THE SIGNPOST
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THE
SIGN POST

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The Sign Post

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INTRODUCTION

The Chapel of the Opened Book, 52a Wilson Street, London, EC2A 2ER is the centre of the Berean Forward Movement, which exists to encourage deeper study of the Scriptures and whose object is to emulate the Bereans, mentioned in Acts 17:10,11, who searched the Scriptures daily to see 'whether those things were so'.

The Movement has four basic tenets:

1. The full inspiration of the Scriptures;
2. The right division of the Scriptures;
3. The deity of the Lord Jesus Christ;
4. The all sufficiency of His one Sacrifice for sins.

The Chapel is quite independent and all persons are welcomed, whatever their beliefs, for all those who are believers in Christ, are united in Him and all build on the one Foundation, 'for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 3:11).

Bible expositions are held regularly at the Chapel of the Opened Book and also at many centres throughout the United Kingdom. A vast library of tape recorded addresses are available, for sale or loan, from the Tape Recording Service of the B.F.M.; whilst the Berean Publishing Trust provides a wide range of literature. All enquiries will be welcomed and should be addressed to the Chapel.

PREFACE

This edition of ‘Signpost’ has a new cover, and the layout is devised to present Bible studies in a clear and understandable manner. It is not a detailed exposition; it is a ‘Signpost’ to point the way to a better understanding of the Bible. A full study is left to the reader but a selection of further works on these, and related subjects, is given at the foot of this page.

The first article was written by Mr. G.T. Foster, former Honorary Treasurer of the B.F.M.; the second and third articles by Mr. S. Allen, Principal of the Chapel of the Opened Book; and the last article by Charles H. Welch.

Throughout this booklet references are given as follows:

2 Cor. 10:4,5	the second book of Corinthians, chapter 10, verses 4 and 5.
Matt. 12:7-11	Matthew chapter 12, verses 7 to 11 inclusive.

It is hoped that readers of this booklet will enjoy it and, through it, gain a better knowledge of our Lord and His Word.

On Reading The Bible	S. Allen
The Unfolding Purpose of God	S. Allen
Fundamentals and the Mystery	C.H. Welch
John and the Mystery	C.H. Welch
That Blessed Hope	C.H. Welch

IN THE BEGINNING

The Former World

'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep'.

According to some authorities Genesis 1:2 may be translated 'And the earth became without form and void'. The heaven and earth as created by God was perfect, but the Scriptures lead us to conclude that judgment on that first creation resulted in its destruction, possibly connected with the fall of Satan. Isaiah 45:18 reads:

> 'For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not in vain'.

The Hebrew word *tohu* is translated in Genesis 1 'without form', and in Isaiah 45 ' in vain'. Thus, the Holy Spirit is saying that God did not create the earth in the form described in Genesis 1:2. It is significant that the words 'without form and void' occur again in Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23, and both contexts deal with DIVINE JUDGMENT.

Reference to 2 Peter 3:6 shows that '... the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished'. The fossils and remains that are the subject of scientific study evidently belong to this first creation. The heavens and earth which are now, by the same word of God (which Word created the first world) are reserved unto fire in the day of judgment that is yet to come. This is a reference to the prophetic period called the Day of the Lord that shall come as a thief in the night. But there is still the promise that there shall be 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' (2 Pet. 3:13).

The following outline is a summary of the information given in 2 Peter 3.

WORLD THAT THEN WAS (Gen. 1:1,2)

PERISHED Water

HEAVENS AND EARTH - NOW (Gen. 1:3-31)

PASS AWAY Fire

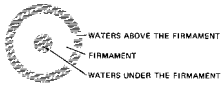
NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH (Rev. 21:1)

(N.B. In Rev. 21:1 'first' may be rendered 'former' as in Rev. 21:4, the *former* heaven and earth were passed away).

The Creation Remade

As we read on in Genesis chapter 1, we find that the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the deep and God said 'Let there be light: (lit. Light be) and there was light' (lit. Light was). In verse 4 God divided the light from darkness and the light was called Day and the darkness Night. The next stage as described in verse 6 is very interesting. 'Let there be a firmament (or expansion) in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters'.

The diagram that follows indicates the waters which are above the firmament and the waters that are under it.



The Firmament was called heaven and the waters under the firmament are next referred to as the waters under heaven. These are gathered into one place and the dry land appears. Earth and Seas are given their names and God

saw that it was good. It is not proposed to study each detail of the creation of this heaven and earth but it may be of interest to set out an outline of the six days creation.

FIRST DAY	Light and Darkness	Day and Night
SECOND DAY	Waters divided	
THIRD DAY	Dry land appears	Earth
FOURTH DAY	Lights Sun and Moon	Day and Night
FIFTH DAY	Life in the waters	
SIXTH DAY	Life in the earth	
SEVENTH DAY	Rest	

The Heavens Distinguished

As we look up, it may not have occurred to the reader that above the heavens, which contain the sun, moon and stars, there is a layer which has the density of water, and beyond that expanse a heaven separated from the heavens which we can see. This is confirmed by other Scriptures. For example, in Psalm 148:4 we read:

'Praise Him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens'.

Nehemiah 9:6 refers to heaven and the heaven of heavens.

'Thou, even Thou, art LORD alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein'.

Again in Deuteronomy 10:14:

'Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is'.

The temporary nature of this creation is implied by such an expression as 'It is He ... that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain' (Isa. 40:22), and in Jeremiah 10:20 the same expression is used 'to stretch forth My tent'. We are living in a creation which, in the sight of God, is a temporary structure where He is working out His plan of redemption.

The Three Spheres

So far then, we can conclude that, as we understand this creation (and so far as we are concerned it is enough if we follow the revelation of the Holy Spirit in this matter) there are three spheres. These are:

1. THE EARTH.
2. THE HEAVENS. (The Firmament)
3. THE HEAVEN OF HEAVENS.

In our searching of the Scriptures, we find that as God's plans reach fruition, there will be blessing in each of these three spheres. Our own personal hope as believers can be related to one of these in particular by the redemption effected by the Lord Jesus Christ and His revealed purpose.

1. THE EARTH

Israel, for example, has an earthly hope; Israel has been promised an inheritance that still remains to be realised. A covenant was made with Abraham, was confirmed to Isaac and Jacob (Israel), and this awaits fulfilment. In Genesis 12:1-3 the promise was given: '... I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; ... and in thee shall ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH be blessed'. Peter reminded the men of ISRAEL of this promise as recorded in Acts 3:25. They however, did not as a nation accept their Messiah, and consequently could not enter into the promise at that time.

In the future, the promise will be fulfilled at the Second Advent of Christ, and the time may not be long before Israel, in their extremity of need, turn to their God and repent. The prayer usually called the Lord's prayer, includes the request of blessing on the earth. 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven'.

Much could be written on this subject, including the return of our Lord as promised in Acts 1:11 and described in Zechariah 14:4. The time is coming when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters (living) cover the (dead) sea. What a glorious prospect for this stricken world! The Lord Who was once rejected, will come again in power to take His place, not only as King of the Jews, but as King of kings and Lord of lords. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, we find that those addressed were expecting to meet the Lord in the *air*; these will return to the earth and realise their hope with Him there.

2. THE HEAVENS

We must leave the hope connected with the earth and think for a few moments of the Heavens. Is there a sphere of blessing connected with the Heavens, and is there a company whose faith is linked with this sphere? We read of those who are blessed with Abraham. Does this mean that their expectation is an earthly one, and connected with Genesis chapter 12? It is true that Abraham was promised an earthly blessing, but Hebrews chapter 11 shows that Abraham lived a life of faith and to him it was revealed that there was a *better* country. He looked for a city and it is clear that this was a *heavenly* city, not an earthly one.

Those who are blessed with Abraham are those who by faith look and live in view of attaining to this higher sphere of blessing. Revelation chapter 21 describes this heavenly city, the New Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven. The number twelve is associated with it and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on the gates. Here is a *heavenly* city, linked with the faithful overcomers largely from Israel, but quite different from the earthly hope.

3. THE HEAVEN OF HEAVENS

Briefly, then, we find that there is an earthly hope and also a higher blessing in the Heavens; some people will be blessed under the rule of the Lord of lords on the earth, while some are looking for a better country connected with the New Jerusalem which finally descends to the New Earth. If this is so, we may well ask if there is also a hope related to the third sphere, the Heaven of Heavens. It would be strange if the first two spheres are to be blessed without the third sphere being the object of blessing too.

To write fully on this subject would need more than the space available, but we have a hint in the Greek words which are translated heaven, or heavenly places. The Greek word for heaven is *ouranos* and heavenly is *ouranios*. Another word is found in the Greek but is not easily translated - *epouranios*. The addition of *ep* gives us a connection with our third sphere. In the first prayer of Ephesians 1:17-23 Christ is described as the Head over all things to the Church, which is His Body. In the next chapter, in Ephesians 2:5, 6, we read of those who are:

quickened with Christ

raised up together with Christ

and who sit together in (super) heavenly places in Christ.

To be seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father is a hope that transcends anything that we have ever imagined, but we bow before Him and give thanks.

Will you now refer to the third chapter of Colossians. In verses 1-4, we are enjoined to seek those things which are above, WHERE CHRIST SITTETH on the right hand of God. When Christ, Who is our life, shall be made manifest, then shall we also be made manifest WITH HIM IN GLORY.

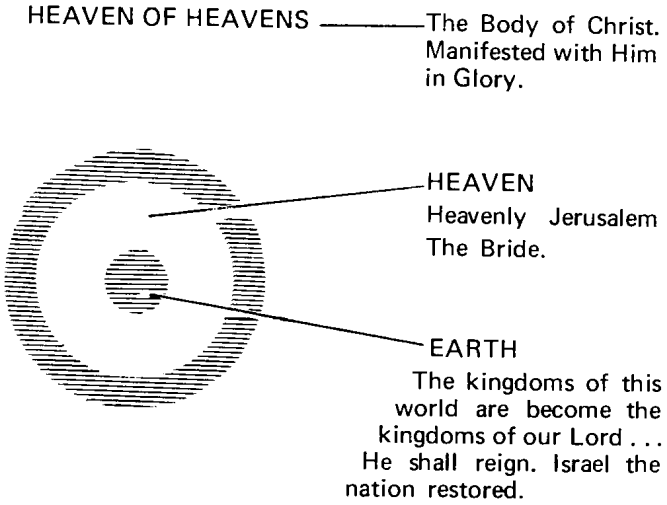
Surely, here is a blessing in the sphere which corresponds to the Heaven of Heavens, where the Ascended Christ is enthroned. If we have eyes to see, ears to hear and hearts prepared to receive the good news, here is a message that will gladden and thrill our hearts. It is clear that this hope concerns the members of the Church which is the Body of Christ and we need to distinguish between things that differ.

Is this church different from the Bride of Christ?

We have seen that connected with the heaven - the second sphere - there is the heavenly Jerusalem and the believers associated with it are described as the Bride. We suggest that the Bride must not be confused with the Bridegroom! Christ is the Head, and the Church which is His Body completes the Bridegroom. This company is associated with the Heaven of Heavens.

The Three Spheres of Blessing

To return to our diagram, we draw it again and suggest that with the three spheres, there will be companies of believers in Christ each in their appointed place and linked with Him, but in different ways according to the position accorded to them by His will. Christ is the Centre and in Him we shall all rejoice.



Conclusion

In these few pages, a great deal has been covered in outline only, and it is hoped that the suggestions made will provide food for thought, prayer and searching of the Scriptures. The Scriptures have been given to us, and we believe that they are inspired by the Holy Spirit. As a consequence the account of the creation is true, and the object of this booklet is to lead on to a consideration of the hope that awaits the members of the Body of Christ.

If the reader wishes to study further the hope which concerns us as Gentiles, it is suggested that the Prison Epistles of the apostle Paul, who is the Apostle of the Gentiles, will provide the avenue of investigation.

It is the earnest desire of the writer that those who may read these pages may appreciate the hope that is still being made known in these last days. This present dispensation is fast drawing to a close and the return of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may not be far distant.

* * * * *

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God'. (Col. 3:1)

THAT GOOD LAND

In the first article 'In the Beginning', we established from the Scriptures that there are three different spheres of blessing for the redeemed according to the purpose of the ages centred in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are:

(1) The Earth

(2) The Heavens and the Heavenly Jerusalem

(3) The Heaven of Heavens, the right hand of God where Christ is enthroned.

The Creation Spoiled

Let us concentrate on what the Word of God reveals concerning the first sphere, namely the *earth.*

The very fact of creation implies a purpose, for it is unthinkable that God would create as a mere whim. A part of this purpose 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 the greatest of His creation - man. Psalm 8:4-8 takes the revelation further:

'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*'.

Here is the extent of the rule that the Lord God willed Adam and his posterity to enjoy, but one surely does not need to stress the fact that something has come into human experience to spoil the Divine plan. This dominion is not true now, for sin has entered and passed to all men, 'for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23). Not only this, but creation itself has also become involved.

'The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now' (Rom. 8:21,22).

The thorns and thistles of Genesis 3:18 and the conflict we see around us in nature are only an external evidence of this fact. Consequently the original purpose in the creation of the heaven and earth has been held up as it were by sin and death, and God is now concentrating on the removal of these enemies of this great plan and purpose. Hence the revelation in the Scriptures of the wondrous work of redemption centred in the Lord Jesus Christ, for He came to put away sin righteously by the sacrifice of Himself on Calvary's Cross and to abolish death for ever. It is here that we find the great basis upon which sinners can be redeemed and the very creation itself restored to its original perfection and beauty.

World Blessing Through Israel

But God is pleased to use human agents to carry out His will and as regards the earth, we have the first unfolding in Genesis 12:1-3 in the call of Abraham. In these verses is revealed seven 'I wills' of Jehovah, ending with 'and in thee (Abraham) shall *all* families of the earth be blessed'. In order that this shall be true Abraham must have a *seed* and Genesis 15:5 states:

'And He (Jehovah) brought him (Abraham) forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, *So* shall thy seed be'.

Now the seed must have a home or land in which to dwell, so later on in the same chapter God says (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'.

The reader should notice that the Divine promise concerning the seed and the land is not conditional in any way, the word 'if' is nowhere used. In fact, so that Abraham should not have part or lot personally in this phase of the plan, he is put to sleep (verse 12). Human failure may postpone the earthly purpose of God, but it cannot frustrate it, for God has not made it conditional upon human responsibility in its final working out.

The Promised Land

Now there is a system of Scriptural interpretation which denies that the Jewish race - Abraham's seed - are to be used as a means of blessing to the whole world. According to this idea the Jews have been tested and failed, with the consequence that God is now going to carry out this purpose through the *Church*. Others say that Christ is the seed of Abraham, and these promises have been fulfilled in and through Him personally. In either case we may ask where does the gift of the land come in? Is the church to inherit the promised land of Genesis 15?

The geographical boundaries are stated in Genesis 15:18 as being 'from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates'. This forbids spiritualising, a literal piece of land is obviously referred to and if the land is literal, the seed of Abraham must be literal too, for the Scriptures *always connect the two together*. Let us see this. In Genesis 26:3,4 God repeats to Isaac the promise made to Abraham .

> '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*'.

And later it is repeated to Jacob.

> '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).

We may be quite sure then that in the book of Genesis we have the purpose of God revealed, which is nothing less than to bless the whole world through the Jewish nation and these are given the promised land as a free gift from Him. It is described again and again as a 'good land', a land 'flowing with milk and honey', which is as we should expect if God is the Giver.

The Messiah - Rejected

The Old Testament is the record of the Lord's patience and longsuffering in preparing Israel for the role they were to play in being His agents for world blessing. Then in the fulness of time, God sent the One Who was to be their Saviour and King, and without Him this plan would have been impossible of fulfilment. The question of the wise men was 'Where is He that is born King of the Jews?' (Matt. 2:2), and of Bethlehem it was prophesied '... out of thee shall come a Governor, *that shall rule My people Israel*' (Matt. 2:6). The angel had told Mary:

> '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).

He came therefore to Israel, and as far as His earthly ministry was concerned, He limited Himself to that nation for He Himself said '*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*' (Matt. 15:24), and Paul in Romans 9:3-5 states 'My kinsmen according to the flesh (Israel) ... of whom *as concerning the flesh Christ came ...*'. Not only did He restrict His ministry to that favoured people, but He limited the twelve disciples likewise, 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles ... But go rather to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel*' (Matt. 10:5,6).

To Israel He came as Prophet (Matt. 12:41), Priest (Matt. 12:6) and King (Matt. 12:42), but they, although intended to be the channel for world blessing, were choked with unbelief and rejected Him in these three Divine capacities. When He rode into Jerusalem on the colt, Zechariah 9:9 was fulfilled, 'Behold, *thy King* cometh unto thee' (Matt. 21:5), but the reply of the nation was 'We will not have this man to reign over us' (Luke 19:14). They crucified their Saviour and King, and the title that was put over the cross, although done in mockery, was nevertheless true:

> 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews' (Matt. 27:37).

Another Opportunity

Was this then the end of God's plan to bless the whole world through the Jewish race, as had been promised to Abraham? The answer is no, for the Acts of the Apostles is a record of the Lord's further patience and longsuffering to this people. Through Peter's lips in Acts 3:19-26 comes the call to the unbelieving nation to repent and then 'He shall send Jesus Christ, which was *appointed for you*' (v. 20 R.V.), followed by the times of *restoration* of all things spoken by the Old Testament prophets which is nothing less than the earthly kingdom restored and set up. Peter likewise tells them that Christ had been raised and exalted in order *to give repentance to Israel* (Acts 5:30,31), but in murdering Stephen and imprisoning the Apostles, Israel showed that their hearts were still as hard as ever. The Divine attitude of mercy and their rebellious response is seen in Romans 10:21 'All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people'.

Now the purpose widens and the Gentile is brought in, but we remember that this is no new thing in God's plan, for all along He intended to bless all families of the earth through Abraham's seed, and Paul, in Galatians 3, when he includes the Gentiles among those who are 'of faith' (verse 7) refers directly to Genesis 12:3; in the eighth verse:

> 'And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the *Gentiles* through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed' (Gal. 3:8).

Compare verses 13 and 14 of this chapter also.

So the churches formed during the Acts period of believers in the Lord Jesus were like a tiny picture and a foreshadowing of this great world wide purpose. They were thus likened to a 'firstfruits' (James 1:18), a pledge of the kingdom harvest to be. Not only this, but the epistle to the Romans gives another Divine reason for the broadening of this purpose, reaching out to the Gentiles during this time. They were to be a means of 'provoking Israel to jealousy' (Rom. 10:19-21). Gentile salvation was to be a means, humanly speaking, of stimulating the nation hardened as they were in unbelief. When they saw those whom they classed as 'dogs' sharing their salvation and privileges, it might have had the effect of stirring them up spiritually.

As the record of the Acts progresses, it is evident that such an effect did not come to pass. In spite of the ministry of Peter and the Twelve and of Paul, who had confined his testimony to the Old Testament up to this point (Acts 26:22,23), Israel the nation was fast sinking into spiritual blindness and darkness. However, they had not yet been laid aside by God for in Acts 26:6,7 Paul states the hope of the *twelve tribes* was still possible and as late as Acts 28:20 he describes himself as being 'bound for the *hope of Israel*'. In Romans 11:1,2 he definitely states 'God hath *not* cast away His people which He foreknew'.

Again Rejected

At the end of Acts 28, a climax is reached when the terrible words of judgment contained in Isaiah 6:9,10 are quoted of Israel for the third and last time, giving them blinded eyes, dulled ears and a non-understanding heart (Acts 28:25-28) a condition which has characterised them all down this present age and one which is the very opposite of the New Covenant of Grace made with them as a nation, for, under its ministration, God writes His law in their hearts (Jer. 31:31-37).

The salvation of God is now sent to the Gentiles quite independently of Israel (Acts 28:28) and within a few years Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed by the Romans, and Israel as a *nation* ceased to exist as such until a few years ago.

Can God Break His Promise?

According to some systems of theology, the failure of the Jewish nation means that they are for ever finished in God's plan and purpose. But, if this is so, God has broken His unconditional promise concerning the *seed* and the *land* that was given as a free gift to them, and if God can break a promise to His earthly people, the whole of Christian assurance is undermined. We do not believe that such a thing is possible. What saith the Scriptures? During the Acts Israel was likened to an olive tree, some of the branches of which were broken off because of their unbelief. But the One Who broke them off can graft them in again (Rom. 11:23), and, at the Second Coming of the Deliverer out of Zion, ungodliness shall be turned away from Jacob and so *all Israel shall be saved*, 'for this is My

Covenant *unto them*' says God (in the New Covenant), and we are assured that 'His gifts and calling are without repentance (change of mind)' on His part (Rom. 11:25-29). This is also the burden of the Old Testament prophets, for while they portray Israel's punishment for their unbelief, they also insist on the nation's *restoration* (Ezek. 37:12-14,21,22; Deut. 30:1-6).

The New Covenant is a *national* one and is made with Israel and Judah (Jer. 31:31) and at the end of it Jehovah describes the ordinances of the sun and moon, day and night, and says 'If those ordinances depart from before Me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a *nation* before Me for ever' (Jer. 31:36). Could language be more definite or explicit?

Prophecy is Coming True Today

The amazing thing is that we are privileged to live in a day when God's word is beginning to be fulfilled concerning the restoration of Israel's nationality. For nearly 2000 years the seed of Abraham has wandered over the earth in judgment with no settled home of their own (Deut. 28:64,65). They have been without a king, a prince and a sacrifice as Hosea 3:4 foretells. At last, however, a representative number of them are back in the promised land and *they are a nation once more*. True, they are in unbelief, but the fig tree is indeed beginning to bud and put forth the leaves of national life. We do not know what those who deny the future of literal Israel make of this undoubted fact from a scriptural point of view, but it must be recognised as such. The Lord Jesus Christ forewarned that this pointed to the imminence of His Second Coming to the earth (Matt. 24:32 and 33 marg.), thus ending the present times of the Gentiles.

Let those who are not ready in heart and mind for this tremendous event think well and realise that the only way to be prepared is to put their trust in the Lord Jesus and receive Him as their personal Saviour now while the opportunity lasts, thus being secure for eternity, for 'He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God BY HIM' (Heb. 7:25).

The Earthly Hope

As we search the Word of God, we are unable to find any other plan on His part for the blessing of the world and the establishment of His kingdom upon earth except through the Jewish race, and there will be no settled peace for the world until the Prince of peace returns and Israel, the medium for world blessing is back in their land, restored and converted. They will then have their real Day of Atonement when they shall look upon Him Whom they pierced and shall mourn (Zech. 12:9-14), and at last believe on Him as their Messiah, Saviour and King. They will then be a nation born again spiritually and at last a ready, willing and cleansed channel to take the good news of salvation and the kingdom to all Gentile nations and so the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 12 shall be literally fulfilled and the knowledge of the Lord shall finally cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). The Lord Jesus Christ 'shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth' (Psa. 72:8) for the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

Then, at last, armaments and all weapons of destruction shall be abolished and nations shall not learn war any more (Micah 4:3). This will last for 1000 years (Rev. 20:4), hence the term 'millennium' which means a thousand. It will be a blessed time of peace and security when Satan and sin will be restrained, and will be characterised by increased fruitfulness of the earth (Isa. 30:23) and lengthened life (Isa. 65:20). Then, at last the kingdom prayer, taught by the Lord, shall begin to come to fulfilment, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in *earth*, as it is in heaven' (Matt. 6:10).

After the 1000 years are finished, the ages complete their course and God creates a new earth wherein saved nations walk in the light of the Heavenly Jerusalem which comes down from heaven to the new earth (Rev. 21:1-3; 22-26).

Conclusion

Thus, in considering the first sphere of blessing for the redeemed, we see that, omitting the parenthesis of the present age in which we live, while Israel is in unbelief and unusable by God, we have a consistent line of teaching

from Genesis 12 to Revelation 21 concerning the earth as a Divine home for some of the redeemed. If God had revealed nothing else in His Word, this would be wonderful indeed for us to look forward to in faith, and infinitely better than we deserve. There are some, however, whose conception of future blessing rises no higher than the earth, yet the Scriptures reveal - a *better* country, that is an heavenly (Heb. 11:16) and also the heaven of heavens at the right hand of God (Eph. 2:6). Here we have something infinitely more wonderful than an earthly kingdom, with riches of grace and glory beyond our dreams. Can our faith rise to this? It is a challenge indeed, and will be our consideration in the next article.

May what is written be a stimulus to the reader to search the Word of God and discover the inexhaustible treasures centred in the Lord Jesus Christ and God's revealed plan through HIM for the heavens and the earth.

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM AND THE MYSTERY

In the last article we considered the earth in relation to the purpose of God. We saw that God had willed there should be a seed and a land for the seed to inherit. The seed sprang from Abraham and was likened in number to the dust of the earth (Gen. 13:15-17) and to the stars of heaven (15:4-6). The land was literal and its geographical boundaries described in Genesis 15:18. The land and the seed are always connected in Scripture and any attempt to divorce them inevitably leads to a partial and distorted view of the Divine plan as it relates to the earth. The Scriptures make it quite clear that all this was in the nature of an unconditional promise to Abraham. So that he could have no part or lot in its framing, God put him into a deep sleep (Gen. 15:12). This promise was secured in Christ, Who is also described as the seed of Abraham and so the earthly seed is linked indissolubly with Him and they are looked on as one by God (Heb. 2:11-16). Any stressing of one at the expense of the other will again lead to an unbalanced view of Truth.

God wills that the nation of Israel, Abraham's seed, shall finally take the knowledge of the Lord to the ends of the earth, 'I have set thee (Israel) to be a light of the Gentiles, *that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth*' (Acts 13:47), and so the purpose expressed in Genesis 12:1-3 'in thee (Abraham's seed and Christ) shall *all* families of the *earth* be blessed' - shall at last become a reality. 'The *earth* shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' (Isa. 11:9; see also Hab. 2:14).

The Lord Jesus Christ shall return as King of kings and Lord of lords and have dominion from sea to sea and from the river unto the ends of the earth (Psa. 72:8,17). The kingdoms of THIS WORLD will then become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever (Rev. 11:15).

All Israel will be saved, for the Deliverer will have returned and turned away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is God's covenant and promise to them (Rom. 11:25-29). It is their national covenant, the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31. God's purpose for the seed and the land will then find fulfilment, and Israel will be a channel whereby its truth and glory will spread over the whole earth.

As we look round on the state of world affairs today with its ever mounting problems baffling the greatest brains as they search for some way of solution, the increasing spiritual darkness and apathy to the things of God, how grateful we are to look beyond man's day with all its failure to the Day of the Lord, when He at last shall take a direct hand in world affairs, settling its problems and bringing peace and prosperity. If we had not this vision granted us in the Scripture of Truth, how depressed we should be with all we see around us!

A Heavenly City

However, while we rejoice in the fact that the prophetic Word is a light shining in a dark place to which we do well to take heed (2 Pet. 1:19), we are conscious, as we search God's Word that these truths concerning earth and its government do not exhaust the revealed will of God as expressed therein. When we read Hebrews 11 we cannot fail to notice that this chapter adds something about Abraham which is not revealed in the book of Genesis. 'By faith Abraham ... sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country ... for he *looked for a city which hath foundations*, whose builder and maker is God' (11:8-10). And not only Abraham, but many of his seed who lived and died in faith emulated his example, and of them it is said 'they desire a *better* country, that is, an heavenly:

wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city' (11:16). This city is referred to and named in 12:22, 'Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the *city of the living God*, the *heavenly Jerusalem*'. The book of Revelation describes this city in detail in all its glory and blaze of colour and beauty (Rev. 21:10-27).

There is a feature we do well to notice. This city is a heavenly one, *yet it does not remain in heaven*. Three times in this book is this fact stated (3:12, 21:2,10). These verses describe the Heavenly Jerusalem *descending from heaven to the new earth* so that its goal finally is an *earthly* one. Here is a sphere of blessing for God's children which is of necessity different from the land given to Abraham and his descendants. No believer can surely doubt, as he reads the stupendous words of Revelation that this sphere is higher and more wonderful than the portion of the earth given the Patriarch Abraham, and this is confirmed by Hebrews 11:16, 'now they desire a *better* country, that is, an heavenly'. The Divine Author Himself describes it as being BETTER, and therefore God must have revealed this higher sphere of glory to Abraham as well as the earthly inheritance. Abraham, being strong in faith, responded by believing all that God had shown him.

Faithful or Unfaithful?

Now believers today can be said to be in two classes; those like this man of God who have great faith and accept

ALL

that God has written in His Word, and seek for the best in it, or like some whom the Lord addressed (Matt. 6:30), have little faith and hang back in the Christian pathway.

The former class go on in faithfulness, regardless of any loss or suffering such a course of action and belief may entail. Their one goal is to be 'approved unto God' (2 Tim. 2:15).

The latter do not grow in grace and acknowledgement of the truth. Their appetite is more for earthly things and all that these offer. It is NOW that they are concerned with; the hereafter with its glory and rewards are unreal and mean little to them; such are described in 1 Corinthians 3. They are saved, being on the one Foundation, Christ, but are building upon Him with shoddy materials of the flesh and the world. In the day when every man's work shall be manifested and tested by the fire of the righteous judgment of God (13), they meet the Lord with shame, their works are burned up, they lose their reward and His commendation, even though they themselves are saved (15). On the other hand those believers who are judged faithful to God's Word, produce works that 'abide' the test and receive the reward that He has promised to such (14).

Gift - and Reward?

Let us distinguish these different lines of truth. Salvation is not by good works and cannot be earned by merit. It is a free gift by God's grace, received by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8,9), and is eternally secure. In contrast to this, reward *IS* earned by the believer. It is for faithful service and is dependent upon his practical response to the claim of God in witness and daily walk.

Such reward is *NOT* secure in this life. It can be lost by unfaithfulness or sowing to the flesh (Col. 2:18; 3:24,25; Rev. 3:11; 1 Cor. 3:14,15). The believer cannot earn or work for his salvation, but he learns by grace to work it out in practice to the Lord's glory (Phil. 2:12,13) with the future day of testing in view. Any amount of Bible difficulties and false teaching today is caused by confusing these two aspects of truth or by emphasising one at the expense of the other.

The believers described in Hebrews 11 belong to the former category. They not only believed God for salvation but all His revelation afterwards, and were willing to go to the extremes of suffering and endurance to obtain that *better country* - the Heavenly Jerusalem (verses 32-40) and the *better resurrection* (35) attached to it. So we see that this higher sphere of blessing is in the nature of a *reward* for the faithful from Abel's time onwards, through Abraham's seed and down to the time of the Acts of the Apostles.

Believers who live during the dread time of the Antichrist and the Beast at the end of this age, are likewise exhorted to hold fast faithfully and endure even to death with a view to having an inheritance in this glorious city (Rev. 2:10; 3:11,12).

Israel's Hope and Reward

The careful reader will not fail to notice the prominent place that is still given to Israel. Revelation 21:12-14 declares that there are twelve gates and upon each is the name of the twelve tribes of Israel, and upon the foundations are written the names of the twelve apostles. Those overcomers who are blessed in this sphere, are either Israelites or Gentiles who have been associated with Israel and go through Israel's gates into the city.

So we see that the *hope* of the Pentecostal church was Israel's hope, the setting up of the kingdom of God on this earth; their reward or prize is something *better*, the Heavenly Jerusalem which is to come down from heaven to the new earth at the goal of the ages. As we search the Scriptures with opened eyes we shall find the nation of Israel dominates the scene from Genesis 12 to Acts 28. They are in the forefront of God's purposes and He plans to bless the whole earth through them. At the end of the Acts they are laid aside in unbelief and hardness of heart.

THIS MEANS THAT GOD MUST HAVE SOME NEW METHOD OF DEALING WITH MANKIND, OTHERWISE HIS PURPOSE WOULD BE FRUSTRATED AND THE DEVIL WOULD HAVE TRIUMPHED.

Either He has appointed a fresh channel through which to bless all families of the earth, or He has revealed another aspect of the purpose of the ages through Christ. Only the Word of God can settle this for us.

Paul - The Apostle for you Gentiles

At the beginning of the Acts the word was *sent to Israel* alone (Acts 10:36) because of their prior place as the instrument for world blessing. Then, as the Gentile was brought in to share Israel's blessings, we read 'children of the stock of Abraham, and *whosoever among you feareth God*, to you is the word of this salvation *sent*' (13:26). At the end we have 'Be it known therefore unto you (Jews), that the salvation of God is *sent unto the Gentiles*, and that they will hear it' (28:28), that is to the Gentiles independently now of the Jewish nation. This age is predominantly a Gentile one, so can we find any Scriptures written after the Acts which are addressed to Gentiles, without being associated with the nation of Israel? Can we find a writer who is commissioned by the ascended Christ to minister to Gentiles apart from the earthly people? The answer is we can, and he is the apostle Paul. After the Acts period Paul wrote seven more epistles. They are Ephesians, Philippians, Titus, Colossians, Philemon, 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy.

'I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you *Gentiles*' (Eph. 3:1), and in verse 8 'that I should preach *among* ***the Gentiles*** the unsearchable riches of Christ'.

'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 *preacher of the Gentiles*' (1 Tim. 2:7).

'I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a *teacher of the Gentiles*' (2 Tim. 1:11).

'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* ...' (2 Tim. 4:17).

This then is what we are seeking - a mouthpiece for the ascended Christ with a message for us who are Gentiles showing exactly where we stand in the Divine plan now that Israel has failed. No other New Testament writer makes this claim. Paul is pre-eminently the Apostle of the Gentiles, and in his letters mentioned above we have the special features of truth for the Gentile age revealed, resting upon the finished work of Christ on Calvary's Cross. The foundation has not altered, for the Lord Jesus Christ is 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. They are true for all time for the redeemed of all dispensations. What has happened is that the *superstructure* has changed, or to put it another way, God has taken the opportunity, consequent on Israel's failure, to reveal *another phase of His plan, this time touching the heavens and not the earth*. Let us repeat that this

rests as securely on the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus as all the previous truth from Genesis onwards, for He is the Centre and Circumference of it all.

All Scripture is Necessary

We wish to stress this lest we shall be accused 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.

Paul's Later Epistles

We are now in a position to approach the epistles of the one whom God ordained to be the prisoner of Jesus Christ for us Gentiles (Eph. 3:1). We do so with the consciousness that we are not reading the writings of man, but rather the message of the Christ in ascension, to us and for us, through Paul the channel. As we search the seven post-Acts epistles we shall look in vain for the repeated references of the earlier epistles to the Jew, to Israel and to Abraham. The word Jew only occurs once and then negatively (Col. 3:11), Israel twice, once negatively, and the other looking back to Paul's unconverted days (Eph. 2:12; Phil. 3:5). References to Abraham are nil. We are dealing with a *new calling* which has no reference to Israel the nation or the promises made to the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

On the other hand we shall certainly discover aspects of truth that are unique and not found anywhere else in the range of Scripture. Let us look at some of them.

1. THE TIME PERIOD Before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4).

The Church of this calling was chosen in Christ *before* the creation of the universe and the beginning of time. 2 Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2 literally read 'before age times'. No other company of the redeemed are associated with such a period. The expression is only used elsewhere of Christ Himself (John 17:24; 1 Pet. 1:20). Other companies of believers are said to belong to that aspect of the kingdom which has been prepared by God *since* the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:34). '*Before*' an event and '*since*' an event cannot refer to the same thing. This Church has the farthest '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 so gigantic in its meaning that it is beyond complete comprehension. In Christ Himself dwells all the *fulness of the Godhead* bodily (Col. 2:9), and each member of this company is *filled to the full* (complete) in Him (10). Christ is the fulness of God. This church is the fulness of Christ and each individual member is *filled to the full in* Him. What a Trilogy of truth! And how we need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, to grasp to any degree the glorious reality that lies behind these words. Such language is above anything given to Israel, wonderful though their blessings are.

3. THE STATUS

Ephesians 3:6 gives the relationship of each redeemed member of this called-out company. In the original there is a threefold emphasis on perfect *equality* which is lost in the Authorized Version. Literally it reads 'that the Gentiles should be *joint* heirs and a *joint* body, and *joint* partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel whereof I (Paul) was made a minister' (Eph. 3:6,7).

Here is complete equality between Jew and Gentile at last. The Jew as a nation has gone and with this laying aside nationally go all the privileges they had in the flesh (Rom. 9:4,5). In that sphere the Jew has the first place always in the Divine plan and the Gentile by nature is an alien from the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2:11,12) and an outsider (Matt. 15:24-26). This church however is taken out of the realm of the world and the flesh and blessed in the sphere of *spirit* in the heavenlies where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Consequently all earthly distinctions vanish, Jew and Gentile cease to exist as such and Christ is *ALL* (Col. 3:10,11).

The Pentecostal Church, while saved with the same salvation and standing in Christ, had no such equality for the Gentile believer, who was taught that he was but a wild olive grafted into the true olive tree (Israel) and that he did not bear the root, but the root (Israel) bore him (Rom. 11:17,18). In other words the Jew was still *first* (Rom. 1:16; 2:9,10).

This church, the fulness of Christ, has a new and unique constitution. It is a *new creation*, not an evolution (Eph 2:14,15); where the word 'make' should be translated 'create'. It is a *new man*, and its goal is to grow to a *full grown male* [A.V. perfect man (Eph. 4:13)].

Figures like the 'Bride', the 'Body', the 'New Man' are used with precision by the Divine Author and not scattered indiscriminately throughout the Word.

4. THE SPHERE OF BLESSING

This is described as being in 'heavenly *places*' (Eph. 1:3). The reader will notice that the word '*places*' is in italics and has therefore been supplied by the translators to make sense. The original reads 'in the heavenlies'. Some have questioned the accuracy of the Authorized Version translation and have put forward the idea that the phrase does not refer to a place, but to a spiritual experience in the life of the believer here and now. When Christ has become all to the child of God in his experience, then, we are told, he is in the heavenlies.

The truth of this assertion can easily be checked by noticing how these words occur in Ephesians. The next reference is in Ephesians 1:20,21 where Christ is stated to be raised and seated at the Father's right hand *in the heavenly places.* Now the Lord Jesus must be localised somewhere for He has a glorified body. The disciples saw Him leave this 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* (Col. 2:9) and believers look forward in faith to the day of glory when they shall have bodies fashioned like unto *His glorious body* (Phil. 3:21). He is now sitting at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1) and Ephesians 1:20 assures us that the right hand of God, where He is thus seated, is *in the heavenly places.*

So the Authorized Version is correct. Furthermore Ephesians 3:10 teaches us that there are principalities and powers (heavenly beings) also in the heavenly places. The Lord Jesus has been exalted to the highest pinnacle of glory, that is, the right hand of God the Father and the words 'in the heavenlies' are only another way of describing this supreme sphere. Elsewhere it is described as being far *above all heavens* (Eph. 4:10).

Now Ephesians 1:3 teaches us that members of this most favoured company of God's children have been blessed with every blessing that is spiritual *in this same sphere*. If this was not tremendous enough, chapter 2:6,7 goes further and declares that such are not only quickened and raised but *seated together where He is in the same heavenly places.* Chapter 1:20 gives us a seated Christ in this highest of all spheres and chapter 2:6 a seated Church there in Him. It is impossible to get higher than the ascended and glorified Christ, and so we come to the *climax of revelation in the Word of God so far as the redeemed are concerned*.

This revelation is so overwhelming that it leaves the human completely staggered. No wonder Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers might know something of the Lord's exceeding resurrection power; that they might be strengthened with might by His Spirit (1:17-20; 3:16).

Our Response

In and of ourselves we are utterly inadequate to rise in our understanding to anything so tremendous as this. We are of the earth earthy, and always tend to gravitate earthwards in our thinking. It is no wonder that Christians stumble at such teaching and some frankly do not believe, but even oppose it as being error. If the reader thinks this exaggerated, let him try and pass this truth on to other believers and note their attitude. He will probably be pulled up with a jolt! But this must not affect our reception of God's truth. We are each one of us RESPONSIBLE TO HIM, not to other Christians. Let us humbly bow in His Presence with utter thankfulness and realize that the least we can do is to accept and *believe what He has said.* Anything less than this shows the basest ingratitude for all the riches of grace and glory He has lavished upon us. The phrase 'in the heavenlies' occurs only in the Epistle to the Ephesians. It is found nowhere else in the Word of God.

Heavenly - An Explanation

The word 'heavenly' occurs frequently throughout the New Testament but we must learn to distinguish what is heavenly in *character* and what is not only heavenly in character but heavenly *in sphere of blessing*. For instance, the Hebrew Christians, to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was addressed, were described as 'having tasted the heavenly gift' (Heb. 6:4). The gift was heavenly *in character*, but they certainly did not taste it IN heaven or IN the heavenlies where Christ sitteth. This epistle reveals the glory of a seated Priest at the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3; 8:1) but we shall search it in vain to discover a seated Church there with Him.

The Secret Revealed

In Ephesians 3:3-9 Paul calls this new revelation a *mystery*. This word does not mean something puzzling or mysterious, but something that has *been hidden*; in other words a *secret*. He states that Christ had made it known to him, and his one endeavour was to make it known to all (9). This secret was a dispensation (verse 9 R.V.). The word dispensation does not primarily mean a period of time and is not synonymous with the word 'age' although it is often misused in this way. It could be rendered either by 'administration' or 'stewardship' and is so translated by the latter word in Luke 16:2.

The Secret Hid in God

This conveys the thought of being entrusted with someone else's possessions. It was *God's secret truth* which the apostle was handling with the consciousness of the responsibility to Him that such a stewardship brings. It was not his truth to do with as he willed. Prior to Ephesians 3:9 this wondrous secret is said to have been HID IN GOD. In Colossians 1:26 where we have another aspect of it, Paul states that it had been hidden from ages (time) and generations (people). Now if God hides IN HIMSELF knowledge from man, who can find till He chooses to reveal? Yet plenty of Christians imagine that they can discover this secret in the Old Testament and other parts of Scripture when God expressly declares that it was HIDDEN IN HIMSELF. Can this be called faith or is it unbelief? Will not such an attitude only lead to confusion and misunderstanding of the purpose of God?

Misunderstandings

One of the chief causes of such misunderstanding is to identify the Mystery with the revelation of Gentile blessing in the Old Testament and their sharing in the gospel of salvation. *That the Gentiles were to be blessed with the Jew was never kept a secret*. Ever since Genesis 12:1-4, God has made it plain in His Word that His purpose was to bless the whole world in this way, and in Romans 1:1-3, Paul expressly 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 declares 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. The first was cited from Deuteronomy 32:43, 'Rejoice, *ye Gentiles*, with His people' (the Jew). There is no mention in the context that this is a 'mystery' or 'secret', nor was it. If this is all Paul meant in Ephesians chapter 3 by making known the Secret, what an anticlimax, describing as a secret something that had clearly been revealed all the time! What a libel on the apostle's intelligence, to say the least!

Those who imagine that this is all the Mystery is, have completely missed the point. Moreover they make the Scripture contradict itself which is serious indeed. What God did not do before Acts 28, was to reveal *what His plan would be if Israel failed*. When this did take place He made known to Paul what He had kept hidden in Himself, namely His secret purpose to call out a company of Jews and Gentiles whom He had chosen before time began, and bless them in perfect equality, not on the earth, but at His own right hand in the heavenly places, there to form a holy Temple in the highest glory and a dwelling place for Himself (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 when reading them that the apostle had difficulty, humanly speaking, in conveying the fulness of truth in human language.*

Christ The Pre-eminent One

Here we have the unsearchable riches of Christ, riches of grace (Eph. 1:7,8) wherein God has overflowed towards us; riches of glory (Eph. 1:3,18; Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:27; 2:2) and exceeding riches of grace to be shown by God to every member of this exalted company in the ages to come (Eph. 2:6,7). Here too, the Lord Jesus is exalted to the highest place (Eph. 1:19-23; 4:10) that in all things He might HAVE THE PRE-EMINENCE or first place (Col. 1:18; Phil. 2:9-11).

This is the acid test of all doctrine, what does it do with the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it put Him in His rightful place, first and foremost in the heavenly places far above all? We submit that this calling exalts Him as no other, for it is based not just on His resurrection, but on HIS ASCENSION and exaltation to the Father's right hand in the highest glory and without this the whole revelation would collapse.

Conclusion

In a small booklet like this, one can only scratch the surface of these spiritual treasures contained in Paul's prison ministry. To appreciate their fulness of revelation, the reader must read, search, pray, and meditate upon them continually. Untold wonders await the child of God who will humbly ask the Lord for the 'spirit of *revelation*' (Eph. 1:17,18), opened eyes and an understanding heart (Col. 1:9) to receive and to practically acknowledge this glorious Secret which God wills to make known to His saints (Col. 1:27).

What then shall be our response to such a Saviour, but to live lives that glorify Him? Shall we not seek to support by prayer and every possible way those who, like Paul, are out to make all men see what is this 'dispensation of the Mystery' (Eph. 3:9 R.V.)? Let us not only do this, but endeavour ourselves to pass on these precious things to others so that they may share in our supreme joy. We close with two passages from Ephesians and Colossians, with the prayer that God may write their truth and wonder upon heart and mind.

> 'God ... quickened us together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with Him, and made us to *sit with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus*' (Eph. 2:4-6 R.V.).
>
> 'If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, *where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God*. *Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth*' (Col. 3:1,2 R.V.).

JOHN'S GOSPEL AND THE BELIEVER

Three relationships in which believers who are not members of the One Body stand today.

Let us look at some of the figures that are used in John's Gospel to indicate the relationship that exists between the believer and his Lord. We know that in the dispensation of the mystery, the believer forms part of the church which is the Body of Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. No such figure of course occurs in John, but there are in it certain symbols of relationship indicative of the calling of those to whom it ministers.

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* For a survey of other relationships in which believers stand today, see pages 33-37.

Bridal relationships. - It must not be inferred that we deny the occurrence of bridal relationships in the other Gospels; they are there, and we recognise them, but what we wish to draw attention to is that bridal relationships are perpetuated *now* among that great company of believers outside the Body at the present time:

'He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled' (John 3:29).

Now it is nowhere said, either in the synoptic Gospels, or in John, that those addressed actually formed part of the bride; neither, therefore, do we. John the Baptist makes it clear that he formed no part of the bride, his being a special relationship as, 'the friend of the bridegroom'. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the disciples are spoken of as 'children of the bride-chamber', who, of course, are not the bride, and in Matthew 25 virgins go out to meet the approaching bridegroom, not as brides, but to be present at the marriage feast.

The bride is distinguished from those blessed ones who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19:7,9, as also in Matthew 22, so that all we can say here is, that while the bride herself may not be in process of formation during this present period, the great company who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb are being gathered out.

Light on the subject may be obtained from the parable of Matthew 22. We have first of all the invitation to the wedding of those 'who had been bidden'. Following their refusal the invitation is repeated, with the urgent addition, 'All things are ready'. This they made light of. The word translated 'made light' here is rendered 'neglect' in Hebrews 2:3. As a consequence these refusers are destroyed and their city burned. This clearly refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

But after this date, and consequently after the ministry of Peter and Paul in the Acts, a further invitation is sent out, this time into the highways, with the result that the wedding is furnished with guests. This exactly corresponds with the subsequent ministry of John in his Gospel, which extends the marriage feast invitation to believers now.

Again, the first of the eight signs of John's Gospel is that given at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. There the water was turned into wine, and there the Lord manifested forth His glory. At this feast Christ is not the bridegroom, both He and His disciples being present as 'guests'. This first sign therefore suggests that those who came under John's ministry here form the great company who shall be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The other sheep. - The Lord's people are never called sheep in the epistles of the mystery, neither is the Lord called their Shepherd. It is Israel who say: 'We are His people and the sheep of His pasture' (Psa. 100:3). During our Lord's earthly ministry He said: 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 15:24). John's Gospel, however, contains a revelation concerning 'other sheep' which the Lord had and which He would gather:

'And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold (flock) and one Shepherd' (John 10:16).

Who are those other sheep? The answer that comes most readily and acceptably is, 'Israel of the Dispersion', but is this the right answer? The other sheep are declared to be 'not out of (*ek*) this fold'.

We must distinguish between the two words translated 'fold' in the A.V. of verse 16. *Aule* is 'fold', while *poimne* is 'flock'. *Aule* is most probably derived from the Hebrew *ohel*, tent or tabernacle. Primarily it means an open courtyard, and John himself uses the word in 18:15, where it is translated 'palace'. Originally sheep-folds were in the open court of the house, and the word is so used in 2 Chronicles 4:9; Psalm 65:4; 135:1; Isaiah 1:12, and many other passages. These other sheep were not 'of this fold', were not connected with those courts of the Lord into which it was the peculiar prerogative of Israel to enter. The dispersion could hardly be so designated.

The word *poimne*, flock, is intimately associated with *poimen*, shepherd, the flock being viewed not so much as so many sheep, but as so many sheep under one shepherd. *Poimnion*, the diminutive, is found in Acts 20:28,29 where it most certainly is used of the church of God:

'Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock'.

If Paul could use the word 'flock' in its diminutive sense for the church as constituted in Acts 20, the Lord could use the words, 'one flock' of a company composed of the gathered sheep of the house of Israel, and of the 'other sheep' who, though not of Israel's fold, would, nevertheless, under the one great Shepherd, constitute one flock. While this is far removed from the unity expressed by the One Body, with the Lord as Head, it nevertheless is in consonance with that blessing which must necessarily take its character from the present position of the ascended Lord, and while not being in the full blaze of that central glory, nevertheless basks, as it were, in its penumbra.*

Peter was definitely commissioned to feed the Lord's sheep and lambs, but his curiosity was not satisfied when, concerning John, he asked: 'And what shall this man do?' Peter and John are associated very closely in their early ministry with the Lord and the twelve, and it looks as though both were to be under-shepherds, though tending different folds. Galatians 2:9 indicates that John, like Peter, had a ministry to the circumcision, but we are not thereby justified in concluding that God could not send John to another company - such a conjecture is beyond our right or ken.

We know that Paul had a twofold ministry. Why, then, should not John be similarly commissioned? In the same way there is no more difficulty in believing that Gentile believers may be called 'other sheep' than that they are likened to a 'wild olive'. And if Gentiles could be grafted on to the stock of Israel, there is nothing to render it impossible that they should form part of that great 'flock', though never of the 'fold of Israel'.

Partakers of the true bread. - None but those who came out of Egypt ate the manna in the wilderness:

'Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat' (John 6:31).

The Lord, when replying to this, and declaring Himself to be the true bread that came down from heaven, speaks of the *world* as recipients:

'For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the *world*' (John 6:33).

'The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the *world*' (John 6:51).

Here then are three relationships in which, we hold, believing Gentiles stand today who are outside the sphere of the dispensation of the mystery. They are associated with the Bride, they are associated with the Flock, and they partake of the Living Bread, and so of a common life.

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Charles H. Welch wrote the above as the fourth of a series of five articles under the heading *The Dispensational Place of John's Gospel* which are printed in volume 20 of *The Berean Expositor*.

See also *Life Through His Name* by the same author:
Chapter 4, section, *Judaea: - The Bride and the Bridegroom.*
Chapter 9, section, *The Other Sheep*.

Or listen to cassette recordings W 357 to W 365, which have as their theme *John's Gospel and its relation to the mystery*.

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* Penumbra - faint or partial shadow.

POSTSCRIPT

One thing is clear. Revelation 19:9 states that 'Blessed are they which are called (or invited) unto the marriage supper of the Lamb'. These are *guests* and cannot be the Bride or the Body of Christ.

STUART ALLEN

Genesis 12 to 15 reveals that to Abraham and to his seed was granted, unconditionally, the earthly sphere of blessing. To Abraham, however, was opened up the further possibility of rising higher and of becoming a partaker of the heavenly calling. This is shown in Hebrews 3:1; 11:8-10,13-16; 12:22. During early days Gentile believers were associated with Israel's hope under the New Covenant (2 Cor. 3; Rom. 15:12,13). As Galatians 4:26 shows, however, they were not to be partakers of the earthly, but of the heavenly, sphere of the kingdom.

Israel, *as a nation*, became `the wife', when they entered into covenant relationship *at Sinai.*

`... 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' (Jer. 31:32).

By the great love and mercy of the Lord, Israel, though thus `put away', shall yet be brought back again.

`They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to Me, saith the LORD' (Jer. 3:1).

`Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD ... Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings' (Jer. 3:20-22).

This blessed restoration is the theme of Isaiah's prophecies:

`Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married' (Isa. 62:4).

The restoration of a divorced woman and the betrothal and marriage of `the chaste virgin' which Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 11:2; and which John speaks of as the `bride', must not be confused. Israel, as a nation, is the restored wife, but a remnant out of Israel, together with some believing Gentiles, constitute the new company, `the bride, the Lamb's wife'. During the Acts, Gentile believers were, equally with Jewish believers, Abraham's seed and heirs, and to this company belongs Jerusalem which is above (Gal. 3:29, 4:26).

The distinction between these two companies is suggested in the two parables of Matthew 13:44-46. The treasure hid in a field, which, after discovery, was hidden again, represents the nation of Israel, God's peculiar treasure.

`For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people (*segullah*) unto Himself' (Deut. 14:2).

`For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure (*segullah*)' (Psa. 135:4).

While `all Israel' was a treasure, the Lord noted with special approbation those `of Israel' who walked by faith, and these, such as Abraham, were granted the heavenly prospect, associated with the heavenly city, and are represented in the parable as the `one pearl'. The reader will remember that `one pearl' is noted in the description of the gates of the New Jerusalem. While the pearl is a part of the Lord's treasure, it is signally different from other treasures in that it is organic, being produced by suffering and so typical of that remnant, according to the election of grace, that walked by faith, while the bulk of their fellows fell into idolatry and unbelief.

`All Israel' shall be saved (Rom. 11:26); the erring wife shall be restored; but the marriage of the Lamb refers not to this restoration but to the new company that inherits the heavenly sphere of the kingdom. It is to this marriage of the Lamb that the parable of Matthew 22 looks forward, where particular emphasis is put upon the invitation which was sent out to the `guests'. Not by any stretch of imagination can `guests' at a marriage be made to refer to `the

bride', and they must therefore represent a yet further and separate company who are neither restored Israel nor the elect remnant.

As the `Lamb' the Lord Jesus is `the King's Son', and for Him a marriage has been made. The king's servants went out and called those who had been bidden, but they would not come. A second invitation, corresponding with the renewal of the gospel in Acts 2, where `all things are ready', was made, but this was met by excuses and abuse; `they made light of it'. The result of this hardness of heart was that these were destroyed and their city burned up (Matt. 22:7). This is a plain allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D 70, and the words `ye would not' of Matthew 23:37 and the destruction of the temple (24:2) confirm the interpretation.

After A.D. 70 the hope of Israel and the New Covenant were suspended. Necessarily, with the suspension of that hope and that New Covenant, went the restoration of Israel as the wife, and the calling of the remnant as the bride, but one feature was perpetuated, namely, the calling of those who should be guests at the marriage. These were gathered out from the highways, `bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests' (22:9,10). Those who `were (had been) bidden' (22:3) and to whom a second invitation had been sent (22:4) were Israel. Those who subsequently took the place forfeited by Israel are referred to by John: `He came unto His own, and His own received Him not, *but as many as received Him* ... ' (John 1:11,12). These are `the other sheep' not acknowledged by Israel (10:16).

John's Gospel differs from the synoptic Gospels in many ways, and prominent among these is the dispensational position of those who believe its message. Such do not form part of the kingdom of Israel, neither do they constitute the Bride of the Lamb, but they do fit into Matthew 22:9,10, and those who today respond to the gospel of John 3:16 and order their lives according to the teaching of that gospel constitute that distinctive and blessed company who shall be the guests at the marriage of the Lamb, an honour high indeed for such as were gathered from highways and byways, both bad and good.

In harmony with this intention, the first miracle recorded as a sign in John's Gospel is that of a marriage, where the `friend of the bridegroom' is introduced (2:9) and where the Lord and His disciples were there as `guests'.

John's Gospel is unique. It differs from Matthew in that it is not concerned with the kingdom, but rather with one phase of that purpose of the ages by which God fills the interval occasioned by Israel's failure. Both the prison ministry of Paul and the Gospel according to John are written in view of the crisis of Acts 28. In John's prologue the presentation of Christ as the Word is very close to the presentation of Christ as the Image of the invisible God in Paul's prison ministry, but the callings are distinct and differ essentially. In John's Gospel the believer is numbered among those of the Gentiles called after A.D 70 to be guests of the marriage feast, whereas in Paul's prison ministry the Gentile believer called after Acts 28:28 becomes a member of the body of Christ. In both Acts 28 and in the climax chapter of John 12, the crisis is indicated by the quotation of Isaiah 6:9,10 (John 12:40,41; Acts 28:26,27). In John 12:20,21 it is `Greeks' that seek the Lord; in Acts 28:28 it is `Gentiles' that are the object of grace.

The Other Sheep

The perfect voluntariness of the Lord's vicarious death (10:16-18)

Before entering into the question as to whether the `sheep' of Scripture refer only to Israel or ever to the church, it will be necessary to adjust the translation of the Authorized Version in one important particular. In verse 16 the Authorized Version uses the word `fold' twice, where the Greek original uses two different words.

Aule is correctly rendered `fold' but *poimne* should be translated `flock'. *Poimne* is cognate with *poimen* `shepherd', but *aule* refers rather to the enclosure, the `fold', and if used of `men' instead of `sheep' is translated in

this same gospel `palace' (18:15), while the verbal form *aulizomai* is translated `to lodge' (Matt. 21:17) or `to abide' (Luke 21:37).

> `And other sheep I have, which are not of *this fold*: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one *flock*, and one shepherd' (10:16).

`Other sheep'. The fact that the Lord could refer to `other sheep' presupposes the existence and the recognition of some who already answered to that name.

Much may be said for the beauty and simple dignity of `The order for Morning Prayer' to be used daily throughout the year, according to the *Book of Common Prayer*, but no one who desires to obey the principle of `Right Division' can fail to see the bias that must ensue by the continual asseveration* by Gentile believers today, that `We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand' (Psa. 95:7).

When Christ sent out His disciples, to preach the gospel of the kingdom, He differentiated between Israel and the Gentiles, saying:

> `Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:5,6).

Or, again, when answering the prayer of the Syro-phenician woman, the Saviour said:

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

Peter was commissioned to feed the Lord's sheep, and he addresses his epistles to the dispersed of Israel, not to the Gentile churches.

While this would be commonly accepted doctrine among the Lord's hearers, He indicates that there were others who while certainly not of `this FOLD' were destined to make up `one FLOCK'. As these `other sheep' were not of the fold of Israel and as this revelation is found in that gospel which has the world as its sphere, the period of Israel's rejection as its period, and was written for non-Jewish readers, these other sheep must be made up of Gentile believers.

Members of the Church of the Mystery are neither called sheep, nor will they ever be brought into a union with the `fold' of Israel to form one `flock'. The ministry of John's Gospel is, however, at work today in a wider circle than that covered by the dispensation of the mystery, and many a Gentile believer, who has neither attained to the standing of `Romans', nor received the calling of `Ephesians', will find himself one of a fold which Israel would not recognize, even as there are others from among the Gentiles who will be gathered out of the highways and byways, to sit down as guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb, though this honour was originally extended to Israel only (Matt. 22:1-14).

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* Asseveration = a solemn statement.