ON READING THE BIBLE

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The need for such a book as this was made apparent by a listener at a Bible exposition given by the author. He asked, "Where does one start in his reading of the Bible? Is it right to plough through it from Genesis onwards, or should one commence with the New Testament?".

This is a genuine difficulty and we hope that the guidance offered will be a real help to all who want a sound knowledge of the "Scripture of truth". A certain amount of repetition has been unavoidable. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians "To repeat what I have written to you before is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you" (Phi1.3: I N.E.B.). We pray that this may be true of this small volume.

Quotations have been made from the Authorized Version, the Revized Version, the Revized Standard Version and occasionally from the New English Bible. It would be well for the reader to have copies of these at hand so that he can verify what is being said. One could also add the New International Version.

May God richly bless this small effort to spread the knowledge of His Word of truth and of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the centre and circumference of it all.

ON READING THE BIBLE

PART ONE

(**Webmaster's note**: The original page numbers of Stuart Allen's book have been inserted to assist in cross referencing from the indexes.)

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There is no doubt whatsoever that the Bible is the great text book of the Christian profession which no one who names the Name of Christ can neglect if he wishes to be a Christian worthy of the name. But its scope is so vast and the subjects treated are so great and varied that the question arises "Where does one commence reading it?" Should the reader start with Genesis in the Old Testament, or Matthew in the New Testament, or perhaps the first of the epistles, namely Romans? This is a real problem which we trust this book will help to solve.

First of all we should reflect on the fact that the Bible is unique. It makes claims that no other book does and these are so challenging that we cannot ignore them if we are honestly seeking for truth. The Apostle Paul refers to the Old Testament as "the holy Scriptures" (2 Tim.3:15). Of the millions of books which have been written, how many claim to be holy? This word is so far removed from human experience that it is never used in ordinary conversation. The Bible is holy because it comes from God and belongs to God Who is holy. It is therefore called the "holy Scriptures" and "the Word of God" and although written by human instrumentality it is, as Paul states, "given by inspiration of God" or "God-breathed" (literally), (2Tim.3:l6), and speaks with all the authority of God.

This may seem to be overstating the case to some, but we can make a check by noting the attitude of Christ on this question. It must be said straight away that on no occasion did He belittle the Scriptures or suggest they were anything but what they claimed to be, that is God's Word. He said:

> **"...Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot** (the smallest Hebrew letter of the alphabet) **or one tittle** (the tiny strokes that distinguish certain Hebrew letters from one another) **shall in no wise pass from the law, *till all be fulfilled"*** (Matt.5: 18).
>
> ***"...the Scriptures cannot be broken"*** (John 10:35).
>
> **"Sanctify them** (His disciples) **through Thy Truth: *Thy Word is Truth"*** (John 17:17).

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> **"For had ye believed Moses ye would have believed Me: *for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings*** (the first five books of the O.T.) ***how shall ye believe My words?"*** (John 5:46,47).
>
> **"Ye do err, *not knowing the Scriptures*"** (Matt.22:29).

When He faced Satan in the wilderness, in isolation and fasting for 40 days, He met His temptations not with His divine power, but with the truth and the authority of holy Scripture, which He quoted three times and vanquished the tempter (Matt.4:4,7,10).

His constant appeal was to the Scriptures as the basis of His teaching (see the following important verses of Matthew 4:4,7,10; 11:10; 19:4; 21:13,42; 22:29; 26:31,56). He asserted that the Word did not merely contain the truth, but IS the Truth (John 17:17), and so closely is He associated with the written Word that He Himself is called the Word of God (John 1:1; Rev.19:11-13) and He said:

> **"I am the Truth"** (not I have it) (John 14:6).

Some tell us that when Christ was on earth He was limited by the ideas and prejudices of His day and thus they try and explain away this clear testimony. But in resurrection when any such limitations (?) were over, He adopted exactly the same attitude to the written Word. He said to the eleven apostles:

> **"All things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning M**e (i.e. the whole of the O.T.). **Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures"** (Luke 24:44,45).

And to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus He said:

> **"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses** (the Pentateuch) **and all the Prophets,** (the rest of the O.T.) **He expounded unto them in *all the Scriptures* the things concerning Himself'** (Luke 24:26,27).

Never did the Lord Jesus suggest at any time that the Scriptures were untrustworthy or anything other than they

claim to be, i.e. the very Word of God, which must be Truth. (The reader will find this important subject treated more fully in the author's *God's Word Written* published by *The Berean Publishing Trust.)*

Now we have a proposition to make and it is this, that no one can call himself a true Christian or believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who adopts any attitude to any subject other than His. It would be mockery for anyone to say "I am a true follower of Christ and a Christian in the fullest sense, but I do not believe or accept His teaching on this point or that".

There can be no doubt of the attitude of the Lord Jesus to the written Word. It was one of complete reverence and acceptance. He regarded the Scriptures as divinely authoritative and if we desire to be completely loyal to Him, His attitude must be ours and we wish to make it clear at the outset that this is the attitude of this book.

Having settled this, we come back to our first problem, where to start in our reading of the Bible? We feel the best way is to be guided by man's need. God's Word speaks in plain language and calls a spade a spade. It asserts that all man's problems whether personal, national, or world-wide can be traced back to sin and imperfection. When God created man He had at least two courses open to Him:

(I) He could bring man into being and compel him by His

divine power to always think, speak and do the things that are right. In this way a perfect universe could be maintained without problems. Some think things ought to be like this. There would then be no calamities in nature, no personal sickness, pain, death, frustration or the multitude of pressing problems that go to make up life. But do they realize at what cost this would be obtained? Such a man would be a mere puppet, having no choice or desire, God pulling the strings as it were all the time. Such a being would be of no satisfaction to Him. It would appear that one thing God desires above all is the response of real love from the creature He has made and puppets cannot love or respond to love.

(2) The other way would be to create man as a moral being with the power of choice and the ability to love unselfishly, but this would open up the possibility of choosing wrong rather than right. God knew fully the risks He took and the tragedy that would follow if man disobeyed. Yet He chose the latter course and this is what actually happened. The first man made his choice and unbelief and disobedience followed. He became a sinner and passed the "virus" on to all his posterity so that since this time man is born into the world a ruined creature. He is a ruined creature by reason of what he is apart from what he does, for the virus of sin is already in him from his birth (Psa.51:5).

"By one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom.5:12).

The Dilemma of Sin and Death.

Death is a hideous thing and is represented in the Bible as an enemy to the last (I Cor.I5:26) both to God and man. Men may try to glamourize it, but the Word of God never does. Death cannot originate from something good. It can only spring from something evil and the universality of death proves the universality of sin. We have to face this fact honestly that man, whether he likes to admit it or not, is a sinner. He is constantly falling short of perfection in thought, word and deed whether he knows it or not:

"As it is written, there is *none righteous, no, not one".*
"For *all have sinned* and come short of the glory of God" (Rom.3:10,23),

and as a sinner he has put a yawning chasm between himself and a thrice holy God, which he can never bridge by his own efforts. There is no exception to this. Sin is a great leveller. High or low, rich or poor, intellectual or non-intellectual, clever or foolish, there is no difference in this respect and there is no exception to it. "There is none righteous, no not one". People may take offence at this, specially those who are trying hard to live a good life. But facts are stubborn things and it is better to face them than to run away and pretend they do not exist.

Sin does four things:
(1) It brings spiritual and physical *death* (cp.Gen.2:16,17).
(2) It brings into *bondage*.
(3) It brings God's *condemnation*.
(4) It contaminates and *makes unclean*.

The Apostle Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in his letter to the Ephesians, wrote:

> **"And you hath He quickened** (made alive), **who were *dead in trespasses and sins;* 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: among whom also we *all* had our conversation** (manner of life) **in times past in the lusts (desires) of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"** (Eph.2:1-3).

From this passage we can see, looking back to their pre-Christian days, that these Ephesian believers were *dead* spiritually as the result of their sins. They were in *bondage*, because whatever their thoughts and desires were, all were controlled by Satan, "the prince of the power of the air". This great enemy of God and man energizes all mankind in their natural fallen condition, the Apostle asserts. When writing to the Corinthian church he states:

> **"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world** (Satan) **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"** (2Cor.4:3,4).

And John writes:

> **"...the whole world lieth in the evil one"** (1 John 5:19 R.V.).

One of the tragedies that sin brought in was the opportunity for Satan the deceiver to get control of men's minds. So much so, that three times the Lord Jesus called him the "prince (ruler) of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). We should cast out of our thoughts the medieval conception of Satan as a monster who constantly urges mankind to commit the blackest of crimes. These come from man's evil heart as Christ clearly taught (Matt. I5:18-20). The Bible shows that Satan is a primarily *religious* being who desires

above all to usurp God's place and receive the worship of creation, hence the third subtle temptation of Christ in the wilderness (Matt.4:8,9).

Sin then brings spiritual death to the whole human race and the first thing a dead person needs is life. This gives us an important clue as to where we should commence in our reading of the Word of God. It should be with the Gospel of John, for this is the great theme of the fourth Gospel:

> **"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that *ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have LIFE through His name"*** (John 20:30,31).

Let us stop for a moment and consider this word "life" as the Apostle John uses it. Does he mean this present natural life which will end in death, or does he mean spiritual life which will be eternal, without an end? We can easily discover which it is by his usage. This word zoe, life, occurs 36 times in the Gospel, alternating "life" with "eternal life". We give all the references:

Life (I:4)
Eternal life (3:15,16,36)
Life (3:36)
Eternal life (4:14,36; 5:24)
Life (5:24,26,29)
Eternal life (5:39)
Life (5:40)
Eternal life (6:27)
Life (6:33,35)
Eternal life (6:40,47)
Life (6:48,51,53)
Eternal life (6:54)
Life (6:63)
Eternal life (6:68)
Life (8:12; 10:10)
Eternal life (10:28)
Life (11:25; 12:25 twice)
Eternal life (12:25,50)
Life (14:6)
Eternal life (17:2,3)
Life (20:31)

It will be seen that life which is eternal is one of the great key thoughts of this Gospel. In only one verse does the Apostle use it of the present physical life (12:25) and then it is in contrast with eternal life and its inferiority is shown. These 36 occurrences should be checked by the reader and each context carefully considered. Some may feel that this will entail a lot of time and patience, but in the quest for truth our sincerity is shown by the amount of effort we are prepared to make for its discovery. Diamonds are not scattered on the earth's surface. Digging and toil are necessary to acquire them, and those who market diamonds evidently think this is more than worth while!

What we shall discover from these verses and their contexts is that this unending spiritual life of joy and complete satisfaction is not inherent in human nature (as we have seen, mankind has lost this life because of sin). If its source is not in man, the Gospel of John makes

it abundantly clear where it is found, and that is IN CHRIST. He alone is the possessor of it inherently, but, wonder of wonders, He is ready to give it to all who put their entire trust and faith in Him and His work for them.

The Origin of Eternal Life.

"In Him (Christ) **was LIFE"** (John 1:4).
"I am the Bread of LIFE" (6:35).
"I am the Resurrection and the LIFE" (11:25).
"I am the Way, the Truth, and the LIFE" (14:6).

The way to obtain it.

***"He that believeth on the Son* hath everlasting life"** *(3:36).*
"...He that heareth My Word, and *believeth on Him that sent Me,* hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; *but is passed from death unto life"* *(John 5:24).*

To these references we may add two more from John's first epistle:

"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and *this life is IN HIS SON"* (1 John 5:11).
"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12).

This confirms what we have already seen, that spiritual death and condemnation because of sin can be exchanged permanently for endless life and freedom from condemnation and guilt by committing one's self in absolute trust to the Lord Jesus. "I am come" He said, "that they might have life, and that they might have it *more abundantly*"(John 10:10). To some who would not receive and trust in Him He said "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life" (John 5:40), and to such He later added "Ye have no life in you" (John 6:53), although they were very much alive physically. "To eat His flesh and drink His blood" in this context is simply a figurative way of receiving Christ by faith and "assimilating" Him, just as we describe learning a fact as inwardly "digesting" it.

For sheer simplicity 1 John 5:12 cannot be beaten. There is no word that has more than four letters and a child can easily understand the verse. To "have Christ" (the only source of this life) is to possess life unending for one's self by faith in Him. Not to "have Christ" *is never to attain to it*, and there is no middle position. Let no one think that the Lord Jesus forces Himself or this life on anyone or that somehow, at some time or other, they will drift into it apart from their belief and choice. Those who choose not to come to Him to receive this life or in other words reject Him, automatically cut themselves off from eternal bliss. It is, without exaggeration, a choice of eternal life or death, *and there can not be an issue more serious or solemn for each one of us*.

Needless to say, the reader of the Gospel of John will find other wondrous truth in it, all of which is resident in Christ, but owing to its basic stress on the need for eternal life and all the abundant blessings that go with it, we advise the one who wishes to approach God's Word seriously to start here. Before we press on we quote from

the Apostle Paul, showing that his testimony is the same as John's:

> **"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of *life which is in Christ Jesus"*** (2Tim.1:I R.S.V.).
> **"...our Saviour, Christ Jesus, Who abolished death and *brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher"** (2Tim.1:10 R.S.V.).

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> **"For the wages of sin is *death;* but the free gift of God is *eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Rom.6:23 R.S.V.).

The Dilemma of Sin and Bondage

The second consequence of sin which we listed on Page 5 is that it brings all of us *into bondage*, for whether we recognize it or not, in God's sight we are all sinners. Sin makes slaves of us all and it makes no difference whether we are big sinners or little sinners. One sin makes a sinner just as one lie makes a liar. We are slaves to sin because none has the power or ability to free himself from this terrible bondage. In other words we cannot change ourselves permanently into perfect beings who never sin in thought, word or deed.

Anticipating what we hope to show later on, God is slowly working back to a perfect creation such as He had when He first created. Nothing less than this will fulfil His will, and His standards of righteousness and perfection cannot be lowered, *otherwise this goal will never be attained*. To admit *one* imperfect being into His eternal kingdom would be to start the rot and the tragedy of sin and death all over again.

God is finally going to create new heavens and earth as Peter in his second epistle tells us:

> **"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, *wherein dwelleth righteousness"*** (2Pet.3:13),

and the divine statement concerning the heavenly Jerusalem will then be true of all the new creation:

> **"And there shall in *no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie:* but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"** (Rev.21:27).

Thus the new heavens and earth will be peopled only with perfect beings, but how can perfect beings be made out of sinners? *This is what the gospel, God's good news is all about.* What man as a sinner cannot accomplish for himself, *Christ has come to accomplish for him.* To go wrong here is to go wrong everywhere. Millions have never learned this. They try hard to live what is called the "good life" thinking that this is a good enough standard for God and His future creation. Or if it is not, then they indulge in wishful thinking and hope that somehow God will make up the deficiencies.

This conception of salvation by human effort lies at the base of all the world religions except the true Christian faith. However much they differ in details, they are all united in this, that man must *do* something for his salvation, whereas the truth of the gospel revealed in the Bible, is that *it has already been done perfectly and completely by Christ on the cross* and all that is now needed for the individual to participate in its eternal blessings is personal faith, trust, or reliance upon Him and His work on his behalf.

This may seem too good and too simple to be true. Some may think there is a snag in it somewhere. *But there is not,* and if anyone should object and say that, in this case, the kind of life we lead does not matter, the N.T. answer is just as clear. Salvation is not *by* good works, but it is *unto good works.* In other words, good living should follow as a *result* of salvation. Good works are never its *procuring cause.* Salvation by faith in Christ is the *root* and good works are the *fruit* of such salvation:

> **"For *by grace* you have been saved *through faith;* and *this is not your own doing,* it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works,* which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"** (Eph.2:8-10 R.S.V.).

The work of Christ on the cross for us meets every need of the sinner. The sinner is spiritually dead and needs life, and this is provided as a free gift by faith in the One Who alone has it - the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinner is in *bondage* and therefore needs *freedom,* and this too is provided by the same Saviour. This has been made clear in "picture" language in the book of Exodus, chapters I-IS which can next be read. God's people Israel are here in cruel bondage in Egypt. The tyranny of Pharaoh is so complete that they could do nothing about it. Protestations or strikes would have been utterly useless! for the more they resisted the more rigorous the bondage became (Exod.5:4-12). There was only one thing left to them, *to cry to God to deliver them* and this they did (Exod. 2:23-25).

God heard their cry, and using Moses as His instrument, He intervened with His mighty hand and outstretched arm (Exod.6:1-8) and delivered them. He not only rescued them

from Egypt, the land of cruel bondage, but took them safely through the Red Sea on to the Promised Land and at the same time destroyed their oppressors, Pharoah and the Egyptians (Exod.14:26-31). Their deliverance was signified by the offering of the Passover lamb (Exod.12:3,7,12-14) a picture of the *real* Lamb, the Lamb of God Who beareth away the sin of the world (John1 :29). The Israelitish slaves were *really free,* not through any efforts of their own, but through God's mighty redemptive power alone.

Now the N.T. book which treats of this freedom from sin and trying to keep the moral law as a way out of sin's bondage, is the *epistle to the Galatians,* and this should now be carefully read.

A word is necessary here about the moral law. It was essential for man to learn what *God's* standard of right and wrong really is. Otherwise man with his imperfections would make his own failing standards and fall far short of God's requirements. The moral law is in 2 parts: (1) Man's attitude to and regard towards God. (2) Man's attitude to and regard towards his neighbour (Exod.20:1-17), and both are summed up in the word "love" (Rom.13:8-10).

The first thing we have to face is that God's law is so high in conception that no human being as a sinner can attain to it. It may then be asked, what was the use of making it known to men? The answer is simple - it showed up sin in its true colours. The best way to show up black is to put it in front of a brilliant white background. The Apostle Paul said: "If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet' " (Rom.7:7 R.S.V.). "It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order *that sin might be shown to be sin,* and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure" (Rom.7:13 R.S.V.).

We must get quite clear in our minds that God's standard touches not just our exterior *acts;* it touches our *minds,* with their thoughts and their intentions. Many through will power can control their actions, but no one can control his thoughts to the extent that no wrong idea can ever enter the mind. God's conception of perfection is such a condition *inside* as

well as *outside.* Furthermore this perfection in thought and action must be carried out from *the cradle to the grave without one slip.* As we have before remarked, *one* lie makes a liar. A person does not have to lie a dozen times before he can justly be called a liar.

Sin is transgression of God's law and brings with it a curse:

> **"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, cursed be everyone who does not *abide* by all things written in the book of the law, and *do* them"** (Gal.3:10 R.S.V.).

We should note that keeping the law of God spasmodically will not do; it must be continuous, without a break, and putting into practice this law is not accomplished by just admiring its purity; it has to be rigorously carried out into acts.

It surely is obvious that no human being has ever done this since Adam's fall. One sinner, by his efforts, may be relatively better than another sinner, but this is all that can be said about human attainment to real holiness. Man may struggle to reach perfection, but the task is hopeless and unattainable by his own will-power or

strength. In other words he is a slave to sin; he is in absolute bondage, and the more he contemplates the rigorous standard of righteousness revealed in the moral law of God, the more this shows up his shortcomings.

The epistle to the Galatians with that to the Romans makes it quite clear that man cannot extricate himself from this dilemma. Because of man's inability to keep the law of God, it is as well to understand what it *can* and *cannot* do:

(1) It gives the knowledge of sin (Rom.3:20; 7:7).
(2) It stirs up sin in the human mind (Rom.7:5).
(We all know that when we are *ordered* to do a thing, we immediately feel like refusing to do it, to be disobedient).
(3) It cannot give *righteousness* (the standard God lays down for a future *inheritance* in His kingdom or for *eternal* life Gal.2:21; 3:18,21).

There was of course nothing wrong with God's law - it was "holy, just and good" (Rom.7:12,14,16), but, as chapter eight says, "it was weak on account of the flesh" (Rom.8:3) i.e. weak because of man's sinful nature being unable to rise to its high standards.

Man as a sinner then is virtually a slave, whether he knows it or not. The epistle to the Galatians shows how he can have the chains that bind him snapped and how he can become *really free.* It is not, as we have seen, by his own efforts, but by the *redemptive work of Christ* Who alone has kept the law perfectly without one flaw. All the law can do is to bring us to Christ (as our only hope of deliverance, Gal.3:23-26), and at last, putting our complete trust in Him and what He has accomplished for us by bearing the penalty of our sins on the cross, we find ourselves gloriously *free;* and let us remember that the Lord Jesus said: "If the Son makes you free, *you will be free indeed"* (John 8:36 R.S.V.). This freedom is no sham; it is the real thing and the only freedom that is complete and worth-while.

Men love to talk about liberty. They think that their political ideas and aspirations can lead them to this goal. But while they talk about it one can see the chains and hear their clanking! In the Galatian churches there were Jewish opponents of the gospel who were trying to fasten the law as a means of salvation and deliverance upon the members there. This the Apostle Paul resisted absolutely and showed in this epistle the falsity and hollowness of their claims. His conclusion is:

> **"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of bondage"** (Gal.5:1 R.S.V.).

At the same time of realizing the wonder and joy of such a freedom, we do well not to forget that this divine liberty, worked out for us at such great cost to God, does not mean we are *free to do just what we like;* but rather we are free to do *what He likes;* in other words to carry out what is His will for each one of us, for only in doing this can we

experience the "peace of God that passes all understanding" (Phil.4:6,7; John 14:27) and the abiding joy of Christ which the world can not give or take away (John 15:11).
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The Dilemma of Sin and Condemnation

We have seen that sin brings *death and bondage.* Another thing that it does is to bring all men into *condemnation* before a holy God. If mankind is arraigned before God as Judge of all the earth, then there is only one verdict which can be pronounced and that is, *guilty:*

> **"There is *none righteous,* no not one ... Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and *all the world may become guilty before God"*** (Rom.3:10,19).

What does a guilty person need if he is to escape from the penalty of law-breaking? He needs something that no human court can provide - someone who can take away his guilt and give him in its place complete innocence so that he can be acquitted. In other words he needs absolute *righteousness* and this is the key thought of the *epistle to the Romans.* This is the next portion of Scripture we would advise the reader to read and study carefully.

In English we can use the word "righteous". or "just", the latter word coming from the Latin. In the original Greek we have a family of words clustering around the root DIK, and while the A.V. uses both "righteous" and "just" for variety, it is better to keep to one English word throughout, namely righteous, righteousness, and to make righteous, and then we get something of the insistence of the original words of the Holy Spirit. We must not make distinctions in doctrine from the English words 'just', 'justify', 'righteous' and 'righteousness'. This would only lead to false conclusions.

We have seen that the goal of God is to bring in finally a perfected creation which is absolutely righteous and spotless (2Pet.3:13) and therefore completely free from sin and death with its multitudinous problems and misery.

God's righteous standard has been crystallized in the moral law, and we have seen that this standard enters searchingly into every thought, word and deed done by man and is so high that no one can attain to it in performance.

Here then is the dilemma. God cannot lower His standard for His future perfect kingdom, otherwise its wonder and beauty will never be attained. Yet man cannot produce this perfection.
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How can such a tremendous problem be resolved? God has done this by *providing this righteousness through Christ's work on the cross in dealing with sin and thereby giving such righteousness as a free gift which can be personally received by faith or trust in the Saviour and His redemptive work.* This is the theme of the epistle to

the Romans:

> **"But now the righteousness of God without** (apart from) **the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ *unto all and upon all them that believe"*** (Rom.3:21,22)

and this wonderful righteousness which is part of the very character of God, forms therefore the basis of the gospel, the "good news of God" to men who cannot attain to it by their own efforts.

> **"For I am not ashamed of the *gospel of Christ:* for it is the power** (miracle) **of God unto salvation *to every one that believeth;* to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed* from faith** (as its source) **to faith** (as its goal); **as it is written 'the just** (righteous) **shall live by faith' "** (Rom.1:16,17).

Note, there is only *one condition* for its personal possession, *namely faith or complete trust in Christ.* There is no reserve - it is "unto all" (3:22), but it is only *"upon all them that believe",* those who receive it for themselves in this way. Unbelief, and pride behind it are the *only* barriers to its reception. God's righteousness is not just something added to make up what sinners lack, as it were. It is for the bad, the helpless and the hopeless and it meets their every need and covers them, like a garment, from head to foot and obliterates their sin and shortcoming.

This is beautifully expressed in Isaiah 61:10:

> **"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He *hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness..".***

Centuries later the Apostle Paul expressed it in this way:

> **"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, *not having mine own righteousness,* which is of the law, *but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith* ... "** (Phil.3 :8,9).

The way this all-needed righteousness is expanded in the epistle to the Romans may be expressed as follows:

	Romans
God's righteousness *revealed* in the gospel	1:17
God's righteousness *required* and found wanting in human attainment	1:18-3:20
God's righteousness *provided* through faith in Christ	3:21-31
A concrete illustration of this - Abraham. How God reckons righteousness to a sinner	chapters 4&5

God's righteousness and the *freedom it brings to serve God*	chapters 6-8
Israel's attitude to this righteousness and their failure through not receiving it	chapters 9-11
God's righteousness in practice in the daily life	chapters 12-16

A personal grasp and reception of this vital truth concerning righteousness is absolutely essential before one can go any further in the understanding of divine things. Get quite clear that God's provision of His righteousness is a free gift from Him and received personally by nothing more than faith in Christ Jesus. God bestows it on the believer in Christ by virtue of which he stands accepted and assured in Christ for ever. If such a person were to stand in the dock with God as the Judge, the verdict would be NOT GUILTY, or completely innocent of wrong-doing, in other words in no sense is he under *condemnation* of God as a law-breaker.

This all sounds too good to be true - in fact it is so stupendous that the majority pass it by and think it is impossible. In other words, as we have stated before - unbelief acts effectively as a barrier to the personal experience and joy of it all. Let us also understand that, just as a man as a sinner cannot manufacture this righteousness by his own efforts or merit, so the believer in Christ cannot lose this righteousness of God by his own failure. Justification or righteousness does not depend upon works or merit *after* salvation any more than *before* it. It is still *God's gift* by faith, not by human works, and what God gives as a free gift He never takes away.

"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance (change of mind on His part)" (Rom.11:29). *God's righteousness is not received by faith and then maintained by human merit or works.* Many professing Christians have not got this clearly in their minds. We repeat: righteousness (or justification) is by faith alone, *apart* from the law and its deeds (Rom.3:21,28). This epistle states that it is impossible for anyone to be made righteous by their own deeds or any merit on their part:

> **"Therefore by the *deeds* of the law there shall *no flesh be justified*** *(made righteous)* ***in His*** *(God's)* ***sight* ..."** (Rom.3:20). **"Therefore, being justified** (made righteous) ***by faith,* we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (Rom.5:1).

As we have seen, it is this attitude of mind to human merit or attainment that severs the N.T. conception of salvation by grace apart from works from the pagan idea of having *to do something* to obtain it. The words of Max Muller are apt here:

> "I have found the one key-note of all these so-called sacred books, whether it be the Vida of the Brahmans, the Puranas of Siva and Vishnu, the Koran of the Mohammedans, the ZendAvesta of the Parsees, the Tripitoka of the Buddhists - the one refrain through all - salvation by works. They all say that salvation must be purchased, must be bought with a price; and the sole price must be our own

works and deservings".

(quoted by Moody, *The Childhood of the Church,* p.68).

And it can be added that this idea is prevalent in *religion all around us.* This strikes at the very root of God's salvation on our behalf. In contrast we have in chapter four of Romans a concrete example of salvation by faith alone in the person of Abraham. Abraham was reckoned righteous by God, not through any acts of his own or any personal qualities he may have had. He was accounted righteous solely *by his faith* in what God had said and promised, and so it is today.

A person who has come to a saving knowledge of Christ may lapse into sin. He may become a careless and unfaithful servant of the Lord. But in no sense can he cancel God's free gift of righteousness bestowed through Christ. He may "walk after the flesh", that is, according to the dictates of his sinful old nature and so be designated in the N.T. as *"carnal",* in which case he will be accountable to the Lord when his service

and witness is assessed by the Lord in the next life, and be in danger of losing his reward and forfeiting the Lord's approval. But he cannot lose *the righteousness imputed* by God and the free gift of salvation that goes with it, and *so is never described in the N.T. as unrighteous or unjust.*

And while we are on this point it will be as well to mention the apparent contradiction to this in Romans 8:I in that in the A.V. the state of "no condemnation" is linked with works. One should read the R.V. or any of the later versions which omit the last clause "who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit" on the basis of the best Greek texts. This phrase properly occurs in verse four.

Summing up then, we can with complete assurance state that the creation of a perfect heaven and earth yet to be (2Pet.3) where righteousness rules, can be the sure hope of men and women when they come to acknowledge Christ as Saviour, and have bestowed on them by God *His own righteousness* in the place of their sin and failure, that sin having been reckoned to Christ and the penalty borne by Him. God then has not overlooked or winked at sin and death. *He has borne them Himself in the Person of the Lord Jesus* and then given His own perfect standard to the believer at a cost we can never realize or assess. Consequently" He can be just" and at the same time be "the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (Rom.3:23-26).

We may talk of the "simple gospel", but let us remember that its simplicity resides only in *the way it is received,* namely by faith or complete trust in the Saviour. It was anything but simple for God, for it meant *giving His all* in the person of His beloved Son and then carrying the sin of the world on His shoulder and treating Him (Christ) *as though He was the sinner.* What love! What abounding

love is here! and at what tremendous cost!

> **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16).
>
> **"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and *shall not come into condemnation;* but is passed from death unto life"** (John 5:24).

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The Dilemma of Sin and Uncleanness.

The fourth thing that sin does is to render the sinner *unclean* in the sight of a holy God. And if such an one is ever to have direct dealings with the God of holiness then this uncleanness must be removed and holiness put in its place. Here again the sinner cannot accomplish this for himself. Once again we are brought back to the great Foundation, Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the answer to this dilemma.

In the N.T. the word holiness is often translated as "sanctification". Hebrews 12:14 reads: "Follow peace with all men, and *holiness* (or sanctification), *without which no man shall see the Lord".* So holiness is a "must", for no sinner can ever even *see* God in the Person of the risen Saviour, let alone dwell with Him throughout eternity. The basic meaning of the word translated "holiness" or "sanctification" is *separation,* this separation being primarily the Lord's action in separating His children unto Himself for His work and witness. This separation is *positive* and does not merely mean what the believer is *separated from.* With so many Christians sanctification is negative and this consists of a list of things they do *not* do. Far more important is what we *are* and *what we do,* that is, what our positive acts are. For the Scriptural answer to the problem of uncleanness, the reader should turn to the first chapter of John's first epistle, where we read:

> **"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the *blood of Jesus Christ His Son clean seth us from all sin.* If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just** (righteous) **to forgive us our sins, and *to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*** (1John 1:6-9).

There is only one way a sinner can be made clean and holy before God and that is through the atoning work on the cross of the great Sanctifier Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. His shed blood, in other words His perfect life laid down on our behalf, is the basis of such cleansing. Through this work, cleansing resulting in sanctification or holiness can be the continual experience of the believer in the Lord Jesus.

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> **"But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God *is made unto us* wisdom, and righteousness, and *sanctification*** *(holiness),*

and redemption" (1 Cor.1:30).

Concerning the redeemed who form the Body of Christ, Ephesians 5:25-27 states:

> **"...Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might *sanctify** (make holy) **and cleanse it* with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that *it should be holy and without blemish* ".**

Titus 3:5 reads:

> **"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the *washing of regeneration,* and renewing of the Holy Ghost",**

and the Apostle Paul, reminding the Corinthians of their pre--conversion days and the sins in which they indulged, writes:

> **"...Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, not revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; *but ye are washed, ye are sanctified** (made holy), ***but ye are justified (made righteous) in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God"** (1 Cor.6:10-11).

Symbolically the need for cleansing is clearly set forth by the great condescension of the Lord Jesus in washing the disciples' feet (John 13). He said to Peter:

> **"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me"** (verse 8).

The Lord distinguishes between bathing all over, the complete cleansing that results from salvation, and the need for the daily cleansing of the feet, in other words the daily walk of the believer in contact with an unclean world. Hence the need for daily cleansing in this respect which is constantly being accomplished for him by the risen Saviour on the basis of His shed blood, His life offered on the cross.

Let us now recapitulate. The atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross is the complete answer to the terrible dilemma brought about by sin. The eternal and inestimable benefits from this work are for all who rely upon it by complete trust. This brings to them:

(1) Unending spiritual life in the place of death as the result of sin.

This is not the old life patched up and reformed, it is a new life, a new beginning, a new creation. "If anyone is *in Christ,* he is a *new creation:* the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2Cor.5:17 R.S.V.). This life is linked with peace, joy and satisfaction that *does not lessen or fade away with experience, rather the reverse.* The present life at last has a real meaning and a real purpose and the believer looks forward to a certain hope that goes beyond physical death, a hope that is too great and wonderful to express adequately in human language. And, as we

have seen, this life, the real life, lasts for eternity.

(2) The atoning work of Christ releases from the *bondage* that sin brings. Here at last is perfect freedom, deliverance from the strain, stress and frustration that exist in ourselves and all around us consequent upon man's failure and his domination by Satan, the enemy of God and the ruler of this world. This freedom can at last be expressed in the satisfaction that comes from following the will of God in practice day by day just wherever we are placed and learning the ever increasing joy of serving Him "Whose service is perfect freedom".

(3) The atoning work of the Lord Jesus delivers the believer for ever from *condemnation* from God because of our sin and shortcoming. With the righteousness of God given to him, the believer is guiltless in the sight of the great Judge of all the earth. And because Christ has borne the penalty for the believer's sins, these are blotted out as it were and God can say, not only of His earthly people Israel, but concerning *all* His great redeemed family "their sins and iniquities I will remember no more" (Heb.10:17).

(4) Christ's work on the cross cleanses from the *defilement* of sin. It washes the believer clean from all such contamination, and now, in Christ, he can be called a 'saint', a holy one, and one day will be presented to the Lord in glory, "holy, unblameable and unreproveable in His sight" (CoI.1:21.22) and can now, even in this life, be a "vessel fit for the Master's use" (2Tim.2:20,2l).

Let us think a little further about this new life of service for the Lord Jesus. It is certainly true to say that everyone

who has personally experienced salvation by trusting and relying upon Christ alone is *saved to serve.* He has been saved to do something for the Saviour, and while we have seen that *before* salvation, no amount of service or doing or personal goodness can bring this about, yet *after* salvation this is just what the Lord expects! One has advanced in Scriptural knowledge quite a distance when one has the Scriptural conception of the place of "good works" in our lives. Ephesians 2:8-10 expresses this clearly:

> **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it** (i.e. the gift of salvation by faith) **is the gift of God: *not of works,* lest any man should boast. For we are His work-manship, created in Christ Jesus *unto good works,* which God hath before ordained** (or prepared for us) **that we should walk in them".**

"Good works" or good living can never *earn* salvation. As before pointed out, millions err here, never learning this lesson, and hope that somehow they will be able to produce of themselves something good enough for God. But, as we have seen, salvation, redemption, atonement and all the kindred thoughts that cluster around this great

subject combine to make the only effective remedy and *are entirely of God.* When Christ said in His last words on the cross "it is finished", the phrase means it is perfected or completed, that is, the foundation and the work of man's redemption and salvation from sin, and nothing needs to be added or can be added to a perfect, complete and finished work! All that needy man can do is to receive it by faith for himself or equally he can reject it, but if he does this he automatically cuts himself off from eternal life, forgiveness and blessing.

If he receives it for himself in this way, then limitless possibilities lie ahead for him. He can now be an instrument in God's hands to carry out His work for Him, in other words *he can become a servant for God* and produce the good works *as a consequence* of his salvation. Now just as there are no useless members of the human body, each part working together for the good and health of the body as a whole, so there should be no useless members in the Body spiritual. There is *variety* of function in the human body and one member does not fight against another or try and usurp the function of another.

So it should be in the Body spiritual. It is not for the saved member of the Body of Christ to decide what he shall do for the Lord or merely to do what appeals to him. His service is decided solely by the Lord Himself. He is the Head of the Body and as Head and Lord He controls and directs each member. It is not for the writer or anyone else to direct anyone to this or that form of Christian service. What each of us must do is to respond to the Lord as the Apostle Paul did directly he was saved on the road to Damascus. His first words to the Lord Jesus were, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:5,6) and such a prayer, sincerely offered and with the mind ready to respond to whatever God's will may be, is never unanswered although sometimes we may have to wait for the Lord to reveal it to us. Nor need we be afraid and fear lest God should make too many demands upon us which we cannot fulfil, for "God's biddings are God's enablings".

As we think further about this (and the N.T. makes this evident), service for God can be of two kinds or qualities, good or bad. The parable of the talents clearly sets forth this difference. There were the good and *faithful* servants who pleased the Lord and received His commendation "well done" and also His reward. On the other hand there was the lazy servant who did nothing and received the Lord's stern reproval and lost any possibility of reward, and we should remember all Christian service partakes of these two qualities, and as God's redeemed children are not puppets, but have the power of choice, these qualities must exist and account must therefore be taken by the Lord of all work and witness that has been done in His Name.

The N.T. also makes it quite clear that when the day of reckoning for service comes in the next life, the Lord rewards those who have been

faithful and denies that reward to those whom He deems have been unfaithful. Some say we should not do anything with reward or gain in view. Rather should we serve the Lord out of love and gratitude to Him. Perfectly true - but God will never be in any man's debt and it would be contrary to righteousness if the believer who wasted his Christian life and the believer who has consistently given his "all" for Christ, should have exactly the same position in glory.

As the great text of 2 Timothy 2:15 makes clear, the believer can either be "ashamed" or "approved unto God" as regards his service.

We are exhorted to have constantly in view God's approval - "Be zealous to show yourself *approved to God"* (2Tim. 2:15) and the Apostle Paul aimed to be "well pleasing (acceptable) unto Him" (2 Cor.5:9). The opposite is His disapproval - in fact the N.T. reveals that Christ will be ashamed of some of His followers and they will be ashamed in His presence (Mark 8:38; 2Tim.2:15). The passage that needs to be pondered carefully for the question of service and reward is I Corinthians 3: 10-15. The reader should consult this and he will see that the Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only Foundation for the believer to 'build upon'. This building which every saved person erects upon that Foundation during his life-time whether he realizes it or not can be of two kinds - good and bad, a building erected with shoddy materials and one of good quality. This illustration we can see all around us every day in our towns and villages.

The fire of God's holiness will test all Christian service. The good quality service stands this searching test, but the bad is consumed by the fire of God's holiness and the context clearly states this will mean *loss of reward* but the person concerned will *still be saved* yet so as by fire for, as we have already seen, his salvation does not depend upon *his works,* but upon the sacrifice of Christ (1Cor.3:11-15). But let us not make the mistake of thinking that the fulness of God's grace and our perfect standing in Christ takes away our responsibility as *servants* of His. There are two parallel lines in N.T. teaching then which we must never confuse, that is, salvation by God's grace independently of human works, and divine prize or reward in connection with good works and faithful service to the Lord. The former is a gift and can never be lost. The latter depends upon our practical response day by day and *can* be lost. Therefore Colossians 2:18 states: "Let no man beguile you of *your reward"* and Revelation 3:11, "... Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take *thy crown".* Note it does not read "that no man take *thy life".* This is impossible, for that life is "hid with Christ in God" (Col.3:3) and who can touch the believer's

life in such a gloriously safe position? "Crowns" are a figure of *reigning* which is something additional to future *living with* Christ and these two lines of doctrine are set forth in 2 Timothy 2:11-15. Living with the Lord in resurrection is the culmination of our salvation by

grace. *Being on the throne with Him* and sharing His reign is something much higher and it is this that can be lost by unfaithfulness. He will "deny" the unfaithful this inestimable privilege and they will be ashamed before Him.

Getting these two lines of truth clearly in our minds will prevent us from going to two extremes:

(1) Taking the attitude that, if we are saved by grace apart from our works or merit - it does not matter what sort of lives we lead after salvation. We can "get away with" anything.

(2) On the other hand, denying the certainty of salvation and its hope and thinking by our failures we can be "saved today and lost tomorrow". Those who take this latter view are confusing "prizes", "crowns" or "rewards" that can be lost, with salvation by faith in Christ which is a free gift of God and is therefore sure and certain and cannot be forfeited.

In these balancing truths we see the matchless wisdom of God Who has, by them, rendered null and void the above extremes. As we think of the privilege of serving Him (and there can be no greater privilege), there is another aspect of truth we must consider and that is the teaching in Scripture concerning the two natures in the believer.

The Two Natures in the Child of God.

We must not assume that because the believer's sins are forgiven and cancelled (Christ having borne them), the believer has now no problem in his daily life regarding sin and failure. In other words he learns by experience and from the teaching of God's Word that he is not yet holy *in himself* although he has a *perfect standing in Christ.* He finds at times that his experience is similar to that of the Apostle Paul which is graphically described in the seventh chapter of Romans: "For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil

which I would not, that I do". "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me".

Every real believer in Christ knows something of this experimentally and it can be a shattering discovery, for it is possible to expect that, once one is gloriously saved, the sin problem will not exist any more, *but it does.* What does one do then to remedy this? Struggle on and somehow by willpower try to master and eradicate sin within us? Many Christians attempt to do just this and get hopelessly depressed because they find they are fighting a losing battle.

Once more the answer to the problem is found in God's Word. Every believer has *two natures;* one is sinful and he inherits this from fallen Adam, and the other sinless, because it is implanted by the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of holiness.

The Apostle Peter in his second epistle writes:

> **"According as His** (God's) **divine power *hath given unto us* all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; *that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature..."*** (1:3,4).

One of these "exceeding great and precious promises" is the gift by God of a *portion of His own holy nature* which by the Holy Spirit's power He causes to reside permanently in the believer. The Apostle Paul often calls this "spirit" (with a small 's'), being the gift of God the Holy Spirit. So then every saved person has two lodgers as it were, two "indwellers", "sin that *dwelleth in* me" (Rom.7:20) and the Spirit of God that *indwells* (Rom.8:9) and these two most obviously are contrary one to another (Gal.5:16-18), hence the internal conflict which every Christian experiences at times.

Now it is true to say that no consistent Christian service and witness can be given in the daily life, if we are constantly "see-sawing" up and down in experience, sometimes the old nature in control and sometimes the new. With Paul this conflicting experience became so acute that he cries out "0 wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Having asked the question, he is enabled to supply the answer: I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.7:24,25).

So yet again we are brought back to the fulness of what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for us and His almighty power, and the next thing we should learn and believe is this, that in God's plan and by His working, the believer has been *identified with Christ* in His *death. burial and resurrection.* This is the wonderful instruction given in Romans 6:1-14. It means that God sees us in Christ closely identified with Him, so that when He was crucified, we were crucified; when He was buried, we were buried; when He rose again, we rose in Him. Consequently Romans 6:6 teaches us that our old sinful nature was crucified with Christ and so can be 'put out of action'. This means if we count upon this in faith, the old nature, which is the root of all our troubles cannot operate and enslave us. Note that the A.V. translation "destroyed" is too strong. This sinful root in us is *not destroyed* and removed until death or until our hope is realized.

F.F.Bruce's paraphrase is helpful here:

> **"Understand this: our old inherited self was crucified with Him, so that the material with which sin had to operate might be *put out of action.* Consequently, we are no longer in bondage to sin; once a man has died, he is quit of the claims of sin upon him"** (Rom.6:6).

Here then is the basis of the believer's holiness in his walk day by day, and the divine answer to the problem of besetting sin. It is not to be found primarily in the believer's strength or his resolution, *but*

again in what God has done for him in Christ. This he is commanded to *reckon for himself* (Rom.6:11) and only when this is done will freedom from the domination of sin be realized. This is sanctification in practice and experience and is possible when we rely upon (reckon) the *likeness* of Christ's death and resurrection made ours by God (see verse five). Needless to say, our being *raised with Christ* is not dealing with our *physical* resurrection any more than our crucifixion with Him was a physical crucifixion. But it does mean we can serve in "newness of life", on resurrection ground here and now, and the power of His resurrection can mightily operate through us.

How wonderful it is to realize that, just as we are not left to save ourselves by our own efforts, so we are not left to live the Christian life in our own strength.

The limitless power of the Lord's resurrection waits to be appropriated by faith. In his first recorded prayer in Ephesians, Paul prays that the believers at Ephesus may know:

> **"...what** (is) **the exceeding greatness of His power to *usward who believe,* according to that working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come .."** (Eph.l:19-21 R.V.).

Not only this, but Romans eight assures us that both the Holy Spirit and the Lord Jesus are *continually* interceding for us (8:26,27,34) and both of them are indwelling us (John14:17; Eph.3:l6,17). If such a God be for us (on our side), who can be against us? (Rom.8:3l). With such limitless might and love in our favour, why should we shrink from anything the Lord wills us to undergo or accomplish for Him?

No wonder the Apostle Paul could say:

> **"I have strength for anything through Him Who gives me power"** (Phil.4:13 N.E.B.),

and this can be our continual and joyful experience too, so that as believers in Christ Jesus we can live the abundant and fruitful life He promised, and so shine for Him in a world that is getting darker and darker and more dangerous as it goes further and further away from Him Who is the only source of true life, light, wisdom and love.

(**Webmaster's note**: Original page numbers and breaks of Stuart Allen's book are retained to assist in cross referencing from the indexes.)

The Believer in relation to the purpose of God for heaven and earth.

Having noted how wonderfully God in His Word has dealt with the individual and his great needs, and how a sinner can find the complete solution in Christ, the next thing we must realize is that God has a *purpose on a grand scale,* and every true believer should seek to discover what is his relationship to that purpose.

The very fact of creation implies a purpose, for it is unthinkable that God would create out of caprice or a mere whim. The Apostle Paul in the third chapter of Ephesians, after dealing with the revelation that was given to him by the ascended Christ concerning the church which is His Body, states:

> **"According to the *eternal purpos*e** (literally, the plan of the ages) **which He purposed** (or planned) **in Christ Jesus our Lord"** (verse 11).

Just as we have seen that individual salvation and redemption is centred in Christ, so also is this great purpose or plan of God. A part of this purpose as far as the earth is concerned is revealed in Isaiah 45:18:

> **"...God Himself that formed the earth and made it... He formed it *to be inhabited".***

So the earth was intended to be a dwelling place for man who was made in the image of God with a view to producing a physical race, who were also to bear that image. God intended as it were, to reproduce Himself in a limited form in a sinless human race who were then to be given the privilege of rule and dominion. Psalm 8:4-8 expresses it thus:

> **"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? ... Thou madest him *to have dominion over the works of Thy hands.* Thou hast put *all things under his feet"*.**

It seems evident though, before the creation of Adam, God had created heavenly beings - angels of various grades for the

heavens. Colossians 1:15-17 (R.S.V.) reads concerning Christ:

> **"He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation; for in Him all things were created, *in heaven and on earth,* visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together",**

and in Job 38:6,7 we read:

> **"Whereupon are the foundations thereof (of the earth) fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God (the**

angels) shouted for joy?"

God must have a purpose therefore for the heavens as-well as the earth, but the bulk of the Bible deals with the earthly part of the divine plan.

However, as we have seen, the earth has become involved in sin and death and through the previous fall of Satan, the chief heavenly being, the heavens had become involved too. All this means nothing less than that God's original purpose had become spoiled and the main aim of the Bible is to reveal *how God in His matchless wisdom, love and power, undoes all this failure, abolishes it and brings back a new creation as spotless and beautiful as the first one was.* Whatever God intended to do when He first created has thus been held up until this gigantic work has been accomplished. All this is wrapped up in the phrase "the purpose of the ages", and it is our task to get a deeper knowledge of this by studying the Word of God and carefully noting what it reveals concerning this purpose.

At this juncture it must be stated we shall have to look at *selected* passages of Scripture, so our reading from this point will not be books of the Bible so much as chapters and verses which are relevant. After this, the reading of whole books can follow.

In tracing out God's purpose earthwards, we first of all note the fact that God uses human agents to carry out His will. Not that He is compelled to do this, for with His limitless power, just as He brought the creation into being alone, so He could carry out what He chooses without intermediaries. But as a God of grace and condescension He wills to use human agents, imperfect though they may be. So He raised

up the people of Israel, and for centuries trained them in His truth, so that eventually they could act as His agents and take the knowledge of Himself and His salvation to the ends of the earth (the only effective remedy for sin and death, as we have seen).

He started with Abram, and if the reader will turn to Genesis 12:1-3, he will read of his divine call with God's purpose expressed:

> **"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" .***

The reader should note there are seven "I wills" of Jehovah without any conditions, God stating to Abram quite clearly what He intended to do. This involved giving him a posterity (a seed) and a land, a home for them to dwell in. The geographical boundaries of this gift of land are stated in Genesis 15:18:

> **"In the same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto *thy seed* have I *given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates".***

Again it should be noted that this is unconditional, so much so that Abram is put into a deep sleep (verse 12). There is no possibility here that God was giving a *spiritual* inheritance, for the land is specified from the river Nile in Egypt right over to the Euphrates and if the reader will consult a map of the Middle East, he will see what a huge land mass is indicated. Further than this, Abram is invited by God to explore it:

> **"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee"** (Gen.13:17).

One of the greatest of modern world problems is the Middle East, particularly Palestine and the problem as to who shall occupy and control it, Jew or Arab. It is futile for politicians and leaders to argue about this on the length of occupation of this portion of the earth. The fact remains that basically the land belongs to neither Jew nor Arab, its owner is the Lord:

> **"The land shall not be sold for ever, for *the /and is Mine* ... "** (Lev.2S:23).
> ***"The earth is the Lord's,* and the fulness thereof'** (Psa.24:1).

Consequently God gives the land to whomsoever He wills and there can be no argument about it. He purposes that this stretch of land in the centre of the earth should be the home of Abraham's descendants coming through Isaac and Jacob. This gift is not on the basis of *merit;* it is not that Israel is better than the Arab nations. Rather God has given it to Israel because this is at the heart of His plan for world-wide blessing (all families of the earth). He will surely carry out His purpose whatever the feelings of Jew or Arab may be, or those of any other nation. The Bible makes clear that the Lord has not forgotten the Arabs. They will have their earthly portion in due course.

It is obvious from past history that the descendants of Abraham have never occupied the whole of this territory, for Palestine as we know it today is only a small portion of it. There must therefore be a future total occupation, for God's Word and His promises cannot be broken.

Here we would point out that there was a foreshadowing of this larger inheritance during the reign of Solomon. In 1 Kings 4:21 and 2 Chronicles 9:26 we are told that his dominion was from the river (Euphrates) to the *border* of Egypt. This is not so extensive as the promise of Genesis 15 for it does not include Egypt from the boundary of the Nile, and while Solomon, for political and commercial reasons was able to control territory outside Palestine, yet the twelve tribes occupied no more than this small piece of land as 1 Kings 4:25 states:

> **"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" .**

Reference to a map will show that this was the extreme north and south of Palestine only, and therefore as these were the palmiest days of Israel's history, it can be definitely said that the Jew has never enjoyed the complete territory promised by God in Genesis 15:18. The days of Solomon then are *not* a fulfilment of this promise as some expositors

state. They are a foreshadowing only, leaving the complete fulfilment to a future day when God will honour His word to the letter as He always does.

The next thing we should note is that in the unconditional promise made to Abraham, the gift of a *posterity and the land* with its prescribed boundaries *are always kept together.* This promise concerning the seed and the land was repeated to Abraham's son Isaac:

> **"Sojourn in *this land* ... for unto thee, and *unto thy seed,* I will give all these countries ... and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"** (Gen.26:3,4),

and also to Jacob, Abraham's grandson:

> **"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 in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed"** (Gen.28:13,14).

This divine promise then concerned Jacob's twelve sons from whom sprang the nation of Israel.

However, Israel was warned by God through Moses that if they sinned and went into apostasy they would be severely disciplined by Him and would be temporarily dispossessed of this land (Deut.28:58-68). This passage should be read. It is too long to quote here. History shows us that this happened on three occasions:

(1) Their experience in Egypt resulting from the famine in Canaan and their subsequent bondage under Pharaoh and redemption by God through Moses.

(2) This resulted from the moral disintegration which followed Solomon's reign and the division of Israel's kingdom into two parts. The northern part was taken into captivity by Assyria in 721 B.C. and later the southern kingdom of Judah was similarly treated by Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C. Their return to the land is indicated by Jeremiah in chapter 29:10,11 who predicted that this captivity would last 70 years.

(3) The third and final dispersion began in A.D.70 with the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus, as foretold by Christ in Matthew 24. This was followed by the desecration of the entire land.

Israel has begun to return to this land in the present century which has witnessed the establishment of them as a nation again. Two million Jews are now settled in a part of their ancient land. This

however does not completely fulfil the prophecies concerning Israel's final regathering. From this it will be clearly seen that God's elective love shown to the people of Israel does not exempt them from discipline. They have to learn, as the Apostle Paul later wrote:

> **"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ... "** (Gal.6:7,8).

But this discipline is temporary and never results in their being permanently cast away by God, the reason being His sure and unconditional promises made with their fathers as we have seen. Jeremiah 31:10 expresses it in a nutshell:

> **"He that scattered Israel *will gather him"***

and there should be no need to emphasize that the literal Israel that God scattered in judgment must be the same Israel that He will finally restore. The prophetic books of the Bible express these two aspects of God's dealings with Israel judgment for their sin and apostasy, and restoration to the promised land according to the unchanging mind and will of God.

It is important to realize that, because of the divine purpose, *Israel cannot be exterminated.* She has always stood beside the graveside of her persecutors. The permanence of the Jewish race through all the vicissitudes they have endured during the centuries is an indication of the truth of God's Word. The prophet Jeremiah in his 31st chapter, verses 35-37 states:

> **"... the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day and the ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; the Lord of hosts is His name: 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".**

God here throws out a challenge to all. If the immensity of creation can be completely plumbed, measured and searched then He will cast off this people. But in spite of scientific advances, man has only begun to scratch the surface of our solar system and beyond, and this challenge therefore stands secure and always will do.

Later on, in the Apostle Paul's witness, he asked the question:

> **"I say then, hath God cast away His people? (i.e. Israel) ... God hath *not* cast away His people which He foreknew"** (Rom.11:1-6),

and the emergence of Israel as a nation once more shows that this is still true today. There is a permanent earthly people of God whose destiny is to dwell in the Middle East in the large portion of land from the Nile right across to the Euphrates. *This is because this people*

and this land are right at the heart of God's programme for world blessing and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.

As for the *quality* of the land itself, needless to say whatever God gives must be of the best. It is described as "a good land", "a land flowing with milk and honey",

> **"A land which the *Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord God are always upon it,* from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year"** (Deut.11:12).

With the spring and autumn rains it is an exceedingly fertile land, rich also in minerals and oil as the nations of the earth have learned only too well.

The prophets are full of explicit predictions concerning the final regathering of Israel to this promised land. As we are indicating portions of the Bible for reading which bear upon the divine plan, the following passages should be carefully pondered over:

> **Isaiah 11; 14:1-3; 43:1-7; and chapters 60-62, Jeremiah 30:1-11; 31:1-13, 28-40; 32:36-44; 33:14-26, Ezekiel 11:15-21; chapter 37; 39:25-29, Hosea 3, Joel 3, Amos 9, Micah 4, Zechariah 8.**

Of course, the above passages are not the only ones which deal with the future of Israel and their restoration to the promised land. That this can only refer to the *literal* land

promised to Abraham and his seed is seen from the phrase "Your own land", or "the land which I sware *to give unto your fathers"* (Ezek.20:42; 34:13; 39:28). This effectively forbids any spiritualizing and transference to the Church.

God's plan then to reach the whole world was to choose a people, teach them His truth and knowledge of Himself, (which took many centuries) and the way of salvation by the sacrifice of Christ, in order to equip them to pass on this vital gospel - "good news" to all mankind. Israel were to be the divine agents, a great missionary nation to achieve this purpose of God so that His Kingdom with all its manifold blessings might be a practical realization all over the earth.

In Exodus 19, Moses was instructed to tell Israel:

> **"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will obey My voice, and keep My covenant, you shall be My own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is Mine, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel"** (Exod.19:4-6 R.S.V.).

God begins to explain why He chose Israel. They were to be a pure channel (a holy nation of priests) and were an expression of the earthly kingdom in miniature. As such they were to be the premier nation of the earth:

> **"And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and *thou shalt be above only,* and thou shall not be beneath ... "**

(Deut.28:13).

There was one weak point in all this however. These promises were conditional upon Israel's complete obedience. Before God's covenant of law with them had been ratified they broke it by the idolatrous worship of the golden calf and their history was one of frequent idolatry and rebellion. This was indeed disastrous, and unless there was further revelation from God of His mercy and love, there could be no future for Israel, now under the curse of a broken law. However, this is just what we find, for as the one Sacrifice of Christ on the cross is sufficient to atone for the sinner today, in the same way the great redemptive work is sufficient for the sinful Jewish nation and this is expressed in the New Covenant which God made later on in Jeremiah's day with this people.

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The 31st chapter records it and a very important chapter it is. Note that its setting is *restoration to their land* (Jer.31:714; 28-30) and then revelation of the New Covenant which is not conditional like the former one was, but is all of grace:

> **"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).

Clearly God contrasts these two covenants which He has appointed between Himself and the nation of Israel: the first with its high standard of conduct is set before the children of Israel to keep, and its attendant blessings were conditional on Israel's obedience. It was, as we have seen, "weak on account of the flesh", the sinful old nature. The Jewish nation did not and could not keep it because of this. Consequently the Lord makes this New Covenant of grace with the same people. It is *unconditional,* the word "if' is not used once. This time, instead of commanding Israel to keep His law, God takes the initiative by putting *it into their minds,* and thus it becomes an *inward force* which enables them to become the priestly kingdom which was God's will for them from the beginning.

Not only this, but under the New Covenant, all their sins and failure are blotted out and forgotten by the Lord, and they come to a full knowledge of Himself and so are ready to spread and impart that vital knowledge to the rest of mankind. This covenant could not

operate till it was ratified by the offering of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. At the passover supper He said to His Jewish disciples:

> **"Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the *new covenant*** (testament A.V.), **which is shed for many for the remission (forgiveness) of sins"** (Matt.26:26-28).

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It should be clear that this wonderful and far reaching covenant relates to two parties: God on the one hand, and Israel on the other and we have no right to insert anyone else into this covenant as is so often done in order to bolster up certain theological ideas. If it is asked, do Gentiles come under this covenant? the answer is "yes", if they are associated with Israel, as they were during the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles and this we shall consider later on. But we should remember that God can deal with sinners on the basis of free grace, apart from any covenants. Concerning Israel however it is on the basis of the *New Covenant* that there can be a future for them in the plan of God, and we have noticed how important God considers this by throwing out the challenge to alter the functioning of creation and only then would He cast this sinful people away and thus they would cease to be a nation before Him for ever (Jer.31:35-37).

In spite of the Jew's failure, blindness and hardness of heart during this age, there must therefore be a glorious future for them and this the prophetic Word makes clear.

God's promise of a King over Israel and finally over the whole world.

We have seen that, in order to accomplish His purpose for world blessing, God chooses a nation, gives them a promise of a home in the centre of the earth, but not only this, He promises them a *leader and king of His choice.* In the original promise to Abraham God said "Kings shall come out of thee" (Gen.17:6-16). As the purpose unfolds, it is narrowed down to Isaac and Jacob and then in Genesis 49:10, in his prophetic summary of the future of Israel, Jacob under divine illumination, says *"the sceptre* shall not depart from Judah, nor the *ruler's staff* from between his feet (or posterity), until Shiloh come, and unto Him shall the obedience of the peoples be". The Hebrew has an alternative *Sheloh* which means "whose it is" and the Greek translation of the O.T. (the Septuagint) has "he for whom it is laid up". The phrase "from between his feet" means his posterity. The whole verse then reads "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a

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lawgiver from his posterity until He comes Whose right it is and unto Him shall the obedience of the peoples be". The verse has practically always been regarded as Messianic and indicates that the sovereignty would never depart from Judah until the Messiah came

Who had the right to reign "Until He comes Whose right it is" is repeated in Ezekiel 21:27 where God links this sovereignty once more with Christ.

So we see that early in Israel's history there was a concept of a future earthly kingdom and a divine Ruler. The teaching concerning this future King is embodied in the promises given to David. The Scriptural passages for reading here are 2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 17 and Psalm 89.

In 2 Samuel 7:16 God tells David through Nathan:

> **" ... And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee; *thy throne shall be established for ever".***

This is repeated in Psalm 89, the Psalm of God's faithfulness to His word and His promises, for faithfulness occurs seven times (verses 1,2,5,8,24,33,49, "truth" here should read "faithfulness" as R.V.). Verses 3,4,35-37 clearly link the "seed" (posterity) with "the throne" and this God declares, shall be for ever established. It is also stated that He will not alter or break His covenant (34). That Christ, as David's greater son, fulfils this promise, both the O.T. and N.T. emphasize. In the wonderful prophecy relating to the birth of Christ in Isaiah 9:6,7 (R.V.) we read:

> **"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: *and the government shall be upon His shoulder,* and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father** (or Father of the ages), **Prince of Peace. Of the *increase of His government and of peace* there shall be no end, *upon the throne of David and upon His Kingdom,* to establish it and to uphold it with judgment** (justice) **and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever - *the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this".***

The holy Child to be born is Emmanuel, God with us, and He is definitely linked with the *throne of David* and the fulfilment of this divine purpose will go on for ever. That this is vitally important to God's plan for world blessing is shown by the statement that God's zeal or keenness will carry it out!

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In Jeremiah 23:5,6 (R.Y.) the reign of the King Who is the son of David is portrayed as coming to pass in a time when Judah and Israel shall be saved and dwell safely:

> **"Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that *I will raise unto David* a righteous Branch, and *He shall reign as King* and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord is our righteousness** (Jehovah Tsidkenu)".

This is followed by the regathering of Israel and their occupation of the promised land. The same truths are emphasized in chapter 33:14-26 which should be also read. It is too long to quote here. In it God says:

> **"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 ... "** (verses 20,21).

Not only this, but when these prophecies are fulfilled, David himself will be raised from the dead and act as a prince and Christ's vice-regent on the throne of Israel. Ezekiel 37:22-25 indicates that Israel in that future day will have one King over them and then in verses 24 and 25 God says:

> **"And My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd: they shall also walk in Mine ordinances, and observe My statutes and do them. And *they shall dwell in the land I have given unto Jacob My servant, wherein your fathers dwelt,* and they shall dwell therein, they and their children, and their children's children *for ever:* and David My servant shall be their prince for ever".**

In Ezekiel's days David had of course been dead over four hundred years and this then must be a prophecy concerning his resurrection at the millennial reign of Christ and of his sharing with the Lord the rule over the people of Israel.

Some have a problem owing to the fact that for many years the throne was unoccupied. From the time of the Babylonian captivity there was no earthly kingdom. But this had been taken account of in God's Word, for according to Hosea 3:4,5 (R.Y.) written before this captivity, it was predicted:

> **"For the children of Israel *shall abide many days without king,* and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar** (image) **and without ephod or teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall come with fear unto the Lord and to His goodness *in the latter days".***

Thus, although there would be a period when David's throne would be empty, yet this would only be temporary and the time would come when Israel would return to the Lord and the resurrected David would be their king, reigning with and for Christ.

Amos 9: 11 also states that the tabernacle of David would be restored *in the latter days* and in Zechariah 14, after Christ's second advent when His feet shall stand once more on the Mount of Olives (Zech.14:4), the prophet states: "Jehovah (in the Person of Christ) shall *be king over all the earth"* (verse 9) as well as being the king of Israel.

There is abundant O.T. evidence then that God planned a literal accomplishment of His promise to David concerning the throne of Israel and that this would finally be fulfilled in Christ. We will now look at the testimony of the N.T. on this most important subject and note how this purpose is carried forward.

The Testimony of the N. T. concerning the Kingship of Christ and the earthly phase of His Kingdom.

The Gospel of Matthew opens with a genealogy of Christ, "the Son of *David,* and Son of *Abraham".* As the son of David the Lord Jesus has the right to the *throne.* As the son of Abraham He has the right to the *land.* In chapter two the question is asked, "Where is He that is born *king of the Jews?"* (2:2). The angel that visited Mary before the Lord's birth, speaking for God, said:

> **"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" could only have meant one thing to Mary, the position of king over Israel and "the house of Jacob" would certainly have been understood of the nation

that descended from Jacob and not the church. When Herod demanded to know where Christ should be born, the chief priests and scribes quoted from Micah who, centuries before, had pin-pointed Bethlehem as His birth place, concluding " ... for out of thee shall come a Governor *Who shall rule My people Israel"* (Matt.2:4-6).

The same truth was stressed by the Apostle Paul:

> **"Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of *the circumcision (Israel)* for the truth of God, *to confirm the promises made unto the fathers,* and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy"** (Rom.l5:8,9).
>
> **" ... my kinsmen according to the flesh *(Israel)* ... *of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came* ... "** (Rom.9:3-5).

Moreover we have the express statement of the Lord Himself concerning those to whom He was sent:

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

Not only did He limit His ministry to the chosen nation but He put the same limit on the ministry of the Twelve when He commanded them:

> **"Go *not* into the way of the Gentiles.. but go rather to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel"*** (Matt.l0:5,6).

Those who do not have a grasp of the centrality of Israel in God's plan to reach the whole world will have difficulty here, for they will be unable to reconcile the conception of Christ as the Saviour of the *world* with this limitation to *Israel,* but once this has been understood there will be no problem in the fact that the Jew must come first in God's dealings in the O.T. period and now in the N.T. When the Lord Jesus came to them in the flesh He did so as their King-Priest. "He shall be a *Priest* on His *Throne",* said Zechariah (6:12,13). As the King, He can administer righteous rule, first to Israel and then to all mankind. As Priest and Offering He can deal with and remove the stumbling block of sin, so that God's kingdom can become a reality and not just a dream.

The tragedy was that when in the fulness of time their Saviour and their King came to them, this favoured nation chosen by God rejected Him in His threefold capacity as Prophet (Matt.12:41), Priest (12:6) and King (12:42).

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The forerunner, John the Baptist, had prepared the highway for the King and with His advent in view had pronounced the kingdom near (Matt.3:2) to the earthly kingdom people, which good news was also sounded out by Christ Himself to them (Matt.4: 17). But in the words of the parable they said "we will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). They would have a criminal released rather than their king! o the tragedy of it all - the ghastly tragedy, that after centuries of divine training it should come to this! In mockery they put over His cross "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews" (Matt.27:37) but it was absolutely true. What a disappointment and grief to the heart of God this must have been! One could have understood if He had given up using human beings to carry out His will after such a terrible let-down. The fact that He has not done so only magnifies His character as the longsuffering God of all grace.

Just the few responded to the Lord's teaching, such as Nathaniel, who confessed "Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the *King of Israel"* (John1:49). The majority showed their unbelief and fickleness for when the Lord Jesus rode into Jerusalem, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy (9:9) "Behold, *thy King* cometh unto thee" (Matt.21:5), they appeared to receive Him, but it was only a thin veneer of empty emotion, for within a few days they were shouting "crucify Him".

Was this then the end of God's programme for world blessing and the failing of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David concerning the seed, the land and the King? The book that follows the four gospel records will tell us. This is the Acts of the Apostles and is the next portion of holy Scripture that should be carefully read.

The Testimony of the Acts of the Apostles to the earthly Kingdom of Christ.

With the terrible failure of Israel, we need to discover now whether God will continue His plan for world blessing without Israel and use other means, or whether in His great patience and longsuffering He will give them yet another opportunity to repent and respond to Him.

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The Acts of the Apostles which carries on the narrative from the earthly ministry of the Lord shows clearly that God in His great mercy took the latter course.

Luke who wrote the Acts, also wrote the third Gospel which evidently originally was the first part of the Acts. In the last chapter of his Gospel he records. the fact that the Lord Jesus appeared to the eleven after His resurrection and opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). In the first

chapter of the Acts which overlaps the last chapter of the Gospel, Luke tells us that for some six weeks the Lord appeared to the eleven and expounded the O.T. Scriptures to them. What a favoured position they were in! What a privilege to hear the living Word expound the written Word and to be given a correct understanding of it by Him!

The result of all this was that they asked Him, "Wilt Thou at this time *restore the Kingdom to Israel?"* At the very outset these men were led to see that the earthly kingdom and the position of Israel were still dominant in the will of God. We should note that 'to restore' is not to bring in something *new,* but to bring back *something that existed before.* This was the kingdom which was the great subject of revelation through all the O.T. prophets.

The Lord did not correct them for asking such a question. It was the *time element* that He could not reveal, for to do this it would have been necessary for Him in His foreknowledge to reveal that Israel was to reject yet again God's offer of mercy and restoration, and this the Lord in His wisdom refused to do, or to give them any grounds for expecting such an action.

The next thing in the record is the concern of the eleven to fill the place of Judas. The *number twelve* must be made up. It is difficult to understand the need for this if God had rejected Israel at this point and was commencing to call out the Body of Christ in which the Jew as a nation does not exist, (Col.3:8-11). But in the earthly kingdom the Lord Jesus had made a promise that the twelve apostles *should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Matt.19:28 - note twelve thrones, not eleven).

The qualification for the role of an apostle is seen if one compares Acts I:21,22 with the Lord's words in John 15:27. The thought here is the capacity to bear personal testimony from being an eye-witness to the life and works of the Lord, from the commencement of His public ministry right through to His death and resurrection. Two men fulfilled this condition and the apostles wisely left it to the Lord to choose between them. The indication of His will led to Matthias taking the place of Judas and the Holy Spirit confirmed this on the Day of Pentecost, for His divine power rested on *Matthias equally with the eleven,* so if any mistake was made, God endorsed it! We say this because some expositors do not hesitate to say that here the apostles made a mistake. Had they been more patient and waited, Paul would have become the twelfth apostle! But Paul did not fulfil the above condition laid down by the Lord and, as he himself made clear, his ministry was distinct from the Twelve.

Now follows Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit as promised by the Lord Jesus, and His divine equipment of the Twelve for their further kingdom ministry. It is very important to realize that Pentecost was the third of the feasts of Jehovah, given to Israel and recorded in Leviticus 23. Symbolically they sketch out God's earthly

programme for Israel from the beginning with Passover (Calvary) to the setting up of God's kingdom on earth (Tabernacles). The church which is His Body is not foreseen here, for it is linked with the heavenly purpose of God and at this time was still hidden in the mind of God and so was unrevealed (Eph.3:1-11; Col.I:24-27).

In explaining the meaning of Pentecost to the Jewish beholders, Peter refers to the second chapter of Joel's prophecy. It is important to note that this quotation occurs in a setting *of restoration.* God says:

> **"I will *restore* to you (Israel) the years that the locust hath eaten"** (Joel 2:25),

and in verses 26 and 27 we read:

> **"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 shall never be ashamed".***

Then immediately follow the words that Peter quotes as being fulfilled in the happenings described in Acts 2. [For fuller treatment see the author's *Pentecost,* published by The Berean Publishing Trust, 52a Wilson Street, London EC2A 2ER.]

Coming to chapter three we wish to impress the reader that this is a very important chapter to understand if one wishes to get a grasp of the continuing purpose of God at this point of time. It opens with the record of the healing of the lame man by Peter at the gate of the Temple and this was but an illustration of what God could yet do for Israel, sick with unbelief and hardness of heart. With great plainness of speech he accuses them of killing the Prince of life and brings home to them the enormity of their crime. Then he says:

> **"Repent ye therefore, and be converted** (be turned, [literally] that is, back to God), **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 heavens must receive until the time of *restoration*** (R.V.) **of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth ofall His holy prophets"** (i.e. the prophetical books of the O.T.) (Acts.3:19-26).

The implication of these verses was absolutely critical for Israel. The dying Saviour had prayed for the nation, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34), and that prayer would have been answered there and then for Israel, if they had only repented and turned back to God. In which case their sins would have been blotted out, and their Saviour and King would have returned to them, and then the kingdom spoken of in such glowing terms by the O.T. prophets would have become a reality. The period covered by the Acts of the Apostles (some 35 years) is the record of God's great long-suffering and patience, waiting for this repentance and obedience from Israel. To miss this is to misunderstand one of the main purposes of this most important period.

When Israel failed in faithfulness to God during the O.T. times, restoration was always effected by their *turning back* to God. Consult the following references - Deuteronomy 4:30,31; 2 Chronicles 6:26,27; Nehemiah 1:8,9; Zechariah 1:2,3. In each case in the Greek O.T. the word translated 'turn"

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is the same as the one Peter used when he urged his fellow Jews to be 'converted'. Of course no one knew at this time whether Israel would repent or not. Doubtless those who were saved prayed and hoped that this would be the case, for had this happened, the second Advent of Christ would have taken place *then* and their hope would have been realized. That is why all the epistles written during the Acts stress the nearness of the Lord's coming. [See the author's *The Unfolding Purpose of God,* pp 42,43.]

This was not a Christian concept that was wrong, as some think, and that had to be amended in view of later history. *The attitude of the nation of Israel is the key here.* As events turned out, Israel did not respond to the Lord's mercy and so the realization of God's kingdom on earth was postponed and with it the imminence of the Lord's Second Coming. It will be helpful to note the drift of events during the Acts and we can set it out in this way

JERUSALEM	Jews only	Restoration
ANTIOCH (outside Palestine)	Jews and Gentiles	Reconciliation
ROME	Gentiles only	Rejection

The circle of witness widens as we go through the Acts. It commences at Jerusalem (the city of the great King). It goes outside the land with the commencement of Paul's ministry and brings in the Gentile for a Scriptural purpose as we shall see, and it ends at Rome with Israel finally rejecting God's offer of mercy. But all the way through, the Jew, as the central agent of the earthly kingdom purpose, comes first.

Peter says:

> **"Unto you** (Jews) ***first,* God having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you"** (Acts 3:26),

and Paul in his first public speech recorded at Antioch:

> **"It was necessary that the Word of God should *first* have been spoken to you (Jews,** Acts 13:46).

For the same reason, the people of Israel must have the gospel first (Rom.1:16) and also judgment (Rom.2:5-9). We can now understand why Paul throughout his missionary journeys

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went to the Jew first (Acts 14:1; 17:1,10; 18:1-4,19). As long as there is the possibility of the kingdom on earth being realized, the people of Israel must have the prior place.

God's plan, as revealed during the Acts, is also shown by the

emphasis given to the resurrection of Christ. This is the great foundation upon which Christianity rests. The salvation of the sinner wholly depends upon it (Rom.10:8,9; 1 Cor.15:1-4). But in the Acts 'its relationship *to Israel* is stressed as well, and this is often completely overlooked by evangelicals. In his Pentecostal speech, Peter states that *Christ was raised to sit on David's throne* (Acts 2:26-30), and we have seen how important God's covenant to David is concerning the throne of Israel. At His birth Mary was promised that Christ should be given *the throne of His father David* and that He should reign *over Israel* (Jacob, Luke 1:32-35), and this is still in view, according to Peter's statement, during the period covered by the Acts.

The Apostle Paul, in his speech at Antioch already alluded to, proclaims that "God according to His promise raised *unto Israel* a Saviour" (Acts 13:23), and he links the resurrection with the *"sure mercies of David"* (verse 34). These are His covenant promises concerning the Throne as promised in Psalm 89 and elsewhere in the O.T. Peter again in Acts 5:30, 31 declares that the' resurrection of Christ was in order *"to give repentance to Israel* and remission of sins". Could any thing be clearer? Unless our minds are muddled and blinded by tradition we shall surely comprehend that God did not finish with His earthly people when they crucified His Son, Who was their Messiah and King, but gave them another opportunity to respond to Him. They still could have been "a light of the Gentiles and for salvation unto the ends of the earth" (Acts13:46,47) as Paul told them.

The record of the Acts shows that every step was *taken according to O.T. revelation,* and Paul does not hesitate to declare in Acts 26:22 that his ministry all through had been *strictly in line with the O.T.:*

> **"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".***

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This important statement by the Apostle gives us the Scriptural basis of his ministry up to this point and should save us from importing into it anything outside the O.T. If we heed Paul's words we cannot therefore include the later ministry given to him after the Acts by the ascended Christ which relates to God's *secret* purpose concerning the Body of Christ which was hid in God from past ages and generations (Eph.3 and Col.1) i.e. in O.T. times and right up to Paul's experience as the prisoner of the Lord at Rome.

It is helpful too to realize the position that miracles occupy in the earthly ministry of the Lord and the continuation of these during the following period recorded in the Acts. Peter declares in Acts 2:22:

> **"Jesus of Nazareth, a man *approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs* which God did by Him among you".**

It was not that Christ worked miracles that proved that His claims to Messiahship were genuine. Rather it was because He wrought the *special miracles that the O.T. had predicted* that proved this very thing. Isaiah had proclaimed that God would come to Israel (and this would involve vengeance on Israel's enemies) and 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"** (Isa.35:5,6).

It was these *particular miracles* that the Lord Jesus wrought day by day before His earthly people when He came to them in the flesh. When John the Baptist's faith wavered and he wondered if Christ was the real Messiah after all, the Lord referred to these evidential miracles to reassure him (Matt.11:2-5). These miracles continue throughout the Acts to the last chapter and then cease. The Lord confirmed the word with "signs following" (Mark 16:20), and as Hebrews 2:4 puts it "God also bearing witness, both with *signs and wonders, and with divers miracles".*

These miraculous signs were therefore a confirmation to them that 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 Israel exist as a nation before God these confirmatory miracles continue, but when Israel at the end of

the Acts is set aside by God in unbelief, evidential miracles cease. During the Acts even a handkerchief sent from the Apostle Paul was sufficient to heal miraculously (Acts 19:11,12); afterwards he has to leave Trophimus at Miletum sick (2Tim.4:20) and Timothy was advised to take a little wine for his *often* infirmities (1Tim.5:23). Epaphroditus was sick unto death (Phil.2:26,27), yet Paul cannot heal him. Surely he would have done so if he could!

If we get the *Scriptural* setting of these miracles and see that they were God's confirmation of the *earthly kingdom ministry,* we ought to be wise and not wrench them out of this divine setting and try to put them into the present period when this phase of God's kingdom purpose has been postponed. We see this happening in Christian circles all around us and it can only lead to trouble, misunderstanding and division. We should bear in mind that thousands of Israelites lived outside the land of Palestine and were called "the Dispersion". They were largely the descendents of those Jews who had been deported under the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions centuries before. They were none the less true Jews although they lived outside the promised land. It was therefore necessary that they should hear of God's offer of mercy to Israel equally with those who resided in the land. The Lord's earthly ministry and later that of Peter and the Twelve gave the latter their opportunity to repent and come into line with the divine promises of the New Covenant. Paul and the other apostles associated with him reach out to the dispersed Jews in Asia Minor and commence at Antioch outside Palestine.

When the Apostle wrote his last Acts period epistle namely the epistle to the Romans, he asked this question "Have they (Israel) not heard?" and the answer is "Yes, truly" (Rom.10:18), but this would not have been true earlier on. The *whole* nation *now* had heard God's offer of forgiveness and restoration and they were therefore without excuse.

In the providence of God Paul finally in the Acts reaches Rome and he does what he had done all the way through his ministry, namely goes to the Jew first and calls together their leaders and once again expounds the great theme of God's earthly kingdom as expounded in the O.T. (Acts 28:17,23).

He asserts that he is still "bound for the *hope of Israel"* (verse 20) which is nonsensical if Israel as a nation had been cast aside by God at the crucifixion. His statement before Agrippa recorded in the 26th chapter makes quite clear what he means by "the hope of Israel":

> **"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,** (no lost ten tribes please notice), ***hope to come"*** (verses 6,7).

This hope was not fully realized in the salvation of individual Jews as sinners. It related to the promises that we have already considered which God made to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (concerning the *nation* and *the land of promise)* and at this point were still possible of fulfilment. Nothing less than this was Israel's hope, which rested upon the work of their King-Priest at Calvary's cross and it was this hope that Paul expounded from the O.T. Scriptures to the leaders of the Jews at Rome. The result of this conference is seen in verses 24,25 of Acts 28; still there was no unanimous response to the truth of the kingdom message, and at this point it is evident that God's long-suffering with this people ran out. Israel as a whole had heard the offer of mercy and again they had rejected it as they had done with the ministry of the Lord Jesus to them previously. Then for the third and last time in the New Testament the terrible words from Isaiah six are pronounced by Paul to them. Paul was but the channel; the words were those of God the Holy Spirit:

> **"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias** (Isaiah) **the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and *should be converted (turned,* see 3:19), and I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God *is sent unto the Gentiles and that they will hear it"*** (Acts 28:25-28).

To sum it all up, Israel refused to listen to God's further offer of mercy, in contrast to the Gentile who was ready and willing to hear and respond. From now on, it is the *Gentile independently*

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of Israel that God deals with. Israel as God's covenant nation is now judged by God and is unusable by Him and laid aside temporarily in unbelief and hardness of heart by the word of the Holy Spirit pronouncing the terrible sentence of Isaiah 6:9,10 upon the nation for the third and last time. This is the very *negation of the New Covenant,* which, as we have seen is Israel's national covenant of grace. Under this covenant God writes His law *in their minds and hearts* which then respond to His gracious work. Now the very opposite has happened and the New Covenant cannot be operating when the chief participants in this covenant have minds as hard as steel in their rejection of Christ and God's grace.

There is a passage of Scripture which is a divine comment on the condition of the favoured nation during the Acts and this we must now look at. It is Romans chapters 9-11. A simple analysis of Romans would be:

Chapters	1-8	*Foundational*	Justification by Faith.
	9-11	*Dispensational*	Why Israel failed and their future in God's plan.
	12-16	*Practical walk*	in the daily life.

Some people are afraid of the word 'dispensational' because they think it leads to a divisive attitude to Scripture and also imbalance. But then any truth if wrongly held can lead to error and imbalance. The word 'dispensation' is a Scriptural word and no one who accepts the Bible as the Word of God can ignore it without loss. Basically the Greek word means the 'administration of a household'. It is translated "stewardship" in Luke 16:2,4 and is related there to someone who had been entrusted with another person's goods and had been found unfaithful in connection with his responsibility. It is often incorrectly regarded as being synonymous with the word 'age', and so some talk of the 'seven dispensations' in the Scriptures. But a stewardship is not just a period of time although it is in time. The Apostle Paul asserted that a "dispensation of the gospel" had been committed to him, but this certainly did not mean a period of time (1 Cor.9:17). He also stated that he was a *"steward* of the secrets (mysteries) of God" (1 Cor.4:1,2) and because of this, faithfulness was essential. A dispensation is the working out of an aspect of

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God's truth and purpose which He has committed to someone. To Israel much was committed:

> **" ... My kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the sonship** (adoption) **and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen"** (Rom.9:3-5).

What a magnificent dispensation had been committed to Israel! and what unfaithful stewards they had been! "It is required in stewards that a man be found *faithful"* (I Cor.4:2) - not necessarily *successful* by outward standards, but completely loyal to the truth committed.

It is very important for us to distinguish between truth that is *foundational,* that is true for *all* time and people, and truth that is *dispensational,* that is truth that pertains to and is peculiar to a *section* of God's people at a particular time.

As an example of this Paul asks, in Romans 3, whether Jews are better than others regarding sin and the answer is *"No, in no wise;* for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are *all under sin".* Sin and salvation are not dispensational - they are basic to the whole human race.

A few verses previously the Apostle had asked another question:

> **"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there in circumcision ?"**

The answer this time is:

> ***"Much in every way:*** **chiefly that unto them *were committed the oracles of God"*** (Rom.3:1,2),

and one can add to this honour bestowed on them the weighty blessings enumerated in Romans 9:3-5. With respect to these, the Gentiles were strangers to them all (Eph.2:11,12). These privileges of Israel were *dispensational,* a stewardship committed to them only by God, and this must be distinguished from their position as sinners.

An important point then in the interpretation of Scripture is the distinguishing of dispensational and foundational truth. In order to do this we should note *to whom it is addressed.*

But we must be careful here. We must not assume that because a portion of Scripture is addressed let us say to Israel that every statement in it refers to Israel and *no one else. Each statement must be weighed up with the whole of Scripture and the purpose of God in mind.* For instance, we read in Isaiah 26:3:

> **"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee".**

The book of Isaiah is written concerning *Judah and Jerusalem* (1:1). Would it be right then to assume that because this prophecy relates to the southern kingdom of Israel, the above verse is true for them only? The answer is most certainly "no", for the promise is not dispensational, but true for all time for those who completely trust the Lord. It is therefore *foundational or basic* and we find the Apostle Paul, centuries later, stating the same glorious truth (Phil.4:6,7 R.S.V.).

Some with more zeal than knowledge, have never really grasped

this, and in trying to distinguish what is dispensational, they have thrown away what is foundational. We state again because of its importance; we must certainly note to whom every part of Scripture is addressed, but also we must carefully note whether the contents of any particular passage are true only of those to whom it is addressed or to a wider circle. This we can discover by comparing Scripture with Scripture. Only in this way shall we get the *whole* truth of the passage under consideration and be balanced in our interpretation.

Coming back to Romans 9-11 we note that this section of the epistle is a divine comment on Israel's disloyalty during the Acts period and this really was the reason for their further failure after the crucifixion:

> **"For they** (Israel) **being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God"** (Rom.10:3).

Like millions since, they were trying to buy God's favour by seeking to establish righteousness by their own efforts which, as we have seen, are doomed to failure.

God then used a human expedient to wake them up to their responsibilities and lead them to repent and turn back

to Him. He brought the Gentile into blessing and salvation through the Gospel proclaimed by Peter's ministry in Acts 10 towards Cornelius (a Gentile) and those Gentiles who followed him in response.

In figurative language this was like putting in a wild olive graft (the Gentile) into the old flagging olive tree (Israel) to revitalize it (Rom.11:17-24), as the expression "to provoke them (Israel) to jealousy" means (Rom.10:19, quoting Deut.32:21). This gives us the *real reason, God's reason,* for admitting the Gentile into salvation and blessing during the Acts. He was, as it were, blessing the Gentile *before* Israel was ready to be the channel of blessing to the whole world, and this to stimulate them to faith and response to the divine offer of mercy given through Peter in Acts 3.

This is very different from what is generally taught. It is usually represented that God was at this point bringing the Gentile into the Body of Christ, but as we shall see, this idea directly contradicts what was taking place during the period covered by the Acts, which is the record of God's further longsuffering with the nation of Israel. In fact this is expressed in this section of Romans:

> **"But to Israel He saith, all day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and contrary (gainsaying) people"** (Rom.10:21).

God was waiting with hands outstretched to bless this people if they would only repent and turn back to Him, but as we have seen, they spurned this gracious offer, showing once more that they were indeed a disobedient and contrary people and in no condition to take the knowledge of God to the ends of the earth.

The eleventh chapter of Romans is of great importance. To those of his time who imagined that the Lord had finished with Israel at the cross (and there are many who think in this way today), the Apostle Paul asks this question:

> **"Hath God cast away His people?"** (Rom.11:1),

and we should bear in mind this was not said at the *beginning* of the Acts, but towards its end, for Romans was the *last* epistle of Paul written during this period. What is the answer? "God forbid (i.e. No), for I also am an Israelite ... *God hath*

not cast away His people which He foreknew" (v.2) and then Paul follows on to develop the important doctrine of the *remnant.* This stresses the fact that in spite of Israel's constant failing as recorded in the O.T., *this was never total.* There were always a few who remained faithful and whom God could still use. As an example the Apostle now alludes to Elijah's day with its apostasy. So bad was it that the prophet complained to the Lord that he was the only faithful one left. "I, even I only, am left" he declared (1 Kings 19:10), but he was wrong, for, as Paul shows, God had in secret seven thousand men who refused to worship Baal (Rom.11:4) and the Apostle concludes:

> **"Even so then at this present time also there is a *remnant* according to the election of grace"** (verse 5).

God has never been without a witness to carry on His purpose no matter how dark the times may have been, and those Jews who responded to the offer of mercy at Pentecost and others who believed later through the ministry of Peter and Paul are described as the *remnant of Israel,* not the joint Body of which Christ is the Head, in which Israel as a nation does not exist (Col.3:10,11).

We would remind the reader of the long quotation from Joel 2 that Peter makes on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. If we complete the last verse from Joel (which is left unfinished in the Acts) we shall read:

> **"And it,,shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered (saved): 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).

This again confirms the fact that these Jews who responded and believed at Pentecost were the perpetuation of the faithful remnant of Israel, even though the bulk of the nation apostatized and rejected the Lord. And to these faithful Hebrew believers were added Gentile believers to wake the nation up to what they were losing by their unbelief. These Gentile believers like "wild olive graft into the old stock, partook of the root and fatness of the olive tree" (Rom.11:17), that is, they began to share in Israel's covenant blessings, which were very great as we have endeavoured to show, and the reader should

ponder again Romans 9:3-5 which describes their fullness.

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But they were warned that they could be cut off from these blessings just as branches of the true olive (Israel) had already been lopped off in unbelief (verses18-22). This again is impossible to apply to the Body of Christ as revealed in Paul's later prison epistles. Unfaithful ness here can lead to shame and the Lord's disapproval and the denying of any reward for service. This is indeed serious, but no member of this favoured company, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph.1:3,4), is ever threatened with expulsion from this blessed position.

If there is a problem with the glorious statement of Romans 8:38,39 and the impossibility of separation from Christ, then this is resolved when we distinguish between what is basic and foundational, resting on sheer grace, and dispensational privileges which may depend upon the faithful response of the believer.

It is evident then that, from the faithful remnant, God was building a new Israel, the Israel of God * (Gal.6:16) the first fruits of the earthly kingdom.

* This phrase occurs in one of the earliest of Paul's epistles, Galatians, (possibly the first) and we believe is not a description of the church which is His Body, which is largely Gentile. Bishop Ellicott's comment here is that "and" is the simple copulative, not explicative with the sense of "namely". He continues: "it is still more doubtful whether Christians generally could be called 'the Israel of God', the simple copulative meaning seems most probable. So Paul includes all in his blessing, of whatever stock or kindred; and then, with his thoughts turning (as they ever did) to his own brethren after the flesh (Rom.9:3), he pauses to specify those who were once Israelites according to the flesh (1Cor.10:18), but now are the Israel of God - true spiritual children of Abraham" *(The Epistle to the Galatians* by C.J.Ellicott pp138,139).

The old church of Israel was failing and sinking further and further into spiritual blindness, deafness and hardness of heart whereas the new was responding to His claims. This can be further seen if we consider Peter's statement in his first epistle, chapter 2. He is writing to Hebrew Christians of "the Dispersion" ('those scattered abroad') a technical name for Jews living outside Palestine. Let us compare what he says in his second chapter with God's original purpose for Israel as given in Exodus 19:

Exodus 19:5,6	*1 Peter 2:9,10*
"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"*	"But ye are a chosen generation (race), a *royal priesthood,* an *holy nation, a peculiar people* (God's own people) ..."

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Obviously Peter is applying the terms given in God's original purpose for Israel to those Hebrew Christians to whom he was writing and he further clinches it by referring to Hosea 1:9 where Hosea's son is given the typical name "Lo-ammi", 'not My people' and Israel are temporarily laid aside by God because of their continual unfaithfulness. But because of the unconditional promise of God

given to the patriarchs, Israel are to be restored again and become "Ammi", 'My people'. This, as we have seen, is repeated in the Acts period. At the end Israel is again laid aside by God in unbelief because of their rejection of Christ, and have been so for nearly 2,000 years, but the section of Romans that we are studying, insists that this is only temporary and will be ended: "... 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 (Christ's Second Advent) and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: *For this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins* ... as touching the election, *they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance* (Le. change of mind on His part)"** (Rom.11:25-29).

We repeat, the basis of Israel's restoration from blindness and hardness of heart is the putting into effect of the New Covenant and this, together with the gracious promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David, ensures that there must be a future for this people, and this restoration will be accomplished at the Lord's Second Coming (when the Deliverer [Christ] shall come and save Israel at the time of their greatest danger).

So here we must distinguish between the majority of the nation who had sunk into apostasy and the faithful remnant who formed the churches of the Acts period. These waited for Israel's repentance and the early return of the Lord to set up the glories and the righteous rule of the earthly kingdom as expressed in the O. T. prophets.

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Earlier on we used the phrase "the church of Israel" and this may appear strange to the reader, but it is a Scriptural expression and it is absolutely vital to get a Scriptural understanding of the word 'church' as it is used in a variety of ways in Christendom. It can mean:

(1) a building for Christian worship.
(2) The whole of Christendom, (but it is never used in either of these senses in the Bible).

In the Scriptures it can mean:

(1) Israel as a nation, and separate from all other peoples.
(2) The Jewish synagogue:

> **"And if he neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church..."** (Matt.18:17).

(3) The guild of Ephesian craftsmen in Acts 19:32,39,41 ('the lawful assembly').
(4) Separate assemblies in different localities (1 Cor.1:2; Rom.16:16; 1 Cor.11:16; 1 Thess.2:14).
(5) The church of the firstborn (Heb.12:23). This company is connected with the heavenly Jerusalem which finally forms part of the new earth and is likened to a bride, (Rev.2l:9,10).

(6) The church which is Christ's Body of which He is the Head (Eph.1:22,23). This church is seen by God as "seated together in Christ" in the heavenly places where He is now enthroned, and its inheritance and hope is there, not on the earth (Ephesians and Colossians).

It is very important to grasp the fact stated in (1) that *Israel was a church* in the Biblical sense. The Greek *ekklesia* means literally "a called out company" for some specific purpose. Israel was just that – separated from all other nations by God and trained to become a channel of truth and blessing to the darkened world around them.

The Bible that was in general use at the time of the Lord's earthly people was the Greek translation of the O.T. called the Septuagint and it took a place very much like the Authorized Version of our day. This was the version that the Lord and the apostles frequently quoted from and this explains

why N.T. quotations from the OT. are often worded differently from the Hebrew original.

The word *ekklesia* occurs some 75 times in the Septuagint version of the G.T. so it is quite a frequent word, often translating the Hebrew word for *congregation.* If our A.V. had been translated from the Septuagint (usually designated LXX) we should have had the following:

> **"And Moses spake in the ears of *all the church of Israel* the words of this song ..."** (Deut.31:30).
> **"Furthermore David the King said unto *all the church* ..."** (1 Chron.13:2).
> **"Wherefore David blessed the Lord before *all the church"*** (1 Chron.29:10).
> **"And David said to *all the church,* now bless the Lord your God"** (1 Chron.29:20).
> **"So Solomon, and *all the church* with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon"** (2 Chron.1:3).
> **"... In the *midst of the church* will I praise Thee"** (Psa.22:22; and note when this is quoted in Heb.2:l2 the word 'church' is used - not 'congregation').
> **"And the heavens shall praise Thy wonders, O Lord: Thy faithfulness also in the *church of the saints"*** (Psa.89:5).

These are a few occurrences of the usage of "ekklesia", "church" in the O.T., and it is a great pity this has been hidden from us in our English translations. Stephen refers to the nation of lsrael as "the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). Every Jew would be familiar with the word church and it would be a good thing if we used the expression "the church of Israel" more frequently. For one thing it would rid us of the erroneous idea that there is only *one* church in the Bible. There is only *one Body,* but that is another matter.

Once we realize this we shall have a better appreciation of the Lord's words to Peter as recorded in Matthew 16:18 "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build *My church".* What church would Peter

understand by this statement? He must have been quite familiar with the word 'church', and knowing the O.T., would have linked it with his own nation. He had just received a revelation from the Father and had made the great declaration "Thou art the Messiah (Christ), the Son of the living God". Had the Lord been referring to

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the church that was revealed later on in Ephesians and Colossians, Peter would have needed a further revelation from the Father, for at this time this company was unrevealed, being hidden in the mind of God. He could only have identified the church of which the Lord spoke with Israel. The Lord would have had to correct such thinking if it was the church which was to be His Body He was referring to in His statement to Peter. We believe that it was the faithful remnant of Israel we have been considering that He was speaking about, the new "church of Israel", which, together with the faithful all through Israel's history will finally constitute the Bride of the Lamb, whose inheritance is in the heavenly Jerusalem. This was the city and heavenly country that Abraham and the overcomers of Hebrews 11 saw by faith, but never inherited in this life. They will do so in resurrection. This was the "better country" (11:16), better even than the earthly inheritance given to him and his seed (Heb.11:9,I0,I4-16; 12:22,23). This is why in the figurative language of Revelation 21 Israel is featured so prominently, for this city has *"twelve* gates, and at the gates *twelve* angels, and names written thereon which are the names of the *twelve tribes* of the children of *Israel"* (Rev.21:12). "And the wall of the city had *twelve* foundations, and in them the names of the *twelve apostles of the Lamb"* (verse 14).

This company constitutes the "church of the firstborn", the Bride of the Lamb, the privileged company of faithful overcomers who are honoured by the Lord in this way. Faithful believing Gentiles who have come into blessing via Israel (as in the teaching of Romans 11) will doubtless be here too sharing the glories of this wonderful city on which God has lavished His artistry in colour and beauty as described in Revelation 21.

What happened after the failure of Israel at Acts 28?

That the failure of Israel at the end of the Acts was a crisis of the first magnitude, can be seen when one realizes that the nation was in the forefront of God's purpose for the establishing of His kingdom on earth, from Genesis 12 to Acts 28. They are left there in a spiritual condition which is the very negation of the New Covenant. This covenant, when operated

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by God will touch their *minds and hearts,* making them sensitive and responsive to His truth and its claims. Now their hearts are hardened and their spiritual blindness and deafness make them unusable by God, and this has been their condition all through this present age.

As the prophet Hosea foretold, they are now, "Lo-ammi", *"not* My

people" and although God's providential care is over them for His Word's sake, He does not outwardly own them. As we have seen, the prophet, inspired by God, sets forth their condition in these remarkable words:

> **"For the children of Israel shall dwell *many days* without *king,* or *prince* without *sacrifice* or *pillar,* without *ephod* or *teraphim.* Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to His goodness *in the latter days"*** (Hosea 3:4,5 R.S.V.).

This exactly describes their condition at this moment. In addition to this, as God had warned them, their temple was destroyed by the armies of Titus in A.D.70. A few years after the end of the Acts they were scattered all over the earth where they have been ever since.

As we know, a representative number are now established in Palestine, and in 1948 they became once more a nation to be reckoned with. Now they are at the centre of the insoluble problem of the Middle East. Thus the stage is being set for the final events of this age which will, at the peak of darkness and terrible danger, end with the personal coming of the Lord Jesus in power and great glory as He Himself foretold. This we shall refer to later on.

Meanwhile what happened to the Divine purpose when Israel so tragically failed at the end of the Acts? God, because He is almighty, could have found another channel in the place of Israel for world blessing. But He did not do this. Instead, He revealed another phase of the "purpose of the ages", which up to this time He had kept hidden in Himself and therefore was completely unknown to any created being. This new phase touched the *heavenly side* of His great purpose, for we must never forget that God's creative plan touches *the heavens* as well as the earth.

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The human channel through whom God made this revelation known was the Apostle Paul in his Roman prison. The Apostle had written seven epistles during the Acts (if we count Hebrews. For the possible human authorship and exposition of the epistle see *Perfection or Perdition?* by Stuart Allen and Charles H.Welch, published by The Berean Publishing Trust, 52a Wilson Street, London EC2A 2ER.). They are Galatians, Hebrews, I and 2 Thessalonians, I and 2 Corinthians and Romans. Now he is inspired by the Holy Spirit to write seven more: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians, I Timothy, Titus and 2 Timothy. All but I Timothy and Titus bear the mark of his imprisonment. Both these epistles were evidently written during his short interval of release from the Roman imprisonment before he was apprehended a second time and then martyred.

We can well imagine the perplexity of the Christians at the end of the Acts when they realized that Israel had failed. What now would happen? What would God now do? The problem was solved by the next two epistles they received from Paul, namely Ephesians and

Colossians, and with what joy and relief these must have been read by the faithful! *A Gentile age* had now commenced and the ascended Christ had saved, called and directed Paul, first to the Jew in the Acts period and those Gentiles associated with believing Jews, and now to *the Gentile predominantly,* apart from Israel, for almost the last words in Luke's history of the Acts, we have the statement, "Be it known unto you (Jews) that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and *that they will hear it"* (Acts 28:28). Israel had refused to hear God's message of forgiveness and the possibility of restoration. In contrast the Gentiles had heard and responded and would continue to do so. It is significant then that in the later epistles Paul states:

> **"I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ *for you Gentiles"*** (Eph.3: 1)
> **" ... that I should preach *among the Gentiles* the unsearchable riches of Christ"** (Eph.3:8)
> **"To whom God would (or wills to) make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery (secret) *among the Gentiles... "*** (Col.1:27)
> **"I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle ... *a teacher of the Gentiles* ..."** (1Tim.2:7)

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> **"Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that *by me* the preaching might be fully known, and *that all the Gentiles might hear"*** (2Tim.4:17).

Here then is what the Christian assemblies were reading, a mouthpiece for the enthroned Christ in glory, with a message *for Gentiles* showing exactly where they now stood in God's plan and purpose. *And this is what we need today.* No other N.T. writer makes this claim. Paul is pre-eminently the Apostle of the Gentiles, and in the second set of seven letters we have revealed to us the special features of God's new purpose, now that the earthly people had failed and were unusable by Him. It is important to realize that this new revelation rests foursquare upon the finished work of Christ on the cross as the previous aspect of His purpose had done. The *foundation* has not altered, for the Lord Jesus and His salvation are the "same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb.13:8). The truth concerning sin, salvation by grace, sanctification and allied foundation doctrines of the Christian faith remain unchanged. *These are true for all time and for the redeemed of all dispensations.* What has happened is that the *super structure* of God's purpose has changed, or to put it another way, God has taken the opportunity, consequent .on Israel's failure, to reveal *another phase of His gracious plan, this time touching the heavens and not the earth.* Let us repeat that this rests securely on the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ as all previous truth from Genesis onwards, for He is the centre and the circumference of it all.

We wish to stress this in order to parry the possible accusation of limiting our Bible to seven epistles of Paul written after Acts 28. We need *all Scripture* for our equipment, and the foundation doctrines

mentioned above have already been laid in the earlier writings of the New Testament, and typically in the Old Testament. However, we leave to God the right to reveal deeper aspects of truth in His Word when His infinite wisdom decrees. We shall honour Him by recognizing this. We shall dishonour Him and confuse ourselves and others if we fail to do so.

What Paul is now inspired to reveal was called a *mystery.* This word in the original does not mean something puzzling or mysterious, but something that has been *hidden by God* - in other words, a secret.

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He does not use this word once in his seven Acts epistles to describe the existing church. But after Acts 28 he states that Christ had made this secret known to him and that his one endeavour now was to make it known to all (Eph.3:3-9). This secret was a dispensation (verse 9 R.V.). This word as we have seen, means a *stewardship.* Paul was the steward of this new revelation and it is significant that none of the other apostles use this word or the word "secret". They could faithfully give all their witness (primarily to Israel) without claiming to reveal anything that had been hidden, for God's purpose for Israel had already been clearly revealed in the OT. Scriptures.

Before Paul's prison ministry this secret had been hidden by God *in Himself,* note, not in the Scriptures (Eph.3:9). In Colossians 1:26 where we have another aspect of it, the Apostle states that it had been hidden from past ages (time) and generations (people). Now if God hides IN HIMSELF knowledge from man, who can discover it till He chooses to reveal it? Yet plenty of Christians imagine that they can discover it in the Old Testament and other parts of Scripture when God expressly declares that *He hid it in Himself.* Can this be called faith? Rather it is unbelief and can only lead to confusion and misunderstanding the purpose of God.

Such misunderstanding often identifies the Mystery or Secret with the revelation of Gentile blessing in the Old Testament and their sharing with Israel in the gospel of salvation. *That the Gentiles were to be blessed with and through the Jew was never kept a secret.* Ever since Genesis 12:1-4 God has made it plain in His Word that His will was to bless the whole world in this way, and in Romans 1:1-3 Paul declares that the gospel of God had been "promised afore by His prophets *in the holy Scriptures" i.e. the Old Testament.* In Romans 15:8-12 the Apostle states that:

> **"Jesus Christ was a *minister of the circumcision* (the Jew) for the truth of God, *to confirm the promises made unto the fathers; and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy".***

He then quotes three Old Testament passages to prove his point.

What God did not do before Acts 28 was *to reveal what*

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His plan would be if Israel failed. When this actually took place at Acts 28, the Lord made known to Paul what He had kept hidden in

Himself. This, His secret purpose was to call out a company of Jews and Gentiles whom He had chosen before creation (Eph.I:3,4). He planned to bless them in perfect equality, not on the earth, but at His own right hand in the heavenly places. There they were to form a holy Temple and dwelling place for Himself in the highest glory, "far above all" (Eph.2:21 ,22; Col.1:12). Is it any wonder that the prison epistles of Paul deal with the "exceeding" things of divine revelation? One cannot help feeling that the Apostle had difficulty, humanly speaking, in conveying the fulness of truth in human language. Here we have spiritual riches beyond dreams! The word "riches" occurs eight times in the prison epistles 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)
> **" ... that you may know... what are *the riches* of His glorious inheritance in the saints"** (Eph.I:18)
> **" ... that in the coming ages He might show *the immeasurable riches* of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"** (Eph.2:7)
> **"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)
> **" ... 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.3:14)
> **"And my God will supply every need of yours *according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus"*** (Phil.4:19)
> **"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)
> **" ... to have all the *riches of assured understanding* and the knowledge of God's mystery** (secret), **of Christ, in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"** (Col.2:2,3)
> (All quotations here from R.S.V.).

What limitless spiritual wealth is here, and are we not going to explore it by faith?, knowing that we have the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of Truth, Who can give us the

earnest or foretaste of these glories, the complete fulness of which lies ahead in the next life, the life which is life indeed (Eph.I:13,14).

Omitting for the moment Philemon which is not intended to be a deep treatise, but a delightful little personal letter from Paul to Philemon touching a personal matter, we have four prison letters and in their teaching they are grouped as follows:

A. ***Ephesians:*** *Seated together in the Heavenly Places in Christ Jesus*
Key words
3:2,9 R.V. Dispensation (mystery or stewardship) The
3:3 Mystery or Secret.

1:23:4:10 The Fulness
1:22 Christ the Head
1:22-23 The church Which is his Body
1:22 Principalities and Powers.

B. ***Philippians:*** *The Prize*

Key words

I:10 (Margin) Try the things that differ
I:27 Strive
3:14 Press toward the mark and the Prize
I:23 Depart
2:17 Offered

A ***Colossians****: Complete (filled to the full) in Him*

Key words

I:25 Dispensation (ministry or stewardship)
I:26 The Mystery or Secret
I:19 The Fulness
2:19 Christ the Head
I:24 The Church which is His Body
I:16 & 2:10 Principalities and Powers

B. **2 *Timothy:*** *The Crown*

Key words

2: 15 Rightly dividing the Word of Truth
2:5 Strive
4:7 Race finished
4:8 Crown
4:6 Depart and offered

It will be seen that these epistles are in pairs, Ephesians and Colossians, Philippians and 2 Timothy. The first pair make known the Mystery or Secret and the glories attached to it with their practical responsibilities. The second pair reveal a heavenly prize or crown for faithful service and witness in connection with this great revelation. In these epistles the Lord Jesus is exalted to the highest place (Eph.1:19-23; 4:10) in order that in all things He might have *the pre-eminence or first place* (Col.1:18; PhiI.2:9-11). Here we have reached the summit of revelation in the Bible wherein are priceless treasures awaiting appropriation by faith! What a challenge to all who name the name of Christ!

We cannot give an exhaustive study of these great epistles here (The reader is referred to *The Testimony of the Lord's Prisoner* and *In Heavenly Places* by C.H.We1ch. Also the author's verse by verse exposition in *The Berean Expositor* obtainable from The Berean Publishing Trust.), but we would indicate aspects of truth which are unique to this calling of the redeemed, and not found anywhere else in the range of Scripture.

(1) ***TIME PERIOD****.* Chosen in Christ *before* the foundation of the world.

This church was chosen in Christ before creation and the beginning of time. 2 Timothy1:9 and Titus1:2 literally read "before age times". No other company of the redeemed is associated with such a period.

The expression is only used elsewhere of Christ Himself (John 17:24; 1Pet.1:20). Other companies of believers are stated to belong to that aspect of the kingdom which has been prepared by God "since the foundation of the world". Before an event and since an event cannot refer to the same thing. This company has the furthest "look back" into the past.

(2) ***THE TITLE****.* "The church which is His Body, the *fulness* of Him that filleth all in all"

Here is a title which in its great content defies complete explanation. In Christ dwells *all the fulness of the Godhead bodily* (CoI.2:9), and this church is *His fulness* and each individual member is *filled to the full (complete) in Him* (CoI.2:9,10). What a trilogy of Truth! Such language is above anything given to Israel, wonderful though their blessings were.

(3) ***STATUS****. Joint-heirs, a joint-body* and *joint partakers.* Ephesians 3:6 gives the relationship of each redeemed member of this church. In the Greek there is a three-fold emphasis on *perfect equality* which is lost in the Authorized Version. Here is complete equality between Jew and Gentile at last. Israel *as a nation* in covenant with God has gone, together with all the privileges they had in the flesh (Rom.9:4,5).

Likewise the far-off Gentiles who were strangers from all Israel's privileges (Eph.2:11-13) cease to exist as such, and out of the two (Jew and Gentile) the Lord makes *a new creation, a new man* (Eph.2:14,15; CoI.3:11). This then is unique. There had been nothing like it before in the outworking of God's purposes. This company is taken out of the realm of the world and flesh, and blessed in the sphere of *spirit* in the heavenly places where Christ is enthroned at the right hand of the Father, and is seen by God "as seated together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph.2:6). We repeat that this church is a *new creation,* not an evolution or improvement of what had gone before. The Pentecostal church, while saved with the same salvation and having the same standing of holiness *in Christ,* had no such equality, for the Gentile believer was taught he was but a wild olive grafted into the true olive tree of Israel, and that he did not bear the root (Israel) but the root bore him (Rom.11:17,18). In other words the Jew was still first (Rom.1:16; 2:9,10). In contrast the *New Man,* the Joint-Body of Christ, is certainly not partaking of Israel's national blessings. Its blessings are *heavenly* in character and in destination, and higher than anything Israel enjoyed. And in any case, in this dispensation from God's viewpoint, there is no literal Israel to be grafted into for they are laid aside in unbelief.

(4) ***SPHERE OF BLESSING****.* This is described as being *in heavenly places.*

Some have questioned the accuracy of the A.V. here and put forward the idea that this is a spiritual experience for the believer here and

now. When Christ has become everything to the child of God in his experience, then, we are told, he is in the heavenlies. But Ephesians 1:20,21 tells us that Christ was

raised and is now *seated in the heavenly places.* Now the Lord Jesus must be localized somewhere for He has a glorified body. The disciples saw Him leave the earth *bodily* and were assured that He would return *in the same way* (Acts 1: 9-11). In Him, at the present time, dwells all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily* (Co1.2:9) and believers look forward in faith to the day of glory when they will have *bodies fashioned like His glorious body* (Phi1.3:2l). Furthermore, Ephesians 3: 10 teaches us that there are principalities and powers (heavenly princes) also in the heavenly places and they must be *somewhere.* The Lord Jesus has been exalted to the highest pinnacle of glory and the phrase "in the heavenlies" is only another way of describing this supreme sphere. Elsewhere it is described as *far above all heavens* (Eph.4:10), which shows us that heaven is a great deal more complex and wonderful than we realized. Ephesians 1:20 gives us an enthroned Christ in the heavenly places and 2:6 reveals a seated church in the same heavenly place in Him. *It is impossible to get higher than the ascended and glorified Lord Jesus* and so once again we stress the fact that here we reach *the climax of revelation so far as the redeemed of God are concerned.*

There is something else we must point out concerning the word "heavenly". This word occurs frequently throughout the New Testament, but 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.* For instance, the Hebrew believers to whom the epistle to the Hebrews was addressed were described as "having tasted the heavenly gift" (Heb.6:4). This gift was heavenly *in character,* but they certainly did not taste it *in the heavenly places where Christ sitteth,* but upon earth, and it is this phrase "in the heavenly places" that is unique in the N.T. and kept for the Body of Christ in Ephesians.

As we study Scripture we find that there are at least three future spheres of blessing:

(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 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).

In each sphere God has a company of His children whom He likens to the *firstborn son.* (1) Israel (Exod.4:22). (2) The church of the firstborn (Heb.12:23). (3) The Body linked to the Head Who is the Firstborn of all creation because He created all things (Col.1:15-18).

That the great plan of God revealed in the Scriptures is much wider

than the average conception is only too true. Several years ago J.B.Phillips wrote a book entitled *Your God is too small.* How true this statement is! Some see a small part of God's purpose and imagine it to be the whole. They would put all the redeemed in heaven, or all the redeemed on earth. If one points out that God's purpose is much wider than this, then they retort that such an idea is *divisive.* As though true unity is dependent on all being in one locality! Challenge a truly united family and tell them that they cannot possibly be in close unity with each other unless they are all living in the same house! God has a tremendous plan for both heaven and earth and He finally intends to people both these spheres with His redeemed children.

Now we can expect some to say all this is very fine but what we want is *practical* Christianity. But it must be stressed that until we have received God's doctrine which is His truth, how do we know what to practise? If we are not first of all instructed into the truth of God, we shall only be putting into practice what *we* consider to be right. In other words we shall be making our own standards for ourselves and others, and *these falling far short of God's requirements* will be fruitless and unacceptable to Him. We would agree heartily that all true doctrine should lead to *practice* and that without such practice we shall have failed to carry out the Lord's will and be well-pleasing to Him.

While Paul was the Apostle of grace and stresses free grace more than any other N.T. writer and will not allow works to be mixed with grace *for obtaining salvation* through Christ, yet he insists that such salvation is *unto good works* and these should *result from it:*

> **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: *Not of works,* lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, *created in Christ Jesus unto good works* ..."** (Eph.2:8-10).
>
> ***"Not by works of righteousness which we have done,* but according to His mercy He saved us ... that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these *things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.* These things are good and profitable unto men"** (Titus 3:5-8).

God's salvation is like a fruit tree. The *root* is entirely in what Christ has done. The *fruit* of Christian character and living is the natural consequence that should follow, and if it does not, then one has every right to doubt whether there is a healthy root at all, that is whether the reality is really there. The nine-fold fruit of the Spirit (GaI.5:22,23) must be in evidence in every true Christian life. "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear *much fruit;* so shall ye be My disciples" declared the Saviour (John 15:8), and one should look to this context to find the secret of abundant fruit bearing.

In this way we *"adorn* the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things"

(Titus 2:10). The Greek word for "adorn" means to make beautiful or "attractive". God's doctrine and His truth is of course always beautiful but we can either make it attractive to others in the way we speak and act, or we can do the reverse. Do our lives make Christ attractive to others? Do we reflect Him in the darkness all around us? Can others see anything of Christ in our bearing and behaviour? These are strong challenges to all of us who profess to be true believers and know Christ as Saviour and Lord. We should "shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Phil.2:15,16). But we should also remember that the Saviour warned that light could be obscured by the *bushel* and the *bed* (Mark 4:21), and the bushel (a dry measure) can easily stand for business and the bed for the love of ease. Modern business makes such excessive demands on people today that Christ can be easily driven into the background and we do not say this unfeelingly. Likewise the multitudinous problems which surround us can tempt us to keep silence regarding our Christian belief lest we bring further difficulties our way!

Strictly speaking we are or should be "light-bearers". Light does not originate from us. Christ alone is the light of the world (John 8:12) and all He asks us to do is truly to reflect Him and His Truth. We should realize that this is the only light that can pierce the darkness all around us in a world that is drifting further and further away from God. To sum up this section then, if we profess to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our own personal Saviour (and this is possible for all, as we have seen) then it is our duty and our privilege to live out in practice, in His strength, the life and "worthy walk" that is set forth so clearly in Ephesians chapters 4-6. Here the married life, the family life, the business life and our attitude to the non-believing world around us, is dealt with searchingly and in detail (Eph.5 and 6; Col.4:5).

The end of the present age and the testimony of prophecy.

There is one more important thing for the reader of the Bible to consider and that is, what does God's Word say about the future and where do we stand with regard to this future? This concerns what theologians call *eschatology* or the doctrine of the "last things", and brings us into the realm of Biblical prophecy. This is a great subject and one that is not by any means easy to grasp in all its aspects, and a separate volume would be needed to expand it in detail. However, the Apostle Peter makes an important statement concerning prophecy:

> **"We have also a more sure word of *prophecy;* whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts"** (2 Pet.1:19).

Prophecy has not been given to turn us into second-rate prophets. God's prophetic Word is a searchlight that pierces the darkness

ahead and enables the one who takes heed to it to walk in the light with certainty and without stumbling. Only God knows the future and it is utterly futile to turn to the works of men to get sure and certain direction as to things to come.

Again prophecy has not been written for the curious, for, let us face it, knowledge of future events holds an attraction for all of us.

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This is one of the reasons why much of it is written in symbolic language which is sometimes difficult to understand. Prophecy is guidance for the people of God, not for those who reject Christ and have no time for the things of God. We have the encouragement of the fact that the Holy Spirit can give us understanding on the prophetic portions of His Word as much as any other part of it. "The wise shall understand" (Dan.12:10) and those who are described as wise will be prepared to search the prophetic Scriptures and compare them, and wait upon God for such illumination and understanding as is needed if one is to get a clear picture of what lies ahead.

As this book is first of all a guide for reading the Bible, we would point out that while the *O.T.* prophets deal in some measure with the wind-up of this age, the main prophetic parts of the Bible are the prophecy of Daniel, and in the N.T., the book of Revelation (Among the many books which deal with Daniel and Revelation we can recommend the paperback entitled *Daniel* by Geoffrey R.King and published by Henry E.Walter Ltd., and for the book of Revelation, *This Prophecy* by C.H.Welch published by The Berean Publishing Trust. Some will disagree with certain points of interpretation, but we may say that it would need an angel to write a book on prophecy that would command the assent of all professing Christians!). These should be kept together for one is a commentary on the other.

As we have before indicated, it is not possible to give a detailed exposition of these parts of Scripture. However we will endeavour to give the broad outlines of the future as indicated in the Word of God.

Those who are members of the Church which is Christ's Body have a sure and certain hope which they daily wait for:

> **"For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us ... to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own who are zealous for good deeds"** (Titus 2:11-14 R.S.V.).

There is no prophetic event mentioned in the prison epistles of Paul which must take place before this wonderful hope is realized, so it should be a daily expectation. We cannot date it, but it will surely come to pass when the Lord has saved

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and gathered in the last member and then the complete company will be taken to the glory of heavenly places "far above all", which we have been considering. Those who have died will be raised from the dead with a "body fashioned like the body of His glory" (Phi1.3:20,21)

and the living changed into the same Image.

The way will then be clear for God to take up again His earthly people, the nation of Israel, though His providential care has watched over them even in their "lo-ammi" condition. We have seen that spiritual blindness came upon this nation because of their continued rejection of Christ and the offer of restoration given to them in Acts 3:19-26. But Romans 11 has instructed us that this is for a limited period, for the gifts and calling of God are without change of mind (repentance) on His part (Rom.11:29). It will be ended by the Second Coming of Christ to the earth (to Palestine) and then Israel will "look on Him Whom they have pierced", and be saved and converted at last (Rom.11:25-36; Zech.12:9-14).

What do the Scriptures teach us about the end of this age? They give us a very detailed and graphic description, but we have to face the fact that the end time condition for the world as a whole is as *black as it can be.* Not one passage of Scripture in the O.T. or N.T. describes this time as one of peace, blessing or stability, rather the reverse. The reader should carefully peruse Matthew 24 here, for in this chapter the Lord Jesus almost stunned the disciples by telling them that the magnificent Temple at Jerusalem would be razed to the ground, and this took place at the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. The amazed disciples asked Him when this would take place. They linked it with His Second Coming and further enquired what would be the sign of His Second Coming and the *end of the age.*

Here our A.V. is misleading, for it translates their question as asking concerning the *end of the world.* The cessation of the present earth was not in their minds. Far better here is the N.E.B. or R.S.V. which reads:

> **"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of -the *close of the age?"*** (Matt.24:3 R.S.V.).

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So many people today, if they ever think about these things at all, put the Second Coming of Christ at the last day, the end of time - possibly thousands of years ahead. Many creeds do this too, in which case this great event has no practical bearing on our present lives or the situation in which we find ourselves. Just the reverse is true as the N.T. makes clear. Note that the Lord Jesus answers the disciples three-fold question *in reverse order.* He deals with the end of the age in verses 4-24; the sign of His Coming in verses 25-31 and answers the query when? in verses 32-42.

One thing must not be missed - the Lord's stress on *deception* in verses 4,5,11, and 24. Many are going to be deceived He forewarns, and to deceive a large number of people the lie must look very much like the truth or it will have little effect. This can hardly be over-stressed. The great deceiver himself, Satan, will spread his lie all over the world through his dupes. The Apostle Paul emphasizes this

in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10, and John in Revelation 13:11-14. The whole of 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2 should be carefully pondered, for these passages deal with the end time and the Lord's Coming.

The characteristics of the world as a whole are startlingly portrayed by Paul in his last epistle:

"Men will love nothing but money and self; they will be arrogant, boastful, and abusive; with no respect for parents, no gratitude, no piety, no natural affection; they will be implacable in their hatreds, scandalmongers, intemperate and fierce, strangers to all goodness, traitors, adventurers, swollen with self-importance. They will be men who put pleasure in the place of God, men who preserve the outward form of religion, but are a standing denial of its reality. Keep clear of men like these" (2Tim.3:2-5 N.E.B.).

Not a very nice picture is it? But absolutely true of the world we are living in today. "They will love nothing but money and self'. Man, ever prone to idolatry when he turns away from God, avidly worships the great god Materialism and this is what we are seeing all around us. The value of life seems to be couched in nothing more than money and material possessions. But this never satisfies, for this god binds its devotees in a greater bondage from month to month and year to year and so they struggle violently to get more and more. At the same time, true contentment, like the will 0' the wisp, eludes them.

"Lawlessness will abound" said the Lord Jesus (Matt.24:12) and He likened these days to the times of Noah (verse 37). Genesis 6 should be consulted here. In verse 13 God declares that the earth was *full of violence* and that the end of mankind had come. How relevant this is to the times in which we live! There is less and less respect for law and order, and violence is increasing on an alarming scale the world over. Men are *refusing to be controlled,* and this can only finally lead to anarchy and self-destruction, for self-control has largely vanished.

The Lord further added that the end time would be a climax time of trouble "such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt.24:21), and He goes on to assert that unless this time is shortened it would end in the complete destruction of mankind (verse 22). Bear in mind these words were uttered by One Who said:

"I am the way, THE TRUTH, and the life" (John 14:6),

so this cannot be exaggeration, but a sober and terrible picture of the nightmare towards which the world is rapidly drifting through its rejection of God and His standards. Whatever anyone wants to do is now considered right no matter how low and despicable it is.

It used to be taught that Christ would not return to the earth until the gospel had been preached all over the world and had been accepted by all. In other words Christ could not and would not return till mankind was ready to receive Him. *But just the opposite is true.* It is at the climax of the world's sin and the terrible dangers that it produces, that Christ will appear personally in power and great glory

as He promised (Matt.24:30), to cut it all short. Whereupon He takes control of world affairs and brings in His Kingdom of righteousness so that all will have to conform to Him and His will.

First of all He will have to rule with a rod of iron until the nations learn what God's truth really is and start to put it into practice. The Lord will then have dominion from "sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (Psa.72:8; Zech.14:9), for the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever (Rev.11:15).

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Then, at last, armaments and all weapons of destruction will be abolished and nations will not learn war any more (Micah 4:3). This will last for 1,000 years (Rev.20:4), hence the term 'Millennium' which means a thousand. Think of the tremendous financial burden that will then be removed with no more money needed for armaments! It will be a blessed time of peace and security when Satan and sin will be restrained (Rev.20: 1-3) so that he cannot deceive the nations, and it will be characterized by increased fruitfulness of the earth (Isa.30:23) and lengthened life (Isa.65:20). After the 1,000 years are finished, the ages complete their course and God creates a new earth and heaven which are as perfect and spotless as the first creation before sin entered, and these spheres are then peopled with His redeemed children. Thus the goal of the ages is at last reached and this is as far as divine revelation takes us.

But coming back to the condition of the end time of this age we should realize that there is no human solution to the terrible mess that man has made for himself. He will have his conferences and make his pacts and treaties, but all will finally break down into absolute chaos, darkness and hopelessness.

The centre of excessively troubled times at the end of the age is the nation of Israel and the controversy and feud between Jew and Arab concerning the land of Palestine. The Middle East problem will doubtless persist from now onwards and there will be no lasting peace in that region until Christ returns, Who alone can deal with it satisfactorily, and righteously, and this will be along the lines of His earthly purpose that we have been considering.

A bare outline of the prophetic events to come is as follows, though, as we stated earlier on, we cannot expound the Scriptural passages dealing with these events as this would demand another volume. There will be a federation of ten kingdoms at the end (symbolized by the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 2). Whether the Common Market will develop into this or whether it is a confederation of nations surrounding Palestine it is not yet clear.

Certain it is that the land of Israel is the geographical centre of all these prophecies and the points of the compass

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referred to have relation to Palestine and nowhere else.

The next development is the arrival on the scene of a being that Daniel describes as a "little horn" (Dan.7:8,24,25), that is to say he is insignificant and unknown at first, but rapidly comes to the fore and subdues three of the ten powers and then takes control. He then becomes the great world dictator of the end time and will be the greatest tyrant the world has ever seen. Much is said in prophecy about him, but the tremendous power that he wields is satanic for Satan gives him "his power and his throne and great authority" (Rev.13:2). He is, as it were, Satan's trump card, his final fling and attempt to defeat God and get complete control and the worship of all mankind, and he nearly succeeds! (Read Rev.13:3,4,8).

Never forget that, as we have before stressed, Satan is a *religious being* and wants nothing less than the place of God and the worship of creation. It was this that caused his fall and this has been the centre of the spiritual warfare that has been going on ever since. He offered the kingdoms of the world to the Lord Jesus on one condition - that He would fall down and worship him! (Matt.4:8-10). What Christ would not give him, he finally gets in a large measure through his man, the great dictator of the end of this age.

This tyrant finally gets world dominion, so much so that he can control the air as well as the earth for Satan, the *prince of the power of the air* (Eph.2:2) has given him this ability. Consequently everyone says that at last peace has come, for "who can make war with him?" (Rev.13:4). But this will be short lived for I Thessalonians 5: 2,3 tells us that when they shall say, "peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them" and this is nothing less than the glorious appearing of Christ in His triumphant journey back to the earth which will be sudden, like lightning and without warning (Matt.24:27-30; 2 Thess.1:7-10), a tremendous shock to godless mankind.

The world dictator, whom the Bible symbolically likens to a wild beast, will finally have such control over mankind that his will becomes paramount and all who refuse to obey it will be murdered or starved to death (Rev.13:11-18). Who can doubt that the present state of the business world and the and the world as a whole,

with its mergers and concentration of power into fewer and fewer hands, and the spread of communism and totalitarianism is setting the stage for this greatest of all take-overs?

The book of Daniel, chapter nine, gives the revelation of a period of time, consequent upon Daniel's prayer, of 70 sevens of years relating to Israel and Jerusalem, dating from the "going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem" (after the judgment of the 70 years captivity in Babylon) to the putting away of Israel's sins and the setting up of the earthly kingdom.

It is obvious that the present age of grace is excluded for Israel are

in unbelief and spiritual blindness all this time "not My people" as God describes their condition. The interest is focused on the last week (Note that the Jew can as easily talk about a week of years as a week of days.) of seven years which is as yet unfulfilled and will be the final years of this age.

This seven year period is divided into half by such cryptic statements as "a time, times, and a half' (Dan.12:7; Rev.12:14); "A time and times and the dividing of time" (Dan.7:25); "1260 days" (Rev.12:6); "42 months" (Rev.11:2, using the Jewish reckoning of 30 days to a month). All these expressions mean a period of 31/2 years. Daniel reveals the fact that one of the first things the great tyrant will do is to make a pact with the Jews. This act will be the beginning of this last period of seven years. Half-way through it (after 31/2 years) he breaks this covenant (Dan.9:27) and causes an image of himself to be set up for veneration. This is what the Lord Jesus referred to in Matthew 24 when He spoke of "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place" (of the restored temple) (Matt.24:15-22). This is the signal for the beginning of "the great tribulation", that unparalleled time of world terror and calamity which the Lord declared was unique in history. Nothing has ever been like it before, nor will it ever be repeated (Matt.24:21,22), and if God did not step in and shorten the time it would lead to universal annihilation. Those who see this are warned to escape to the mountains as speedily as possible, not even stopping to take their possessions.

Daniel likewise describes this terrible time:

> **"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince (the archangel) which standeth for the children of thy people** (Israel): **and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people** (Israel) **shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book"** (Dan.12:1).

Israel and the Middle East is the centre of it all. It is preeminently a "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer.30:7), although the whole world is involved and a last desperate effort is made by the nations combining together to rid themselves once for all of the Jewish problem by seeking to exterminate Israel for ever. The prophetic Scriptures reveal that this takes place at "Armageddon" or "Harmagedon" (the hill of Megiddo). Megiddo is situated in Palestine. It was important in the O.T. and is found in the Carmel range some 20 miles S.S.E. of the modem port of Haifa (Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29; 2 Chron.35:22-25; Zech.12:11). It is here that the last and most terrible world battle will be fought (see Rev.16:13-16; 19:11-21; Zech.12:1-9; 14:1-7,12-16). But this time God takes a hand in it, for the Lord Jesus comes back to save His earthly people from destruction and to take vengeance on their enemies. Jerusalem will again be destroyed. This will be the 28th siege of this city! History already records 27 other occasions. Two thirds of Israel will be

massacred, a third part being preserved by God (Zech.13:8,9) and the slaughter of the nations will be terrible indeed (see Zech.14:12), and note the expression in verse 16 "everyone *that is left* of all the nations which came against Jerusalem". The passages previously quoted in the book of Revelation - specially chapter 19, also graphically describe this fearful slaughter. The problem of world population will be solved in a very different way than men think.

As we have before indicated, these awful happenings, like some hideous nightmare (but alas it will be true), will be ended by nothing less than the personal return of Christ Himself Who will save His people Israel from destruction and destroy the Gentile armies which have invaded Palestine with the express intention of annihilating the Jew.

Then this age comes to its close. A terrible drama indeed

and some will doubtless shake their heads and say "impossible". But truth is sometimes stranger than fiction and it certainly is so here. This is what God's searchlight, the Word of prophecy, reveals about the future, so that His people may be forewarned and not walk in darkness and uncertainty or be misled into following and worshipping the final great world dictator. Those who remain faithful will do so at tremendous cost - even to giving their own lives. No wonder the Lord gives the message in Revelation 2:10 - "be thou faithful *unto death,* and I will give thee *a crown* of life".

What an end to human civilisation and man's so-called progress! We are supposed to be evolving to better things and many still think that man can not only work out his own salvation, but the salvation of the world and bring in the Utopia for which men have always longed. This is sheer deception and the Word of God faithfully shows what finally happens when men reject God, His Truth and His standards.

To this fearful goal the world is hastening and we need to take the blinkers off our eyes and realize how quickly things are moving downwards on a world scale. The signs all around us; the insoluble Middle East problem with Israel and the Arabs; the world monetary problems; the growing might of the Communist countries; the utter inability of democracy to meet these conditions; the terrible slide in moral values and human conduct, the materialism and greed, selfishness and lack of self-control; the vandalism and personal danger on every hand (and all these things are world-wide), clearly show us that we are going rapidly towards the unparalleled time of danger and difficulty that the Lord Jesus described.

What should be the attitude of the believer? This should be very clear. It is to let the light of God's truth shine through us in thought, word and action, and to give a faithful testimony to a pagan world which, for the most part, has rejected God and His standards. We have the privilege of walking in the light of God's Word of Truth. All else is in blackness and uncertainty and there is no middle course,

nor can there be any "sitting on the fence" if we want to be practical Christians, bringing honour to the Lord and being owned and blessed by Him.

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We have endeavoured in this book then to guide the beginner in the approach to and reading of the Holy Scriptures "which are able to make us wise unto salvation *through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2Tim.3:15-17), and this is where we must all start, coming to a personal knowledge of Him as our own Saviour and Lord as we completely trust Him for time and for eternity. Millions yet have not realized all that He has accomplished on the cross and in resurrection. What should we think of someone who had given their life to rescue another person from danger, and that person had not even bothered to say 'thank you' or to feel a spark of gratitude? Before we condemn such conduct as base thoughtlessness and ingratitude let us be sure that we have not been guilty of this very thing ourselves.

Christ has "once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust that He might bring us to God" (1Pet.3:18). "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree ..." (1Pet.2:24). "In due time, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom.5:6, and whether we like it or not, this is a true description of all of us).

But have we ever thanked Him for this from the heart? If not, let not this day pass before we do this in reality and come to a personal knowledge of salvation and forgiveness of our sins for:

> ***"Now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation"** (2Cor.6:2),

and this day of opportunity should be grasped without delay, for it has an end and that end may be nearer than people think.

For the believer in Christ we have pointed to the fact that for him the climax of truth is found in Paul's prison epistles. Untold wonders await the child of God who will humbly ask the Lord for the "spirit of revelation" (Eph.l:17,18) and who will diligently search these epistles and *fully believe what is written.* Israel of old missed God's best through *unbelief.* "They could not enter in (the promised land) because of *unbelief"* (Heb.3:19), and it will be this parent sin which will rob the believer of God's best in the present age of grace. God is waiting to reveal "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph.3:8).

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Are we ready to receive them? One is amazed that so many Christians are content with so little truth, when there is vast spiritual wealth awaiting the appropriation of faith!

The last thought we want to leave with the reader is that *He Who is God manifest in human form, is the key to all our problems, personal, national, and world-wide.* No wonder, with the burdens of the world in mind, almost the last words recorded in the Scriptures of truth are:

"Surely I come quickly. Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev.22:20).

Let us therefore live:

"... Awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a people of His own, who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:11.15 R.S.V.).

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