones. The New Jerusalem (Isa. 54:11,12; Rev. 21:10-21)

Brick for stone (Babel) (Gen. 11:3)

Two Covenants

The New Covenant (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 12:24)

A covenant made and broken (Dan. 9:27)

Two Thrones

God (Rev. 22:1)

Satan and the Beast (Rev. 2:13; 16:10)

These prophetic pairs are two opposing lines of revelation headed by God and Satan and give a good deal of detail concerning the great conflict of the ages. This conflict is real, intense and never ceasing. How thankful we should be for Him Who was manifested to destroy the devil (Heb. 2:14) and all his works (1 John 3:8), and gathered under the protective care of redemption, believers in Him are for ever safe. We are on the winning side, for `if God be for us, who can be against us?' (Rom. 8:31). Not that we must treat this tremendous battle lightly. Of ourselves we are

no match for Satan and the powers of darkness under his control. But clad in the panoply of God, described in detail in Ephesians 6, we are safe and can go forward without fear.

It is not possible to give a full length exposition of the Book of the Revelation in this volume but enough has been written, we feel, to make clear that the kingdom with which it deals is none other than the mediatorial earthly kingdom of the Old Testament at last beginning to be fulfilled. We say 'beginning' advisedly, because the millennial kingdom that follows is not the perfect kingdom of God. It is certainly the most favoured time for humanity since the fall of Adam, but sin and death are still there. We read in the Old Testament of those who only render 'feigned obedience' to Christ (*see* p. xxx) at this time, and at the end of the thousand years, when Satan is released from his prison, he finds many of his own in the four quarters of the earth. These he once more attempts to deceive and gathers them together for another rebellion against God. But the Lord deals with them summarily:

'And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them' (Rev. 20:9).

Looking back to the Millennium, the very fact that Satan will be imprisoned in the abyss and his activities completely curtailed, will make a tremendous difference to witness for God and the spread of His Truth over the earth. What makes Christian work and witness so difficult in this age is the great deceiving and blinding power of Satan acting on men's minds:

'But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them' (2 Cor. 4:3,4).

'... Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, *according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*' (Eph. 2:1,2).

This malevolent power will be eradicated during the millennial age and with this great obstacle removed, witness and service for the Lord will be much easier. We see no reason why the knowledge of the Lord, mediated by restored and recommissioned Israel, will not make rapid strides, and soon 'cover the earth as the waters cover the sea'. People at that time will *want* to know God, His ways and His Truth.

'But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. *And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths:* for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem' (Micah 4:1,2).

'Thus says the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, *We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you*' (Zech. 8:23).

What a difference from the present time with the opposition or complete indifference to the things of God!

But even with all the advantages of the thousand year reign of Christ, the real and eternal kingdom awaits the new heaven and earth, where sin and death and all that militates against the rule of God shall be finally eradicated. 2 Peter 3:13 assures us that, in this final creation, righteousness will dwell and be one of its great characteristics. At last the time for the complete fulfilment of the Lord's kingdom prayer will be realised - 'Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven'. *There* it is carried out perfectly, and the great kingdom of God cannot come into being until this is true of the *whole* creation.

Almost the last scene which the Word of God leaves with us is that of a *wedding*:

'And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for, fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And He saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called (invited) unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And He saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God' (Rev. 19:6-9).

The 'wife' according to the plain teaching of Scripture is the nation of Israel. The Old Testament clearly reveals this:

'Thy Maker is thine *husband*; the LORD of hosts is His Name' (Isa. 54:5).

'It shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call Me *Ishi (my husband)* ... and I will *betroth thee (Israel) unto Me for ever ... I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness*, and thou shalt know the LORD' (Hosea 2:16,19,20).

'Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for *I am married unto you (Israel)*' (Jer. 3:14).

In the witness of the Old Testament prophets, the relationship of Israel to the Lord was that of a wife to a husband. It was also made clear that Israel had been an unfaithful wife going after other lovers, but through the grace and the redemptive work of the Lord, that relationship would finally be restored and Revelation 19 sets this forth in symbol. This marriage extends over the Millennium. It was customary for a Jewish wedding ceremony to cover a period of seven days. 'Fulfil her week' (Gen. 29:27) refers to this period, so the marriage festivities of the Lamb extend over the seventh thousand years of the history of mankind.

However, as we have seen, there has always been a faithful remnant in Israel who are specially precious to the Lord. They are likened to jewels in Malachi 3:16,17 and together with the worthies of Hebrews 11 were shown a higher sphere of blessing by the Lord, namely the heavenly Jerusalem which finally leaves the heavens and descends to the new earth and becomes one with it. This faithful company of Israel with Gentile believers too, who have been blessed through and with Israel and have been judged by the Lord as equally faithful, are likened to a *bride* in Revelation 21. The apostle John is given a vision of the heavenly Jerusalem 'coming down from God out of heaven prepared *as a bride* adorned for her husband' (21:1,2). Now a *bride* cannot be the same as a *wife*, a married woman, and we can be absolutely sure of the fact that God does not mix His metaphors or confuse them in any way.

The nation of Israel and the faithful remnant of Israel are seen as two distinct companies in Scripture until the time of the new heaven and the new earth. Then both of these redeemed groups become united as one, when the New Jerusalem becomes part of the new earth. The redeemed nation of Israel, whose hope has always been earthly then combines with the heavenly Israel of the New Jerusalem to form one company, for not even in type will God condone polygamy.

Thus it is that John is finally shown by one of the angels *the bride, the Lamb's wife* and the two titles are brought together.

In this glorious wedding scene, which is a time of great rejoicing (19:7), the whole picture is highly symbolic in the new creation which is yet to be. Every symbolic person stands for members of God's redeemed family. First there is the Bridegroom, the Lord Himself, but not alone for He is the Head of His Body, the church and Head and Body will be united when the hope of this church is realised and becomes the symbolic Bridegroom.

Some deduce from Ephesians 5:25-33 that the Body of Christ is also the Bride but in doing so they mistake the argument which surely is that a man should love his wife *as his own body*, as Christ loved the church, *His Body* (verses 28,30). Here we get perfect balance in the argument which is concluded by the statement of the Apostle, 'For we are *members of His Body of His flesh and of His bones*', not that we are members of His Bride. The new creation of the Body of Christ is likened to *a new man* in Ephesians 2:15 and its goal is to grow up to *a full-grown male* (4:13). Man may mix his metaphors, but God never does. The figure of a wife or bride is kept in Scripture to the people of Israel and those who are blessed through and with Israel.

Then there are the two companies mentioned above finally united as the 'Bride, the Lamb's wife'. Not only this but we have those 'who are invited to the wedding' (19:9) in other words they are *guests*. If analogy means anything, then these must form a large company of believers, for in a wedding there is one bridegroom and one bride, but there can be many guests. In the parable of the king's son, related in Matthew 22 those originally invited from Israel as guests refused to come, so others were put in their place 'from the highways' and then we are told the 'wedding was furnished with guests' (verse 10). Who are these? They cannot be represented by the bride or bridegroom whose composition and history are made known in the Old Testament, the Gospels, the Acts, and now in the Revelation.

We are left with this present age in which the Body of Christ predominates. It seems evident that not every believer today has the necessary 'enlightened eyes' and imparted knowledge by the Holy Spirit as taught in Ephesians 1:15-23 and not having this, they do not understand what the dispensation of the Mystery involves and so how can they live and witness for it? And yet this is what God calls every true member of the Body to do, as Paul's Prison Epistles declare and emphasize.

It would seem that such believers *will have a glorious part in this wedding scene as guests*, being linked with the earthly kingdom and sharing with the people of Israel. This hope will be perpetuated in the New Earth eternally. The Lord revealed in His earthly ministry that He had 'other sheep' which did not belong to the flock of Israel, who are usually designated as the 'sheep' (Psa. 79:13; 95:7; Ezek. 34:6,11,12) but not always so for the Lord also used this figure of Gentile nations (Matt. 25:31-33). The 'other sheep' the Lord declared He will finally unite with Israel (the sheep of the O.T.) to become *one flock* (not 'fold' as A.V. John 10:16) and this will surely be in the Millennium during Christ's reign over the earth with all its abundant blessings and then it will be carried over into the new earth for ever.

We can also consider John the Baptist as the 'friend of the Bridegroom' or the best man (John 3:29) and the virgins who may be bridesmaids for the Bridegroom's wedding (Matt. 25:1). For all we know, these represent other parts of God's great redeemed family, but we do not wish to be dogmatic on this point. On the other hand we do not want to spoil this great scene, by confusing and uniting what God, for the time being has kept apart. This, alas, is too often done by evangelical interpreters.

There is one thing of which we can be absolutely sure, and that is, in the great kingdom of God, from the highest heaven down to the lowest earth every redeemed child of God will be united in Christ and yet will have his place and be entirely satisfied for eternity. Then, at long last, the perfection of God's original creation is restored when He creates all things afresh, a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:5) where sin and death are banished for ever and:

'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Rev. 21:4).

Then will be joy unending; *then* will be perfect service, 'His servants shall serve Him' (Rev. 22:3). *Then* the Lord Jesus will have His rightful place and will manifestly be 'All in all' and the great plan that was in the mind of God when He first created, can go on unhindered. Surely then He will be satisfied (Isa. 53:11), and the great redemptive purpose of the ages (Eph. 3:11), resting upon the offering of Himself on Calvary's cross as sin-bearer, will come to a glorious conclusion.

Surely too we can join in the magnificent ascription of praise to Him, recorded in the Book of Revelation:

'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power ... be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever' (5:13).

'Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen' (7:11,12).

'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing' (5:12).

'CHRIST IS ALL' (Col. 3:11).

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