

ACTS

A stylized graphic consisting of several overlapping, fan-like segments. The segments are colored in shades of grey and orange. The grey segments are on the left and right sides, while the orange segments are in the center and bottom. The segments have a slightly curved, feather-like appearance.

DISPENSATIONALLY
CONSIDERED

C. R. STAM

A C T S

Dispensationally
Considered

By
Cornelius R. Stam

VOLUME ONE
Acts One through Eight

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PREFACE

No apology need be offered for the publication of the present exposition of the Book of Acts, for while an understanding of Acts is of paramount importance to intelligent and fruitful Christian service, few indeed are the commentators who have grasped its message.

Much has been written on this book; much, even, from a dispensational viewpoint, but where are the commentaries on Acts which recognize fully the distinction between Paul's ministry and that of the twelve? Yet this distinction lies at the very heart of the message of Acts, and the failure to recognize it has plunged the Church into a state of confusion unparalleled in her history and altogether inconsistent with the light she has received on the *details* of the sacred Scriptures.

It is hoped that our feeble attempt to help dispel this confusion may, under God, prove measurably successful in bringing increasing numbers of believers into the knowledge and joy of "the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery" which was first committed to Paul.

It will be noticed that the text of the Book of Acts, passage for passage, appears in full along with the author's exposition. This is meant to be more than a convenience. It will help the reader considerably *not* to skip over these passages but to read each one thoughtfully and prayerfully before proceeding to the exposition. Indeed, a copy of the Bible should be kept at hand at all times for reference purposes.

The *Authorized* or *King James Version* has been employed in the text and in all other quotations unless otherwise indicated. This is because the *Authorized Version* is still in use by the overwhelming majority of Bible readers and students. Wherever it has been felt that the *Authorized Version* departs from the original sense, however, attention is called to this fact.

We have not hesitated to repeat what has been previously stated in this exposition or in other of our writings, where it appears that such repetition will help to clarify important truths or impress them upon the reader's mind. Also, we have taken the liberty to depart from direct exposition at times to call attention to related material. Secular and church history, while occasionally relevant in the consideration of such a book of Acts, have nevertheless been sparsely cited so as to keep close to the Word itself. Somewhat more, however, has been made of topical and geographical features, customs of the times and the like.

We make no claims to originality and gratefully acknowledge the faithful and generous assistance of our typist, proofreaders and others who have helped in any way to make this book possible.

We rejoice that in the darkness of our times the light of God's Word shines the brighter, and humbly pray that *Acts Dispensationally Considered* may contribute much to the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the *Blessed Book*.

CORNELIUS R. STAM.

Chicago, Illinois
April 24, 1954.

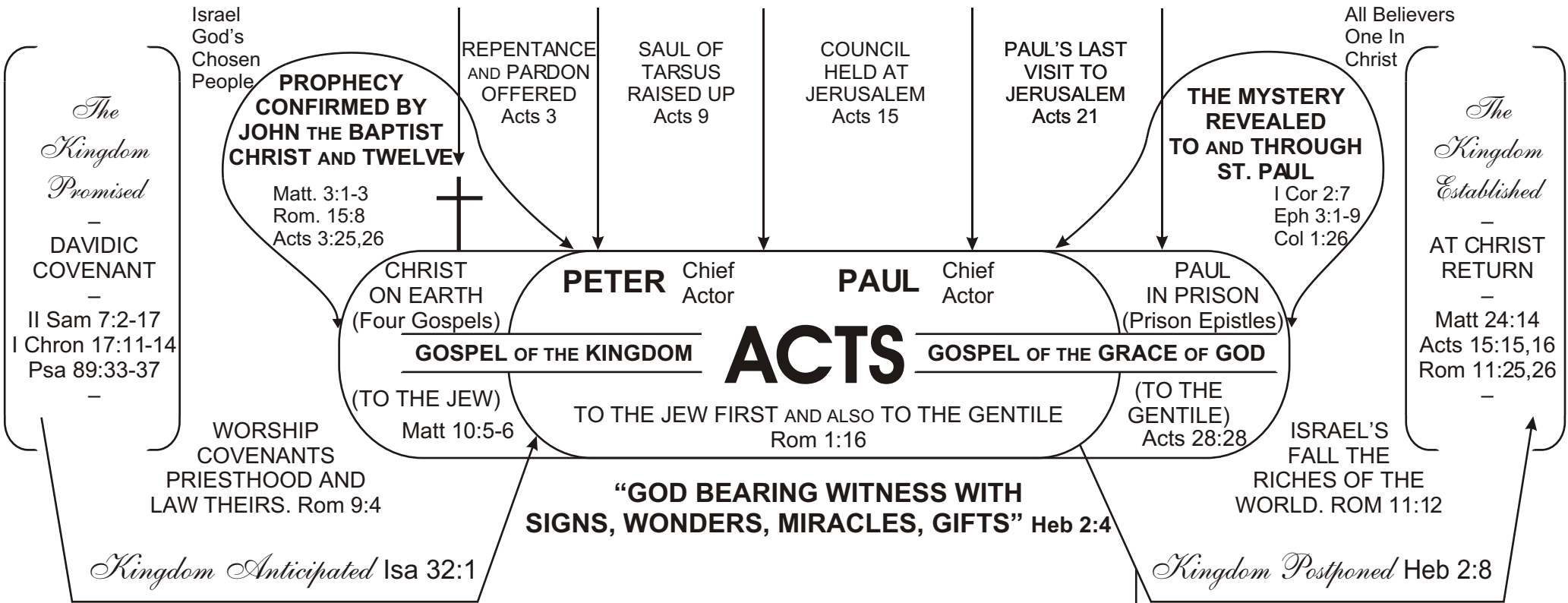
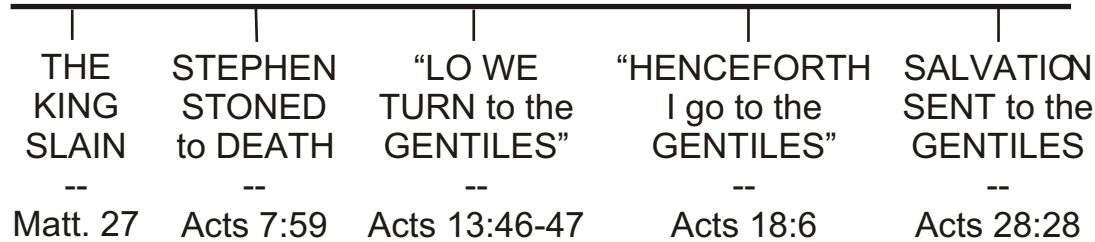
The Book of
ACTS
in the light of
DISPENSATIONAL TRUTH

**MESSIAH REJECTED
 NATIONAL BLESSING FORFEITED**

How
SALVATION
was sent
to the
GENTILES

JOHN 4:22

ACTS 28:28



"MEATS, DRINKS, BAPTISMS, ORDINANCES IMPOSED UNTIL REFORMATION" Heb 9:10

ISRAEL "BLINDED" AND "CAST AWAY" FOR A SEASON - ROM 11:7,15,25

INTRODUCTION

IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

Nearly a century ago Dean J. S. Howson, "an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures," and one to whom, under God, we all owe so much,¹ said:

"I doubt whether the peculiar importance of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles has ever been exhibited or felt as fully as it might have been" (Hulsean Lectures for 1862, P. 221).

Indeed, Dean Howson went farther than this, saying:

"A careful consideration leads us to think of the Acts of the Apostles as the key-stone of the arch of the New Testament..." (Ibid. P. 224).

Our present generation of Bible students would do well to heed these words and engage in a serious and prayerful re-study of the Book of Acts, for a correct interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles is essential to a clear understanding of God's eternal purpose and of His message and program for the present dispensation, and it is certainly a prerequisite to an appreciation of the exalted truths of the Pauline epistles.

THE POPULAR INTERPRETATION OF THE ACTS

Nearly all writers on Acts have assumed, without the slightest foundation, that it is the record of the birth and growth of the Church of this dispensation; that in Acts we find the doctrine and practice of the Church in its earliest and purest form; that it is a spiritual story book containing inspiring examples of what we might do if we but possessed the faith of the first century believers.

We quote from a representative volume:

"The book of Acts is the story of early-day Christianity... God has given us in the book of Acts a pattern of Christian testimony, missionary effort, world evangelism and building of Christian churches--a pattern which we would do well to follow. Certainly we can be assured of this: the closer we come to ordering all things according to this holy pattern, the greater blessing will attend our efforts."²

These words were written by one who was doubtless the most popular Fundamentalist Bible teacher of the past generation and they express the view of the vast majority of believers today.

¹ Especially for his part in the standard work: *The Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*.

² *Lectures on the Book of Acts*, P. 10.

Nevertheless, in the light of the written Word of God this view of Acts is erroneous--not merely in certain details, but *fundamentally and essentially* so--and accounts largely for the confusion that has gripped the Church in our day.

The honest student of the Word will readily admit that Acts presents many problems, especially since much of it is transitional. But these problems are multiplied and rendered insurmountable by the theory that this book is the record of the birth and growth of the Church of today.

WHERE THE POPULAR INTERPRETATION FAILS

If the Book of Acts truly constitutes "*a pattern of Christian testimony, missionary effort, world evangelism and building of Christian churches--a pattern which we would do well to follow,*" why does no one consistently follow "this holy pattern"? One reason is that no one today *can* follow it. God has rendered this impossible, and all attempts to use Acts as a pattern end in confusion and frustration.

First of all, Acts presents a *changing program*. The author of *Lectures on the Book of Acts* himself calls it "a book of transition," i.e., of transition from the past dispensation to the present. How then can we use it as a pattern for our practice *today*? How can we follow a pattern that keeps changing?

What *message*, for example, shall we preach? Shall we call upon men to "*repent and be baptized...for the remission of sins*" and offer them Messiah's return and the establishment of His kingdom, as Peter did (2:38; 3:19-21) or shall we proclaim the message which Paul later "received of the Lord Jesus": "*the gospel of the grace of God*"? (20:24). The Church at large, using Acts as a pattern, is preaching a confused mixture of both. Certainly no one can preach what Peter preached in Acts 2 and 3 and *also* proclaim clearly the glorious truths of Romans, Ephesians and Colossians.

And *where* and *to whom* shall we preach? Shall we begin our ministry at Jerusalem as the twelve did under their "great commission" (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) or shall we go with Paul "far hence unto the Gentiles"? (22:21). Shall we go to "*the Jews only*" as the followers of Christ did in early Acts (11:19) or shall we say with Paul: "*Your blood be upon your own heads . . . I will go unto the Gentiles*"? (18:6). Obviously, if it is our purpose to reach the Jews first, we will now find greater numbers of them in New York, Chicago and San Francisco than in Jerusalem.

And what *economic program* shall we follow? Shall we follow the pattern of Acts 2 and 4 and dispose of our investments and have "*all things common*" or shall we retain our private possessions and give to the Lord's work "*every man according to his ability,*" as did the believers under Paul in Acts 11:29? And if we follow the pattern of Acts 2 and 4 may we be assured that none of us will lack (4:34) or will we end up with "*the poor saints at Jerusalem*"? (Rom. 15:26).

Again, if we *could* use Acts as a pattern and faithfully carry it out, could we expect divine intervention in persecution or not? Could we look for angelic

deliverances like the twelve, or would we find ourselves shut up in prison, delivered to death, forsaken by man and seemingly by God, like Paul?

This brings us to another reason why we *cannot* follow the Book of Acts as a pattern. When Israel sealed her rejection of the resurrected, glorified Christ, God recalled the gifts of miraculous power bestowed at Pentecost, as the epistles of Paul clearly indicate ([Rom. 8:22,23](#); [I Cor. 13:8,13](#); [II Cor. 4:16](#); [5:2](#); [Phil. 2:26,27](#); [I Tim. 5:23](#); etc.). Our Pentecostalist friends may claim to possess these powers still, but the evidence is not very convincing. Such words as those we have quoted from *Lectures on the Book of Acts*, however, have proved a great encouragement to the Pentecostal movement--and that while the author himself considered Pentecostalism a Satanic heresy!

It is impossible to follow the Book of Acts as a pattern, but in vainly seeking to "order all things" according to "this holy pattern" of "early-day Christianity," the Church has actually turned a deaf ear to the Pauline epistles and the revelation from the glorified Lord for *us today*. As a result she has brought herself into a state of serious disorder and division and has presented to the world a confused, incoherent testimony.

THE CORRECT INTERPRETATION

Acts has so often been called the account of the "birth and growth of the Church" (even by Dean Howson) that the statement has come to be accepted almost without question. Yet the Church of the present dispensation, "*the Church which is His body*," does not even enter into the first large portion of the book, and while it does in fact occupy an important place in the latter half of the book, it is not even designated by its distinctive name there. It is only in Paul's epistles that we learn that the Body had indeed begun during the latter part of the Acts period. Similarly "the mystery," which was the very theme of Paul's message, began to be unfolded by him during his early ministry, when Luke was with him much of the time, yet the term is not found in the Book of Acts. This simply emphasizes the selective principle in divine inspiration. It was *Paul*, not Luke, who was chosen of God to make known "the mystery" and the truths concerning the Body of Christ ([See Eph. 3:1-11](#); [Col. 1:24-27](#)) while Luke was inspired to write the Book of Acts for another purpose altogether.

Nor does the first large portion of Acts present *Christianity* at all--either in the popular or the Biblical sense of the word. What it presents is *Judaism*. It is too often forgotten that Israel *alone* is dealt with in the first nine chapters of the book and that those in Israel who accepted Israel's Messiah were "Israelites indeed," whereas "*the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch*" (11:26).³

The only difference between the apostles' position in the four Gospels and in early Acts was that which prophesied events had brought about. In early Acts the resurrection of the crucified King had become the burden of their message and the

³ The interested reader will do well to look up the three occurrences of the word "Christian" and see how it is used. They are: Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Pet. 4:16.

Spirit had come in power to confirm their testimony. Indeed, the kingdom which these apostles had proclaimed "at hand" during the Lord's earthly ministry, could now be *offered* (3:19-21).

And even with respect to Paul's ministry in the latter half of Acts (which was mainly to the Gentiles) it must not be forgotten that until the very end ([Acts 28:28](#)) the apostle went consistently to "*the Jew first*," so that throughout the book Israel is being dealt with.

Sir Robert Anderson correctly called the Acts "a book which is primarily the record, not, as commonly supposed, of the founding of the Christian Church, but of the apostasy of the favored nation" (*The Silence of God*, P. 177) and he rightly termed "the popular belief that the Jerusalem Church was *Christian*" as "fallacious," adding: "In fact it was thoroughly and altogether Jewish" (Ibid. P. 84).

Summing the matter up, Anderson says:

"In a word, if 'To the Jew first' is characteristic of the Acts of the Apostles as a whole, 'To the Jew only' is plainly stamped upon every part of these early chapters, described by theologians as the 'Hebraic section' of the book. The fact is clear as light. And if any are prepared to account for it by Jewish prejudice and ignorance, they may at once throw down this volume, for it is here assumed that the apostles of the Lord, speaking and acting in the memorable days of Pentecostal power, were Divinely guided in their work and testimony" (Ibid. Pp. 76,77.)

Thus Acts, so far from being "the story of early-day Christianity," is from beginning to end the account of *the fall of Israel*. It explains, step by step, how and why the chosen people had to be set aside and salvation sent to the Gentiles apart from them; how and why the commission to the twelve had to be suspended and *another* apostle, *Paul*, raised up to go to the Gentiles with "*the gospel of the grace of God*." Hence Acts is a record of successive crises: Pentecost, the stoning of Stephen, the conversion of Paul, the council at Jerusalem, etc.

Peter dominates the scene in the first part of Acts; Paul in the latter portion. The transition from the prophetic program, in which salvation was to go to the Gentiles *through* Israel, to the new program, under which salvation was to go to the Gentiles *apart* from Israel, takes place entirely under Paul's ministry and can be traced in the gathering force of the statements made to and by Paul in this connection at Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth and Rome. At Jerusalem the Lord said to him with respect to the Jews there: "*They will not receive thy testimony concerning Me*" (22:18). At Antioch Paul said: "*Lo, we turn to the Gentiles*" (13:46) at Corinth: "*From henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles*" (18:6) and at Rome: "*The Salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles*" (28:28).

Let no one conclude from the above that we are antisemitic in our views or sentiments, for we heartily love God's ancient people and rejoice that a glorious future awaits Israel under the reign of Messiah. Meantime we remember the Word of God to us Gentiles:

"For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief:

"Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:30-33).

THE BOOK BETWEEN

Far more than an inspired story book, Acts presents a clear line of teaching and explains why the fulfillment of prophecy was interrupted, some nineteen centuries ago, to make way for "the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery." Appropriately this book has been called "the book between." As far as the structure of the Scriptures is concerned it fits perfectly between the four records of our Lord's earthly ministry and the epistles of Paul.

In the words of Dean Howson:

"Perhaps the best way to see at a glance the value and significance of this book of the New Testament, would be to imagine the New Testament *without* the Acts of the Apostles. What a gulf would then be opened between the Gospels and the Epistles! . . . What discrepancies, what oppositions would be found between the earlier books and the later!" (*Hulsean Lectures*, for 1862, P. 221).

Or, to quote Sir Robert Anderson again:

"Suppose again the Epistles were there, but the Acts of the Apostles left out, how startling would appear the heading 'To the Romans,' which would confront us on turning from the study of the Evangelists! How could we account for the transition involved? How could we explain the great thesis of the Epistles, that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile . . . ? The earlier Scriptures will be searched in vain for teaching such as this. Not the Old Testament merely but even the Gospels themselves are seemingly separated from the Epistles by a gulf. To bridge over that gulf is the Divine purpose for which the Acts of the Apostles has been given to the Church. The earlier portion of the book is the completion of and sequel to the Gospels; its concluding narrative is introductory to the great revelation of Christianity" (*The Silence of God*, Pp. 54,55).

Our Lord, in harmony with the prophetic plan, had first commissioned His twelve apostles to minister to Israel alone and later to go to all nations beginning with Israel, since it was through regenerated Israel that blessing was to have gone (and

someday will go) to the nations. Indeed, He had promised the apostles that in the kingdom they would sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

But what is this we find as we open to the Epistle to the Romans? The twelve apostles, who have been commissioned by our Lord Himself, and whom the Lord has appointed to reign with Him in the kingdom are ignored altogether. *Another* apostle speaks:

"Paul... to all that be in Rome, beloved of God "

And what are these bold statements he makes:

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

"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God,

"That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles..." (Rom. 15:15,16).

What authority had Paul to assume this unique position? Had not the twelve been chosen before him? Had they not been sent to "preach the gospel to every creature" before he was even saved? Who was he to declare: "*I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office?*"

Acts, "the book between," provides the answer to these and many other questions otherwise impossible of solution.

If there is anything the Book of Acts makes crystal clear it is the fact that a revolutionary change in dispensation has taken place since Pentecost. Rather than constituting a pattern for us to follow, Acts explains why the program there begun has passed away and confirms the declaration of the Pauline epistles that the fulfillment of prophecy has, for the present, given way to the unfolding of the mystery of God's purpose and grace.

It is the failure to recognize these facts and to heed the message of Paul to the Gentiles that has brought upon the professing church the curse of Galatians 1:8,9. Those who seek to use Acts as a pattern for their faith and practice will do well to ponder seriously over these solemn words:

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

"As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."

While we must not read more into the word "accursed" than there is in it, this passage shows how serious it is to depart from the specific teachings of Paul for us, and this is not an isolated passage. Paul, by the Holy Spirit, constantly urges strict fidelity to the message and program which the risen, glorified Lord committed to him by revelation and we do well to heed his exhortations:

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 1:13).

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

"Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel; wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound" (II Tim. 2:7-9).

Chapter I - Acts 1:1,2

THE OPENING DECLARATION

THE NATURE OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

"Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen:"

--Acts 1:1,2.

That the Book of Acts was penned by Luke seems evident, not only from its literary style, but from the writer's reference to having addressed a "former treatise" to the same person, Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus had *begun* to do and teach until the day of His ascension (Ver. 1,2; cf. [Luke 1:3](#)).

In other words, Acts is the sequel to Luke's Gospel and this introduces us immediately to a fact which is vital to a proper understanding and a correct interpretation of the book. If the *former treatise* concerned what Jesus had begun to do and to teach until His ascension, then *this treatise* must concern what He continued to do *after* His ascension.

HOW THIS AFFECTS EARLY ACTS

Our Lord's ascension did not bring to an end His mighty works, nor did His teachings end when He had "given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen." On the contrary, He continued to work and teach from heaven.

Therefore we must be prepared to see in the official acts of the twelve, in their mighty miracles, in their proclamation of the kingdom, the doings and teachings of the ascended Christ Himself.

HOW THIS AFFECTS LATE ACTS

Indeed, we must be further prepared to see in the raising up of Paul, in his superseding the twelve as the apostle to all the world, in his going to the Gentiles despite Israel's rejection of the kingdom, the doings and teachings of the ascended Lord. It is surprising how many sincere believers have missed this fact.

Again and again the Apostle Paul, in his writings, insists that he did not receive his message from men but by special revelations of the Lord.

Again and again he uses such language as the following:

"... the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:24).

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you ..." (I Cor. 11:23).

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (I Thes. 4:15).

The ministry and message of Paul, then, was that of the ascended Lord as He still continued "to do and teach" from His throne in glory.

So emphatic is the apostle with regard to this fact that he writes to the Corinthians:

"If I come again, I will not spare: since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me . . ." (II Cor. 13:2,3).

And writing later to Timothy, instructing him what to teach and exhort, he says:

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ... He is proud, knowing nothing ..." etc. (I Tim. 6:3,4).

Moreover, in the Epistle to the Galatians we find that as Israel rejected the offer of the kingdom, the leaders of the twelve clearly perceived that their Lord, who had at first sent them to go from Jerusalem to "all the world" with "the gospel" (of the kingdom) had now commissioned Paul to go forth instead with "the gospel of the grace of God," and they gave to Paul and Barnabas "the right hands of fellowship," in solemn recognition of this fact (See [Gal. 2:2-9](#)).

Thus the epistles bear witness to the fact that the dispensational change from the ministry and message of the twelve to that of Paul was wholly the doing of the Lord Jesus Christ, the rejected Messiah, and that Acts, from beginning to end, is the record of what the Lord, in His ascended glory, continued to do and to teach.

Chapter II - Acts 1:3-8

FROM THE RESURRECTION TO THE ASCENSION

A FORTY-DAY SEMINAR

"To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: --Acts 1:3.

In showing Himself alive by many infallible proofs for forty days, our Lord was preparing His apostles to bear powerful testimony to the people of Israel that the One whom they had crucified was indeed alive again and that it would be wisdom on their part to turn to Him in repentance and faith rather than continue their rebellion.

Another important fact is brought to light here concerning the twelve, which the Holy Spirit would have us learn at the outset of our studies in Acts. If, as this verse indicates, the risen Lord spent forty days with the apostles, "*speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God,*" the apostles could hardly thereafter have been so ignorant of the character of the kingdom as some suppose.

Indeed, this matter is settled by another significant detail which Luke supplies in his gospel record in connection with our Lord's instructions to the eleven during these forty days. There, in Chapter 24, we find at least ten of the apostles gathered together when suddenly the risen Lord appears in their midst. After they have recovered from their fright He begins to speak to them about the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms, pointing out that His death and resurrection were but the fulfillment of these. Then, in the 45th verse we read:

"THEN OPENED HE THEIR UNDERSTANDING, THAT THEY MIGHT UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES."

The apostles had looked for our Lord's kingdom reign but had not anticipated His death and resurrection. Now their eyes were opened to understand all.

We point this out lest our readers should be led away with the popular but unscriptural notion that the apostles were ignorant and carnal in their continued anticipation of the earthly reign of Christ.

As we proceed with our studies in Acts, then, let us be prepared to find the apostles spiritually intelligent as to God's prophetic purpose, having been instructed for forty days with their understandings opened by the Lord Himself.

THE COMMAND TO TARRY

"And, being assembled together with them, [He] commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me.

"For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." --Acts 1:4,5.

Our Lord clearly had the prophetic plan in mind here. According to prophecy Jerusalem was to be the glory of all the earth. It was from Jerusalem that blessing was to flow to the nations. It was at Jerusalem that He was to reign as the Son of David. Indeed, according to His own promise, the twelve were to reign there with Him, sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel ([Matt. 19:28](#)).

Until Jerusalem, the capital of the Hebrew nation, accepted Messiah, world peace and prosperity could never be. Therefore the apostles were instructed to begin their ministry at Jerusalem.

They were not, however, to begin their ministry there immediately. They were first to wait for a baptism with, or in, the Holy Spirit, in fulfillment of "the promise of the Father." This was to take place exactly fifty days after the resurrection.

This baptism with the Holy Spirit was not, of course, the baptism of Jews and Gentiles into one body. The baptism into one body was to be effected *by* the Spirit ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)), but this is associated with "the mystery," which was then as yet unknown.

The baptism here referred to was to be a baptism *with*, or *in*, the Spirit *for miraculous power*.

With regard to this subject too we find additional light in the parallel passage at the close of Luke's gospel, where we find the Lord saying:

"And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with POWER FROM ON HIGH" (Luke 24:49, and cf. [Acts 1:8](#)).

Aside from other miraculous powers which this baptism was to bestow, it was also to empower them to live as worthy representatives of the King. The Apostle Paul exhorts us today to be filled with the Spirit ([Eph. 5:18](#)) but the very fact that he *exhorts* indicates that today this filling is a provision of grace *to be appropriated by faith*. This was not so with the Pentecostal believers. They were filled with the Spirit because they were *baptized* with the Spirit, not in response to prayer or faith *but in fulfillment of a promise*. The Holy Spirit was to come and baptize His own at *the very time, at the very place* and for *the very purpose* predicted. The prophetic clock had not yet stopped ticking. But more of this later.

It is pathetic to find men of God seeking to prove that the dispensation of grace was now to begin, explaining that the apostles were instructed to begin at Jerusalem because it was "the most wicked city on earth" and that in His command to tarry for the Spirit, our Lord merely "told them not to hurry; not to run before they were sent." Such teachings, from the pens and lips of Fundamentalists, form the basis for the "back to Pentecost" fanaticism which they condemn, and betray a sad ignorance of the fact that Pentecost is related to prophecy rather than to the mystery of the Body of Christ.

True, the same Spirit who came in fulfillment of prophecy has stayed in connection with the mystery revealed through Paul, but His manifestations and operations in the present dispensation differ in many respects from those of the Pentecostal era. The Spirit who now baptizes believers into the death, the burial and the resurrection of Christ, into Christ Himself and into one body, was then to empower His servants to live pleasing to God, to speak by inspiration as prophets and to perform miracles.

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

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

In the above passage we have recorded for us the last question the apostles asked of the Lord before His ascension into heaven; a question as misunderstood as it is important.

Let the reader pause to consider this question again, carefully weighing each word and phrase, so that there may be no doubt as to its meaning:

"WILT THOU--AT THIS TIME--RESTORE AGAIN--THE KINGDOM--TO ISRAEL?"

Such words as these can mean nothing else than that the apostles expected *the Davidic kingdom* to be restored and that they suspected that its restoration might be imminent.

It is sometimes said that the apostles in asking this question, betrayed carnality and ignorance of the true nature of the kingdom which our Lord was to establish, but this charge is most unjust. The ignorance and carnality lie, not with the apostles but with their critics.

Had not God in solemn covenant promised David: "*And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever*"? (II Sam. 7:16).

Had He not written in the Psalms: *"Once have sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me"*? (Psa. 89:35,36).

Do we not read in Jer. 23:5,6, *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely "*?

Had not John the Baptist's father, filled with the Holy Spirit, said: *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life"*? (Luke 1:68-75).

And had not our Lord Himself led them to expect the establishment of a physical kingdom *on earth*?

Had he not said: *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit THE EARTH"*? (Matt. 5:5).

Had he not taught them to pray: *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done IN EARTH, as it is in heaven"*? (Matt. 6:10).

Had he not distinctly promised them: *"Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"*? (Matt. 19:28).

Had not our Lord just spent forty days with them, *"speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"*? (Acts 1:3).

And had He not already, at the *beginning* of this period, *"opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures"*? (Luke 24:45).

Why should these men be charged with ignorance when we are *told* that they understood the Scriptures?⁴ Why should they be charged with carnality for taking God at His Word and believing the statements of their Lord and Master? Is faith carnality? It is rather the very essence of spirituality.

Those who talk of "spiritualizing" the prophetic promises are the carnal ones, for in the name of spirituality they alter the plain Word of God to fit their mistaken

⁴ We do not insist that this means that they understood every detail of Old Testament prophecy, but rather that they understood the prophetic plan.

notions. Because they cannot account for the extended interruption of prophetic fulfillment which commenced shortly after the ascension of our Lord, they have assumed that God *did not mean* what He said by the prophets. Is this faith or unbelief; is it spirituality or carnality; is it intelligence or ignorance?

Those who teach the "spiritualization" of the prophetic Scriptures should acknowledge the mystery instead of altering prophecy. Once they see clearly the distinctive character of Paul's ministry and of his "preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery" it will become clear to them that the eleven apostles and their Lord all had the actual restoration of Israel's kingdom in view in their parting words.

But "spiritualization," the mother of heresies, is also practised in milder form by some who oppose it as a system of interpretation. The leading Fundamentalist from whose writings we have quoted, taught that our Lord set Israel aside for this entire dispensation before He even got to the cross, and thousands of sincere believers have followed him in this, supposing that the apostles were laboring under a delusion in thinking that the establishment of the Messianic kingdom might be imminent. In his *Lectures on the Book of Acts* this writer says:

"At the moment the work of Christ was accomplished, salvation was ready to be offered to all men everywhere . . . He [the Lord] bore patiently with His disciples and the early Christians for years while they confined their ministry exclusively to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Pp. 11, 12).

To demonstrate what confusion such teaching leads to, we must point out the fact that the *same* writer says in the *same* book:

"There is no other way of explaining the marvelous results of the apostles' preaching than this --they were endued with the power of the Holy Spirit of God . . . they needed this baptism to fit them for their service ..." (Pp. 19,20).

This after saying that the Lord had to bear patiently with the apostles for their failure to fulfill their commission!

Again, after contending that "*at the moment the work of Christ was accomplished* salvation was ready to be offered *to all men everywhere*" (*Italics ours*), he *also* says:

"The new dispensation was to be ushered in *by the coming of the Holy Ghost, ten days later*" (P. 26, *Italics ours*).

But again he contradicts *both* these statements by saying, with regard to Peter's call for the appointment of a substitute for Judas:

"But Paul was never linked with the twelve; in fact there are twelve apart from him. The twelve are to have a special place in the coming kingdom in connection

with the administration of the affairs of Israel... Peter evidently acted as the Lord instructed before His ascension" (Pp. 29,30).

Thus he acknowledges that the ministry of the twelve, unlike that of Paul, was related essentially to Israel and the Messianic kingdom, and recognizes the propriety and necessity of Peter's action in view of this fact. And this after saying that all was ready to offer salvation to all men everywhere the moment the sacrificial work of Christ was accomplished, that the new dispensation was to be ushered in at Pentecost and that the Lord had to *bear patiently* with His disciples while they ministered exclusively to Israel!

Such confusion disappears when we bear in mind the background of the passage we are considering. Nothing had as yet been revealed as to the proclamation of "the gospel of the grace of God," nor of the formation of the Church which is Christ's Body.

After their forty days with the risen Christ the eleven would, so far as the record is concerned, firmly conclude that they were to bear witness, first to Israel and then to all nations, that the crucified King had risen again and that it was God's purpose to send Him back to reign on David's throne.

Thus early Acts continues the proclamation of the Messianic kingdom to Israel in answer to our Lord's dying prayer: "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). That the apostles looked for the establishment of the kingdom is clear from the passage we are considering, only they did not know how soon this would come to pass.

A SIGNIFICANT ANSWER

"And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." --Acts 1:7.

In considering our Lord's answer to the eleven let us emphasize the fact that they had *not* asked Him whether the kingdom would be restored. They had no question as to that. They had asked: "*Lord, wilt Thou AT THIS TIME restore again the kingdom to Israel?*"

It is the same with His answer. He does not hint that there is the slightest question as to the restoration of the kingdom. He merely tells them it is not for them to know *when* it will be restored.

This is important, for had they, His appointed witnesses, still at this late date entertained a mistaken notion as to the establishment of a kingdom on earth, as some suppose, our Lord would surely have been honor-bound to correct that notion without delay.

In our Lord's reply that it was not for them to know *when* the kingdom would be restored there was the clear inference that in due time it *would be* restored. In this

matter, then, His honor was at stake. If He did not intend to restore the kingdom to Israel, His answer was certainly misleading and dishonest, for that which will not come cannot have "times and seasons." The implication, therefore, is that the apostles' question was legitimate and intelligent.

AN AWKWARD DILEMMA

This passage places those who do not recognize the truth of the mystery in an awkward dilemma.

If, for example, our A-millenarian brethren were right in their interpretation of Scripture, our Lord would have answered "Yes," to the apostles' question (though perhaps correcting their "carnal" view of the kingdom) for according to the A-millenarian view, *the Church is Israel* and Christ is *now* sitting on the throne of David. A-millennialism "spiritualizes" the kingdom promises.

If, on the other hand, the average Pre-millenarian were right our Lord would have answered "No," for the vast majority of Pre-millenarians contend that Israel was set aside at the cross and that the Body of Christ began at Pentecost.

But the interesting fact is that our Lord answered *neither* "Yes" nor "No," but "*It is not for you to know the times and the seasons.*"

The reason for this becomes unmistakably clear in the light of the mystery later revealed through Paul.

Our Lord knew something which for the time being still had to be kept secret. He knew that Israel would reject Him even in His resurrection; that the "great commission" would become "bogged down," as it were, through Israel's unbelief and would give place to another, a greater commission to proclaim the gospel of the grace of God, that the ministry of the twelve would give place to that of Paul and that the kingdom would give place to "the Church which is His Body."

Had our Lord told the apostles what the outcome of their message was to be they could not, of course, have made the same impassioned plea to Israel to accept Messiah. There would have been no heart in their offer of the kingdom.

In turn Israel might then have complained that she had not had a fair chance; that there had been no earnest call to repentance nor any bona fide offer of the kingdom.

Therefore the Lord Jesus did not tell the apostles that, humanly speaking, the restoration of the kingdom hung in the balance, but simply said: "It is not for you to know the times . . . but . . . ye shall be witnesses unto Me" This course was taken so that Israel might receive a whole-hearted offer of the kingdom and be left with no excuse for rejecting that offer.

Certainly our Lord's answer makes one fact crystal clear: that God's purpose to form "the Body Of Christ" out of reconciled Jews and Gentiles, as the masterpiece of His grace, was still a mystery at that time.

TWO KEY VERSES

It is interesting to compare the apostles' question in this opening chapter of Acts with Paul's statement in the closing chapter, some thirty years later:

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

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

These two are key verses in the Book of Acts. In the interval between them Messiah and His kingdom were offered to Israel amid the wonders of Pentecost, but Israel contemptuously rejected the offer and the privilege of bringing salvation and blessing to the nations.

How near had been the redemption of Israel! How nearly, humanly speaking, had mankind, under God, regained the mastery over Satan and the forces of evil!

"But now we see not yet all things put under him" (Heb. 2:8).

There was, however, a deeper reason why the kingdom was not yet to be established. The prophecy could not be fulfilled until the mystery had been revealed. God would allow men, even His chosen people, to show the utter perverseness of their hearts so that He might show that salvation is, and must be, by grace and *grace alone*. This is the lesson He *began* to teach as He reached down to save the chief of sinners ([I Tim. 1:12-16](#)), sending him forth to proclaim "the gospel of the grace of God." This is the lesson He is teaching today. And this is the lesson that even the favored nation must learn and will learn when finally "all Israel shall be saved."

But let us return to the Mount of Olives to hear our Lord's parting words to His eleven apostles.

THE PARTING COMMISSION

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

These parting words of our Lord to His eleven apostles are at the same time the great commission with which the Book of Acts opens, hence a clear understanding of them is of the utmost importance.

Much significance has naturally been attached to the various records of our Lord's parting commands, but it is a sad fact that at this late date in the Church's history the majority of Fundamentalists are still disagreed as to whether any or all or none of them apply to this present age. In other words, Fundamentalists of the 20th century, as a body, are still undecided as to just what our marching orders are!

CHOOSING COMMISSIONS

Erroneously assuming that our Lord, before ascending into heaven, would surely have left instructions for *us* to carry out, and at the same time troubled over certain elements in the records of His parting words which are incompatible with the gospel of the grace of God, many of the leading Bible expositors of the past generation have indulged in what we might call "choosing commissions."

Confronted with difficulties in the various accounts of the commission, such as the legalism of Matt. 28:20, the baptismal salvation and miraculous signs of Mark 16:16-18, the authority to remit sins in John 20:23 and the "Jerusalem first" of Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8, they have concluded that our Lord must have given several different commissions; that within a few days He gave the same men two or more different commissions, certain of which they were to begin carrying out as soon as the Holy Spirit should come and the rest to be carried out by another generation in the future.

And so they have chosen for our obedience whichever commission or commissions have seemed to them to present the least difficulties--*only they never have agreed on the choice.*⁵

ONE COMMISSION

We are convinced that what we have in Acts 1:8 is not one of several different commissions given by our Lord in the forty days before His ascension, but one of several different *accounts* of the same commission.

To say the least, the theory that they are different *commissions* is strained and unnatural it is too plainly a means of escape from difficulty.

Forgetting, for the moment, any attempt to apply them to this age, it is surely not strange that the different accounts of the commission should contain different details; indeed, if they did not there might be suspicion of collusion on the part of the inspired writers.

Furthermore, while the accounts are *different* they are by no means *contradictory*. However they may seem to clash with what subsequently took place they do not clash with each other. One account simply supplements another.

⁵ See the author's booklet: *This is That*, or a fuller discussion of the subject in his book: *The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism*.

In the records themselves there is no hint whatever that our Lord gave two or more different commissions. Much less is there any hint that He gave the apostles commands which, not they, but another generation of believers was to obey. His words are too clearly addressed to *them*, telling *them* where to go and what to do.

That these records all synchronize as *one great commission to them* is surely implied in Acts 1:2 and 3, where we read that our Lord was taken up "*after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen,*" having been "*seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*"

The question now remains how, if at all, the "great commission" can be shown to agree with God's revealed message and program for *this present dispensation* as it is given to us in the epistles of Paul.

But before answering this question there is still another phase of the problem to be discussed.

THE GREAT COMMISSION AND THE ELEVEN

Even among those who do not find *our* great commission in any of the records of our Lord's parting commands, there are many who consent to the view that the different records in the Gospels and the Acts are really different *commissions*.

The difficulty in their case is not, thank God, in harmonizing the records with the revealed program for this age, but in harmonizing them with *what the apostles themselves actually did*.

They point out, for example, that the commission recorded in Matt. 28 commands baptism "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," while in the Acts we do not find the apostles once using this "formula." Instead we find that believers are baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus." Hence they conclude that the commission recorded in Matthew, though addressed to the apostles, was actually not meant for them at all, but for a future generation of believers.

But such a seeming difficulty would still be poor ground, it seems to us, for putting a forced, unnatural construction upon a plain Scripture. Details difficult of explanation must give way before the plain, natural meaning of a context.

It was this same difficulty as to "formula" that caused Dr. Haldeman, who baptized in the name of the Trinity, to refuse church membership to one who had been baptized by Dr. Pettingill in the name of the Lord Jesus.

But is there any difficulty here at all? On what authority may we call the phrase in Matt. 28:19 a *formula* of words to be repeated at baptism? Surely the Scriptures nowhere call it a formula. We must be careful not to yield to mere tradition here.

The apostles, according to Matt. 28, were to baptize in the name of the triune God, but is not our Lord the *embodiment* of the Godhead?

"FOR IN HIM DWELLETH ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY" (Col. 2:9).

Furthermore, a careful study of the usage of the phrase "in the name of" and especially of the word "in" (Gr. *eis*) will show that the phrase does not necessarily mean "into the person of" at all, but rather "as a representative of," or "by the authority of."

The fact that the eleven did not--so far as the record is concerned--actually go into all the world also poses a problem for some who nevertheless hold that a different commission is ours. Some of them, indeed, hold that the Acts commission alone was actually given for the apostles' obedience and should read: "Ye shall be witnesses . . . unto the limits of the land," instead of "unto the uttermost part of the earth." This, they feel, is the solution to their problem, for while there is no record of the apostles going to the uttermost part of the *earth* they did reach the limits of the *land*, that is, the land of Palestine.

But surely Luke 11:31 and Acts 13:47 are correctly rendered in the Authorized Version: "*the utmost parts of the earth*" and "*the ends of the earth*." In these passages the same phraseology, and precisely the word in question (Gr. *ge*), is used, but it is evident that the Queen of Sheba did not come merely from the limits of the land of Palestine to visit Solomon and it is also evident that our Lord was not appointed to be for salvation only to the limits of Palestine!

The rendering of *ge* as *land* in Acts 1:8 is, like the choosing of commissions from the various records, but a means of escape from a difficulty--an illegitimate use of a technicality. "Unto the uttermost part of the earth" is unquestionably correct and harmonizes perfectly with the "all nations," "all the world" and "every creature" of the other records.

THE SOLUTION

The simple solution to the problem is that while the so-called "great commission," as recorded both in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts, was indeed given to the eleven, it is not our commission at all. The reason they did not complete it was not because they would not, but because they *could* not. It was due to Israel's stubborn rejection of Messiah.

The eleven (increased to twelve after the ascension, Acts 1:26) would gladly have made disciples of all nations but they had received explicit directions to begin with the nation Israel. The reason for this will be clear to those who remember that according to the great Abrahamic and Davidic covenants and according to all prophecy the nations were to be blessed through *that* nation. This is why the apostles labored so earnestly to bring Israel to Messiah's feet. Hear Peter as he pleads with them in Solomon's porch:

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

"Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:25,26).

But Israel spurned the plea and God cast aside the rebellious nation until a future day.

However, we learn from Rom. 11:15 that "THE CASTING AWAY OF THEM" opened the way for "THE RECONCILING OF THE WORLD."

To this amazing declaration two other passages should be added, Rom. 11:32 and Eph. 2:16:

"FOR GOD HATH CONCLUDED THEM ALL IN UNBELIEF, THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL."

"AND THAT HE MIGHT RECONCILE BOTH UNTO GOD IN ONE BODY BY THE CROSS, HAVING SLAIN THE ENMITY THEREBY."

OUR GREAT COMMISSION

"But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

It was when sin had risen to its height, when Israel had joined the Gentiles in their rebellion against God and had declared war on Messiah, God's Anointed, that God in His infinite grace reached down to save the leader of the rebellion and make of him the great apostle of grace.

To him, and through him to us, the greatest commission of all has been given.

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, AND HATH GIVEN TO US THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION;

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; AND HATH COMMITTED UNTO US THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION.

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

"For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (II Cor. 5:18-21).

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH

Let us then be careful to rightly divide the Word of truth so that we may be approved of God, workmen that need not be ashamed. Let us make sure that we understand His will for us, lest He charge us with having zeal without knowledge, because of indifference to His Word.

The legalism of Matthew 28:20, the baptismal salvation and miraculous signs of Mark 16:16-18, the authority to remit sins⁶ of John 20:23 and the "Jerusalem first" of Luke and the Acts all harmonize perfectly with the program which the twelve apostles actually followed during the Pentecostal period, but they do not harmonize with *our* great commission and whenever men try to practice them today frustration and confusion follow. For the most part Fundamentalists merely talk about "obeying the great commission" but do not--indeed, *cannot*--obey any record of it.

But our glorious commission is perfectly appropriate to the day in which we live. In our offer of salvation there is nothing for the sight, neither baptism with water nor miraculous signs. Works for salvation are not required or even permitted, for "*Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested.*" Neither is our message related to the earth, that we should begin at the capital of one nation and go from there to make disciples of other nations. It is simply a message to poor lost sinners everywhere, offering them reconciliation to God by grace, through faith in His rejected Son.

This is our commission. May we faithfully carry it out!

⁶ Instrumentally, by water baptism (Acts 2:38).

Chapter III - Acts 1:9-26

FROM THE ASCENSION TO PENTECOST

THE ASCENSION

"And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." -- Acts 1:9.

It is interesting to observe that God first appeared to Israel *in a cloud*--not a *rain* cloud, of course, but the Shekinah cloud, the visible vehicle of the divine presence and majesty. Enshrouded in what appeared as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, Jehovah Himself led His people through the wilderness (Ex. 13:21,22; I Cor. 10:1).⁷

After our Lord had "given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen," it was this cloud that "received Him *out of their sight*." They could not have looked upon the sight that later blinded Saul of Tarsus. It was not theirs to behold the greater glory of the Son of God as He ascended "far above all." The cloud received Him out of their sight.

This fact should be clearly noted, for it is significant of the distinction between the ministries of the twelve apostles and Paul. The twelve had seen Christ *only* on earth, *never* in heaven, while with Paul it was the very opposite. He had *never* seen Christ on earth and *only* in heaven.

This distinction is further seen in the matter of His return, for of His actual return *to earth* we read:

"And then shall they SEE the Son of Man COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27).

But of our Lord's coming for *us*, the members of His Body, we read:

"... the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be CAUGHT UP together with them IN THE CLOUDS, to meet the Lord in the air . . ." (I Thes. 4:16,17).⁸

⁷ It has been suggested that this "cloud" was the host of His attending angels. This suggestion is at least not inconsistent with the Scriptural use of the word, for the same root is used in Heb. 12:1, where we read of "a *cloud* of witnesses." This would also agree with the fact that He is frequently shown as appearing in "clouds" (plural) and is called, again and again, "the Lord of hosts."

⁸ Luke 9:34 may at first appear to deny this distinction, since there we read that at the transfiguration three of the twelve apostles "entered into the cloud." But first of all, the preposition there is *eis*, while in I Thes. 4:17 it is the *stronger* word *en*, "*being or remaining within*." Secondly, our Lord had already been "transfigured," *before* this cloud "*overshadowed them . . . and there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear Him*." It was thus the *Father* who appeared in the cloud that overshadowed them, nor had they seen Christ in the *celestial* glory which was later to be His (See Matt. 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36; cf. II Pet. 1:16-18).

Israel's calling and prospect were earthly; ours are *heavenly*. He will return *to earth* to reign over them, but first he will call us *to heaven* to be with Him. Indeed, *positionally* we are already raised from the dead with Christ and, as members of His Body, are made to sit together in the heavenlies, blessed with all spiritual blessings ([Eph. 1:3; 2:4-6](#)). As we consider these early chapters of Acts, then, we must bear in mind that our relationship to Christ is, by grace, much closer than that of the nation Israel.

THE ASCENSION AND PROPHECY

We must not anticipate revelation or read Ephesians into Acts. We must remember that the purpose of God concerning the Body of Christ and its heavenly calling and position was still a secret at the time of our Lord's ascension.

His ascension was *in fulfillment of prophecy* and the prophets had said nothing; indeed, had *known* nothing, of the ascension of Christ to become Head of a joint body of believing Jews and Gentiles.

What, then, was the prophetic significance of the ascension? Basically it bespoke the divine displeasure at the rejection of Christ (even though God was to offer another opportunity for repentance) and foretold the judgment to be visited upon His enemies. See, for example, Psa. 110:1:

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool."

Prophetically the Lord also ascended, however, that He might send the Holy Spirit to sustain and empower His own in preparation for the great tribulation and His return to reign.

We must not forget that according to prophecy the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the harbinger of the great tribulation and the day of the Lord ([Joel 2:28-31](#)). As in the law the feast of Pentecost preceded that of Trumpets, so in prophecy the true Pentecost was to precede and introduce the trumpets of the great tribulation. The prophetic Scriptures know nothing of a dispensation of grace between.

And now it was the ascended Lord who was to send the Spirit to His own:

"And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you ..." (Luke 24:49).

"... if I depart, I will send Him unto you" (John 16:7).

THE PROMISE OF HIS RETURN

"And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

"Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 'This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.' --Acts 1:10,11.

It is a great mistake to suppose that this passage refers to the rapture of believers at the close of the present dispensation. To do this is again to confuse prophecy with the mystery revealed years later through the Apostle Paul.

According to prophecy the rejected Messiah was to return to earth to occupy the throne of David and reign over Israel and the world. And He was to return "in like manner" as He had now ascended. As we have seen, our Lord Himself had foretold this coming, when He said:

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming IN A CLOUD with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27).

To this the prophet Zechariah adds the following significant detail:

"AND HIS FEET SHALL STAND IN THAT DAY UPON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES" (Zech. 14:4).

This is the very spot from whence He had ascended in a cloud (See [Acts 1:9,12](#)).

Surely it was natural for the apostles to stand gazing up into heaven after the Lord was received out of their sight. This was natural entirely apart from any expectation of His return. Yet, mark well, the shining ones ask them: "*Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?*" and proceed to remind them that this same Jesus will come back--back to earth --just as they have seen Him go up *from* the earth. They were *not* to be occupied with the Lord *in heaven*, as we are today. They were to be occupied with His return *to earth* to reign.

But might He not return presently?

Not yet.

Specific events had been predicted as the signs of His return and these signs had, of course, not yet begun to appear.

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Let us consider carefully the words of our Lord in Luke 21:25-28:

"And there shall be SIGNS in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

"Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

"AND WHEN THESE THINGS BEGIN TO COME TO PASS, THEN LOOK UP, AND LIFT UP YOUR HEADS; FOR YOUR REDEMPTION DRAWETH NIGH."

Clearly then, our Lord could not return so soon after His departure. It is true that no man could know the day nor the hour of His return, but specific signs were to herald its approach. Pentecost and the tribulation must first come and the specific instructions were: When the signs of the tribulation begin to appear "*then look up.*"

Meanwhile there was much to be done. Our Lord had instructed the apostles to remain at Jerusalem until they should be endued with power to go forth as witnesses for their risen King.

Little wonder, then, that the shining ones sought to bring them back to earth again, as it were, with the promise that "this same Jesus" would return again just as they had seen Him go up. Significantly verse 12 reads:

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem "

Theirs was an earthly position, an earthly ministry and an earthly prospect. They had companied with Christ in the flesh and knew Him only after the flesh. They were to reign with Him over the twelve tribes of Israel ([Matt. 19:28](#)). And now they had been sent to bring the nations, and particularly *the* nation, in repentance and obedience to Messiah's feet ([Matt. 28:19](#))

OUR BLESSED HOPE NOT DEPENDENT UPON SIGNS

How different is our calling and our hope! We are instructed to be *always* looking up, occupied with our Lord in His glory in heaven and daily awaiting His coming--not to reign on earth, but to take us to heaven.

Paul, the apostle of this dispensation, reminds the Gentile believers at Thessalonica:

"... ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

"AND TO WAIT FOR HIS SON FROM HEAVEN . . ." (I Thes. 1:9,10).

To the Philippians he writes:

"For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also WE LOOK FOR THE SAVIOR, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

He reminds Titus that he should be even then

"LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13).

No angel will ever question us for being occupied with the heavenly position and ministry of our Lord, nor for looking daily, momentarily, for His coming to catch us away.

Paul himself expected to be among those "caught up" without dying (I [Thes. 4:15,17](#)). He never dreamed that the dispensation of grace would last for nearly two thousand years. So far as signs and prophecy are concerned there has been nothing to hinder the Lord from closing the day of grace and catching away His own at any time from Paul's day to ours. It is grace and grace alone that has caused Him to hold off the day of judgment and to extend His offer of reconciliation until now.

Let the lost and the saved both take note of this fact. Not one more day of grace has been *promised*; not one more day in which the lost may be saved or the saved may toil for Him.

Pleading with the lost, the apostle of grace says, by the Spirit:

"We then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

"... Behold, NOW is the accepted time; behold, NOW is the day of salvation" (II Cor. 6:1,2).

And pleading with God's people to take advantage of the opportunity to win the lost while they may, he says:

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

"REDEEMING [BUYING UP] THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL" (Eph. 5:15,16).

THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM

"Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey.

"And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren." --Acts 1:12-14.

The apostles now returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is but a sabbath day's journey, a very short distance from the city proper.

In his gospel record Luke adds the significant detail that the apostles "*worshipped Him [Christ] and returned to Jerusalem with great joy*" (Luke 24:52).

This was far from a sorrowful bereavement. Once before it had seemed that He was taken away from them, and that by the death of the cross, yet He had proved Himself to be Lord of all. How could they doubt now?

This, of all times, was a time when they *would* rejoice and worship Him. Having spent forty days with the risen Christ, having now seen Him ascend to heaven in the shekinah glory and having been assured by the "men... in white apparel" that He would return in the same way--all this must have called forth from the hearts of the apostles the most profound adoration and have given them a deep sense of confidence and joy.

With all this fresh in their minds, and with their Lord's parting promise of the Spirit still ringing in their ears, it is not strange that they, and the other disciples with them, gave themselves to prayer for the next ten days. Mark well, however, that it was not their prayers that were to bring the outpouring of the Spirit. This had already been specifically promised and a definite day was set for it.

The disciples joined in continued prayer because they knew that the great day of the Spirit's coming and their enduement with power was at hand and they naturally sought close fellowship with God. This is a truth about prayer which the religious masses continually miss. They think of prayer merely as a means of getting things from God, while in fact God has instructed us to present our needs to Him simply *to draw us closer to Himself*. Surely He knows what we need without our asking for it, but He desires our *fellowship* and has instituted the practice of prayer basically for that purpose. And surely if He desires our fellowship we should desire His, entirely apart from any temporal needs. Indeed, as we see prayer in its true light, our prayers will be mingled with worship and thanksgiving, and we will make those requests which will most glorify Him.

It would appear from the record that the disciples maintained permanent quarters in Jerusalem, for we read that "*when they were come in, they went up into an upper room.*" This room, it seems, was of considerable size, for it evidently accommodated at least one hundred twenty persons.

It is further evident from this passage that the apostles and disciples did not consider Mary the sinless divinity that Rome has since made of her, for they all prayed "*with the women, and Mary... and with His brethren*" (Ver. 14). In no sense is she placed on a higher level than they, and certainly she is not *prayed to*. Indeed, she takes her place with the other women while Peter rises to address the "men and brethren" (Vers. 15,16). And this is the last time she is mentioned in

Scripture. Instead of any reference to a bodily ascension to heaven⁹ or an elevation to a place of intercession for believers, she passes off the scene as a woman joining in prayer with other women and men in a common prayer meeting.

Indeed, not only the Lord's mother, but His brothers are mentioned as taking part in this prayer meeting (Ver. 14). Some time previous they had not believed in Him, but their hearts had since been changed and now they are found praying with their mother and with the others gathered in the upper room.

JUDAS' SUCCESSOR CHOSEN

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

"Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.

"For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.

"Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.

"And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.

"For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

"Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

"And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

"And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

"That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

⁹ A legend which the Church of Rome in 1951 proclaimed as an article of her faith, to be held by all Catholics on pain of excommunication. Prior to that *no* Catholic need believe it! Thus Rome, the vaunted infallible custodian of the truth since the time of Christ, has discovered another "truth" which she apparently overlooked or neglected for nineteen centuries, yet suddenly is made so vital in its importance that those who now deny it must endure the tortures of eternal hell!

"And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." --Acts 1:15-26.

The first official act of the eleven was the appointment of a successor to Judas to bring their number up to twelve again.

Some theologians still hold that the choice of Matthias as Judas' successor was a great mistake. They believe that this choice was made in the flesh; that the disciples were out of order in appointing two candidates and then asking God to choose between them; that they should have waited for God to appoint a successor and that this was demonstrated by the fact that God later appointed Paul anyway. In short they believe that Paul, not Matthias, was God's man for Judas' place.

But it is the theologians, not our Lord's disciples, who have made the mistake, thus betraying their ignorance of the character, not only of Paul's ministry, but also of that of the twelve.

MATTHIAS GOD'S MAN

That another was to be chosen for Judas' place the Scriptures had intimated, as Peter pointed out in his address to the assembly:

"For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate ... and his bishoprick let another take" (Acts 1:20 cf. [Psa. 109:8](#)).

Also, the Lord had promised that as a body of *twelve* men they should occupy *twelve* thrones in His kingdom (Matt 19:28; Luke 22:28-30).

They were acting, then, in obedience to the Scriptures and in harmony with the promise of their Master.

But, it may be asked, why did they have to choose another apostle just then? The answer is that in a few days the Holy Spirit was to come and the Messianic kingdom was to be offered to Israel. There must therefore be *twelve* men *ready to sit upon twelve thrones* with their Messiah.

Furthermore, let us not overlook the fact that the "little flock" had been given official authority to act for their Master in His absence. He had said:

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 18:18,19).

To charge that the disciples acted first and prayed later is as untrue as it is unfair. Their act was bathed in prayer. Verse 15 says:

"And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said. . ."

In what days? The preceding verse explains that they were days of much prayer:

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren" (Ver. 14).

It was after continued and united prayer, then, that the matter of another apostle was brought up.

It is not at all strange that only two were appointed to choose from, for Peter, in his address to the disciples goes on to say:

"Wherefore OF THESE MEN WHICH HAVE COMPANIED WITH US ALL THE TIME THAT THE LORD JESUS WENT IN AND OUT AMONG US,

"BEGINNING FROM THE BAPTISM OF JOHN, UNTO THAT SAME DAY THAT HE WAS TAKEN UP FROM US, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection" (Ver. 21,22).

This basic requirement was very exacting. There could surely not have been many who had followed with the Lord and His apostles continually, *throughout His entire ministry*. And the reason for this requirement is not hard to find. Had not our Lord said:

".. . Ye which have FOLLOWED ME . . . shall sit upon twelve thrones . . ." (Matt. 19:28).

Had He not said:

"Ye are they which have CONTINUED WITH ME in my temptations [testings].

"And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto me" (Luke 22:28-29).

No doubt Matthias and Barsabas were the only two who were eligible for the vacant throne. Indeed, with whatever other requirements there must have been, it seems remarkable that there were even two out of one hundred and twenty who would qualify.

And even these two were taken to the Lord in prayer.

"And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou has chosen" (Ver. 24).

Finally, that Matthias was indeed God's choice for Judas' place, is evident from what we read in the very next passage:

"AND THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST . . ." (Acts 2:4).

This is surely confirmation enough! Had the one hundred twenty been out of the will of God in this important matter, *none* of them would have been filled with the Holy Spirit. Men acting in the flesh, or out of the will of God, are not filled with the Spirit. And had Matthias been the wrong man for this most important position *he* would surely not have been filled with the Spirit. But they were *all* filled with the Spirit. This evidence is final and conclusive.

PAUL NOT ONE OF THE TWELVE

That Paul could not have taken Judas' place as one of the twelve is evident from the following considerations:

First, he was not *even* saved at that time, so could not have been chosen in time for Pentecost and the offer of the kingdom.

Second, could the choice have waited, he would not have been eligible at *any* time, for he had not continued with Christ in His earthly ministry--indeed, had not even *seen* Him.

Third, Paul was reserved for a special ministry entirely separate and distinct from that of the twelve (See [Acts 20;24](#); [Gal. 1:11,12,17-19](#); [2:2,7-9](#); [Rom. 11:13; 15:15,16](#); [Eph. 3:1-3](#)).

MATTHIAS NUMBERED WITH THE ELEVEN

"And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26).

What a reward for Matthias!

During the years just gone by he must have seen many failures in the twelve, for he was always with them. He must often have wondered why the Lord had chosen men like Peter and Thomas while leaving him apparently unnoticed. And who knows what he may have known or suspected about Judas? Yet he had continued a faithful follower of the Lord from the very beginning to the very end of His ministry on earth.

And now, at last, his faithfulness had been rewarded. Chosen by God Himself, *"he was numbered with the eleven apostles"!*

And what of "Joseph called Barsabas?" He too had been faithful and was now the only remaining one without an office (1:23).

May it not be that this Joseph Barsabas was none other than Joses Barnabas of Acts 4:36, who later became Paul's companion in travel, the Lord having reserved an even better portion for him?

Chapter IV - Acts 2:1-14

PENTECOST

It was only after the number of the apostles had again been brought up to twelve, that all was in readiness for the coming of the Holy Spirit and the offer of the kingdom to Israel. This must be clearly seen if we would understand the character of the book of Acts.

AN ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTION

It is supposed by many that Pentecost marks the historical beginning of the Church of this dispensation, the Body of Christ.

This, of course, is assumed on the premise that the so-called "great commission" embodies our Lord's "marching orders" for the Church today. But the premise is wrong and so is the conclusion drawn from it.

There is *no Scriptural basis whatever* for the premise that the Body of Christ began, historically, with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. There is, however, much Scriptural evidence to the contrary.

1. The record of Pentecost says nothing whatever about the Body of Christ; we do not read of this until we come to the epistles of Paul.

2. Pentecost was a Jewish feast day, not related in any way to the Body of Christ.

3. Only Jews were recognized in Peter's Pentecostal address (See [2:5,14,22,36](#)) while the Body of Christ is "*one new man*" composed of *both Jews and Gentiles* reconciled to God in one body, and is the result of the breaking down of the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile.

Eph. 2:14-16, "For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

"Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

"And that He might reconcile both unto God in one Body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

4. The Jew, like the Gentile, had to be *alienated* from God before both Jews and Gentiles could be *reconciled* to God in one body. This is why Israel had to be cast away nationally before God could offer reconciliation to the world and form the Body of Christ.

Rom. 11:32: "For God hath concluded them ALL in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon ALL."

Eph. 2:17: "And [He] came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that WERE nigh."

This is why Rom. 11:15 speaks of *"the casting away of them"* (Israel) in connection with *"the reconciling of the world."*

God's dealings with Israel at Pentecost prove that He had not yet concluded them in unbelief or cast them away at that time.

5. The kingdom was not even offered to Israel until Pentecost; how could the Body have begun then (See [Acts 2:30-39](#); [3:19-21](#)). It was when Israel refused this offer that the nation was set aside and the Body formed.

6. At the feast of Pentecost there were *two loaves* ([Lev. 23:17](#)) representing, doubtless, Israel and Judah, which two houses, though brought together in the kingdom, will still maintain their identity. But the body of Christ is *one loaf*, with believing Jews and Gentiles losing their identity in Christ.

I Cor. 10:17: "For we being many are ONE BREAD, and ONE BODY; for we are all partaken of that ONE BREAD" (cf. [Gal. 3:27,28](#)).

7. At Pentecost the disciples were baptized with, or *in*, the Spirit *for power* ([Acts 1:8](#)). This is quite different from baptism by the Spirit into Christ and His Body.

8. At Pentecost the Lord Jesus was the Baptizer, baptizing His people with, or *in*, the Holy Spirit ([Mark 1:7,8](#)). Today the Holy Spirit is the Baptizer, baptizing believers into Christ and His Body ([Gal. 3:27,28](#); [I Cor. 12:13](#)).

9. At Pentecost only Jews were baptized with, or *in*, the Holy Spirit. How, then, could this have been the baptism by which "one Spirit" baptizes believers "into one body, *whether they be Jews or Gentiles*"? ([I Cor. 12:13](#)).

THE ADVENT OF THE SPIRIT

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

"And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." --[Acts 2:1-3](#).

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come."

Since "Pentecost" means simply "fiftieth," the phrase "fully come," may refer to the completion of the fifty days from the Feast of Firstfruits. However, we believe that more is involved in this phrase.

As the resurrection of Christ was the fulfillment of the yearly Feast of Firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:23) so this Pentecost, just fifty days later, was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the coming of the Spirit, and the great antitype of the yearly Feasts of Pentecost which had until then been held.

The Spirit's advent on this day was marked, first of all, by a sound "as of a rushing mighty wind" and "cloven tongues like as of fire," or rather, fire cleaving and alighting as tongues of flame upon each of them.

This passage must not be confused with Matt. 3:11, where we read that our Lord was to baptize "*with the Holy Ghost and with fire,*" for while the baptism of the Holy Spirit in that case indeed looked forward to Pentecost, the baptism with fire referred to judgment to come, as a reference to both the preceding and the following verses will reveal (See Matt. 3:10,12).

These were "tongues of fire," and their appearance was preceded by a sudden sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.

The wind, of course, is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, as our Lord indicated when He said:

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

It should be noted also that while winds normally blow in a horizontal direction, this sounded like a wind suddenly blowing *down* from heaven and it filled the house--not the wind, but the *sound*--and thus the disciples were given to know that the promised Spirit had come. Further, this sounded like "*a rushing mighty wind,*" not a gentle breeze, and indicated the power with which the Spirit was about to work.

Tongues and fire are brought together again in James 3 where the apostle says "*The tongue is a fire . . . set on fire of hell ... the tongue can no man tame*" and "*Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*" (James 3:5-8).

It is true that no *man* can tame the tongue, but *God* can do it and was about to do it now, for as these believers presently began to speak "with other tongues," they were perfectly under the control of the Holy Spirit. Their tongues were set on fire of *heaven*, and what a great matter those little fires kindled!

THE DISCIPLES FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

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

Those who hold that Pentecost marks the historical beginning of the Church of this dispensation should examine carefully those Scriptures which deal with the Holy Spirit and His work. A simple comparison of His operation at Pentecost with His operation today, as outlined in the Pauline Epistles, can lead to but one conclusion: that the baptism with, or in, the Spirit at Pentecost has been superseded by another baptism altogether--that by which believers are baptized into one body--and that the Body of Christ did not exist (except in the mind of God) when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost. If our Fundamentalist leaders will verify and accept this fact, they will have the answer to the "Pentecostal" fanaticism that is gaining such headway in our day.

As we have said, the disciples were not filled with the Spirit because they had prayed long or earnestly enough, but because "the day of Pentecost had fully come"; because the time had arrived for the fulfillment of a *promise*. They had been instructed to tarry at Jerusalem to "*wait for the promise*" of the Spirit, not to *pray* for Him to come ([Acts 1:4](#)).

These one hundred twenty believers had been much like other believers down through history. They had not all been equally spiritual or devoted or faithful. Some had been more so than others, and where some had excelled in one virtue, others had excelled in another. Yet now, suddenly, they were *all* FILLED with the Spirit.

But with Israel's full rejection of Messiah this order passed away. Paul now *exhorts* us: "*Be filled with the Spirit*" (Eph. 5:18). This is something to be attained by faith. Let the honest believer ask himself whether he has ever been *filled* with the Spirit--fully under His control. Ah, we may have felt His power and experienced His help at times; we may have received His guidance and light, and enjoyed His liberty, but who of us can honestly say that he has ever been *filled* with the Spirit any more than he can say that he has been "*filled with the fruits of righteousness*" (Phil. 1:11) or "*filled with the knowledge of His will*" (Col. 1:9) or "*filled with all the fulness of God*" (Eph. 3:19).

Certainly Paul did *not--could not--say* of the Corinthians or the Galatians or the Philippians or the Colossians that *they* were all filled with the Spirit. The record proves that they were not, else why the exhortations and rebukes in his letters to them?

The filling with the Spirit, like the other "fillings" referred to above, is now an *objective* set before us by grace, and as we seek, by faith, to realize this objective rich, deep blessings and real spiritual victories are already ours, to say nothing of the rewards to come. What a challenge to faith! Yet few accept the challenge, and thus it again becomes evident that God's people on earth will never consistently

please and honor Him until He Himself takes Control and *causes* them to; until the Holy Spirit takes possession of them and supernaturally controls them. This is what will take place when the Old Testament prophecies about the Spirit are fulfilled ([Ezek. 36:24-28](#)) and this is what Pentecost was a foretaste of.¹⁰

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

But why was it necessary for them to speak with other tongues?

Because they were to be *witnesses*, from Jerusalem to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Witnesses of *what*?

Witnesses of the resurrection of the crucified *King*, and the miraculous gift of tongues was another supernatural sign that our Lord was the rightful King.¹¹

It is frequently supposed that these apostles were sent "to testify the gospel of the grace of God," but there is no Scriptural foundation whatever for this assumption, for neither this phrase nor the message is found in the Scriptures until we come to the Apostle Paul (See [Acts 20:24](#) and cf. [Eph. 3:1-3](#)). Those who would understand the message of grace must get this clear in their minds.

In their last conversation with the risen Lord the eleven had asked Him whether He would *now* restore the kingdom to Israel ([Acts 1:6](#)) and while He had declined to tell them *when* this kingdom would be restored, He had commissioned them to go forth as His witnesses--obviously to proclaim Him as the risen King, for this was how they knew Him.

At Pentecost they began to carry out this "great commission" and *did* proclaim Him as King ([Acts 2:29-36](#); [3:19-21](#)). Indeed, had Israel accepted her Messiah the apostles could then have proceeded to bring the other nations to Messiah's feet.¹²

The twelve knew nothing yet of God's secret purpose and the exceeding grace which was to be manifested with the raising up of Paul. They did not know that the King and His kingdom would be rejected and that the prophetic program would be interrupted by the unfolding of the mystery kept secret since the world began.

Thank God we now know that it was His purpose to conclude Israel in unbelief along with the Gentiles that He might show mercy to all; to hold the Messianic kingdom in abeyance so that "the dispensation of the grace of God" might be brought in and poor, lost sinners in a world doomed to judgment might find

¹⁰ See the author's booklet: *The Believer's Walk in This Present Evil Age*.

¹¹ With Israel's rejection of Christ, of course, tongues continued rather as "a sign . . . to them that believe not" (I Cor. 14:22); then were done away (I Cor. 13:8).

¹² It is true that Israel's rejection of Christ and the resulting Judgments had already been predicted, but all this must be viewed in the light of such passages as Matt. 23:37; Luke 4:18,19; 19:41,42.

salvation full and free, by grace, through faith in the crucified, risen, exalted Son of God.

PENTECOSTALISM AND PENTECOST

"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

"Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

"And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans?

"And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

"Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

"Phrygia, and Pamphilia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes,

"Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

"And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?

"Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine." --Acts 2:5-13.

Modern Pentecostalism has perverted the true meaning of Pentecost. It has taught that the gift of tongues is bestowed today as a divine evidence of true salvation and of the possession of the Holy Spirit.

It is true that during the Pentecostal era the gift of tongues was one of the evidences of salvation, for our Lord had said: "*These signs shall follow them that believe.*" But our Pentecostalist friends must not overlook the fact that the disciples who first received the gift of tongues at Pentecost had been saved for some time prior to Pentecost and had received the Holy Spirit even before the ascension of Christ ([John 20:19-22](#)).

Tongues, like the other signs of the so-called "great commission," had a far deeper significance than the salvation of the individual who wrought them.

According to our Lord's commission in Mark 16, those who believed were not only to speak with tongues, but also to "*cast out devils [demons] . . . take up serpents ... drink any deadly thing [and] it shall not hurt them... lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*"

All this looked forward to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, for in the process of its establishment, God's messengers were to attack the kingdom of Satan and defy sickness and death itself.

Let us see from the Scriptures, then, how the gift of tongues took its place right along with these other signs which pointed to the earthly establishment of the kingdom.

BABEL AND PENTECOST

There is a distinct relation between what happened at Babel in the days before Abram's call and what took place here at Pentecost more than two thousand years later.

There, at Babel, God judged man's rebellion with THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES; *here* He bestowed THE GIFT OF TONGUES. *There* His purpose was the *scattering* of the race ([Gen. 11:7, 8](#)); *here*, its *regathering*, beginning, of course, with Israel. (See [Luke 24:47](#); [John 11:51,52](#); [Rom. 15:8-10](#)).

Since Israel rejected the glorified Christ, this gift has been withdrawn ([1 Cor. 13:8](#)) and the Jews, like the rebels at Babel, have been scattered to the ends of the earth, while the Millennial kingdom and blessing are held in abeyance until a future day.

In our day, therefore, God is not carrying on negotiations with, or through, any nation. The Jews joined the Gentiles in rebellion against God and His Christ, and have been scattered along with the Gentiles, *all* of them concluded in unbelief.

But let us never cease to thank God that "*where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*" ([Rom. 5:20](#)).

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, THAT HE MIGHT HAVE MERCY UPON ALL" ([Rom. 11:32](#)).

"AND THAT HE MIGHT RECONCILE BOTH UNTO GOD IN ONE BODY BY THE CROSS, HAVING SLAIN THE ENMITY THEREBY" ([Eph. 2:16](#)).

The call, therefore, is now to *individuals* in a world given up to judgment, as in infinite love and mercy, God offers reconciliation, by grace through faith, to all who wilt accept His rejected Son as their Savior.

A BEWILDERED MULTITUDE

It seems clear from a comparison of Acts 1:15 with Acts 2:1-4 that not merely the twelve, but the one hundred and twenty were given the gift of tongues. The passage we are now considering confirms this, for in this list of languages and dialects spoken, more than twelve appear.

Pentecost was one of Israel's three annual feasts at which every male was required to appear at the sanctuary at Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14-17). The disciples, therefore, had a vast audience of "Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven," in which many more than twelve languages were represented.

No Gentiles, of course, are even mentioned. Any who may have been present were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12). They would have nothing whatever to do with this celebration, nor did Peter even address them as he arose to speak to the multitude (See Acts 2:14,22,36).

As to the great Jewish multitude, they *"were confounded... they were all amazed and marvelled and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?"* There were also some who mocked, saying: *"These men are full of new wine."*

And now the twelve apostles rise, with Peter as their leader, to explain the strange phenomenon.

PETER AND THE ELEVEN

"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:" --Acts 2:14.

How beautiful is the harmony of the Word of God! How precise its phraseology! How appropriate that on this momentous occasion we should find *"Peter standing up with the eleven"!*?

A GROUP OF MEN

This brief statement which introduces Peter's Pentecostal address may at first seem rather unimportant--a mere statement of facts with which to start the story--but in fact it is most important and significant.

First of all, God would draw our attention here to a particular *group* of men--*the apostles*. To these men had been given authority to act officially in the Lord's absence. To them the Lord Himself had said:

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:18-20).

We realize that the last verse of this passage has so long been used out of its setting that it is difficult for many people to associate it in their minds with its immediate context. Even the Scofield Reference Bible places over these words the sub-heading: "*The simplest form of a local church.*" Much as we praise God for the great work Dr. Scofield has done, we must take issue here, for this heading entirely disregards the context, giving the impression that this was spoken of *local assemblies during this dispensation of grace*, while in reality it has to do with polity in the Messianic Church.

Let the reader glance again at the quotation of the passage above and note how the "For" of Verse 20 connects it with the preceding verse. Our Lord had just promised that if *two* of them should agree on earth as touching anything that they should ask, His Father would grant them their request *because where two or three* were gathered in His name, there *He* was in their midst. That is, thus gathered, they represented *Him*. *Similarly* the "Again" of Verse 19 connects it with Verse 18, which is the beginning of the whole promise that whatever they should bind on earth would be bound in heaven and whatever they should loose on earth should be loosed in heaven. Would any believer, rightly dividing the Word of truth, claim this authority today? How wrong, then, to wrench Matt. 18:20 from its plain context and impose upon it another meaning.

We do not deny that the Lord will meet in blessed fellowship with two hundred or even with two who have gathered with sincere hearts to study His Word and pray, but will He not even be with *one* who truly desires His presence? Do there have to be two or three? Did not Paul say, with regard to his first appearance before the Emperor Nero: "*No man stood with me, but all men forsook me... Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me . . .*"? (II Tim. 4:16,17). Indeed, there is an even higher truth here for believers today to learn and rejoice in. It is the truth that in God's sight *we* have been exalted together "*with Him*" in the heavenlies. Whereas the outstanding feature of the promised kingdom will be that God, in Christ, dwells with man, "*God with us,*" the outstanding feature of the mystery is our position "*with Him*" in the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3; 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-3).

While God's people today, then, are seated with Christ, positionally, and while He will indeed be with them--whether one hundred or one--in their daily experience, that is not the point in Matt. 18:20. The "two or three," here, takes us back to the Mosaic law, where we read that "*at the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established*" (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; II Cor. 13:1).

What Matt. 18 teaches is simply that the apostles were to have authority to act officially in His absence (Ver. 18); that they did not all have to be together to act; that even two would be sufficient (Ver. 19) for where but two or three were come together *in His name* (i.e., representing Him) there *He* was present.

Thus the apostles arose, at Pentecost, as official representatives of the rejected Messiah.

TWELVE MEN

Our attention is next drawn to the *number of the apostles*. There were twelve--not eleven, but twelve. Judas' betrayal and suicide had, of course, left only eleven apostles with their risen Lord, but since that time Matthias had been chosen and had been "numbered with the eleven" (1:26) bringing the number up to twelve again. Hence here we have "Peter, standing up *with the eleven*."

The reason for this is not difficult to find, for presently the kingdom was to be offered to Israel and in that kingdom there were to be *twelve* thrones on which the apostles were to sit, judging the *twelve* tribes of Israel.

Besides giving them authority to act officially in His absence, our Lord had, as we have seen, promised them twelve thrones in the kingdom. This is why a successor to Judas had to be chosen before Pentecost, and this is why we here find "*Peter, standing up with the eleven*."

ONE MAN

And this is not all, for it should still further be noted that in this passage the greatest prominence of all is given to *one man--Peter*. It is not merely twelve men standing up, but "*Peter, standing up with the eleven*." He alone is *named*. And this is consistently so in early Acts. The reader will recall that in Acts 1:15 it was "*Peter*" who "*stood up in the midst of the disciples*" and proposed the appointment of a successor to Judas. Here in Acts 2:14, "*Peter, standing up with the eleven*," brings the great Pentecostal address. At the close of that address those who were convicted said to "*Peter and to the rest of the apostles*, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (2:37). And later, when persecuted for Christ, "*Peter and the other apostles* answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (5:29). Indeed, all of early Acts revolves around Peter. He is the chief actor.

This is in close harmony with our Lord's words before His departure, for He had appointed Peter as the leader of the twelve, saying:

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19).

Authority in the Messianic Church, then, was centralized in the twelve apostles and personified in Peter himself, whom the Lord had singled out as the chief apostle and the supreme head of the Church of that day (See [John 20:22,23](#); [Luke 12:32](#) and [Mt. 16:18,19](#)).

It is on these passages that the Roman Church bases its claims to apostolic authority and, sad to say, most Protestants, not recognizing the distinctive ministry

of Paul and the fact that the kingdom has, for the time being, given way to "the Church which is His Body," find it necessary to explain these verses away or get around them somehow.

Chapter V - Acts 2:15-41

PETER'S PENTECOSTAL ADDRESS

"For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

"But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

"And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophecy:

"And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." --Acts 2:15-21.

THIS IS THAT

When Peter stood up with the eleven amid the wonders of Pentecost, he knew just what was happening.

He knew that the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy had begun, and said without qualification: "*This is that.*"

Taught by our Lord (Acts 1:3) and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) he had an intelligent understanding of just where he stood in the program of God. Hence the dynamic power of his message.

Let us ask ourselves--especially those of us who stand before the people---Can we be as specific? Do we know just where we stand in the program of God? Can we point from the present circumstances to the Scriptures which deal with them and say positively and unequivocally: "*This is that*"?

We must beware here, for it is not enough merely to be more specific in our statements. Specific statements without specific knowledge will only lead to embarrassment. It is far better to *confess* ignorance than to *display* it!

Many "prophetic experts" of this and the past generation have pointed to what they supposed were definite "signs of the times," pronouncing our days "the last days" because of the "fulfillment" of certain prophecies, only to see their "signs" vanish away one after another without the close of the age having come.

This is not strange when we see how on every hand prophecy has been confused with the mystery; when we consider that at this late date--nineteen hundred years after the revelation of the mystery--our spiritual leaders are still confused and divided as to which of our Lord's commissions is for us and just what He would have us do and teach!¹³

How sad that men of God should strive to be *prophetic* experts today when they have in their Bibles the earnest prayer of Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, that they might be given the spiritual wisdom to understand *the mystery kept secret since the world began!* (Eph. 1:9-23; 3:14-21; Col. 1:24-2:3). All Scripture, to be sure, is for us, but it is the mystery of God's purpose and grace in which we of this age of grace should be experts (Eph. 1:9; 3:9; 6:19,20; Col. 1:25-27).

THE LAST DAYS

Was Peter correct, then, or mistaken, when he said more than nineteen centuries ago that the last days had come?

He was correct. As we have pointed out, he was taught by our Lord (1:3) and filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4). Moreover, he was *Scripturally* correct, for in the light of all Old Testament Scripture these were the last days.

As we read this story we must not anticipate revelation. We must remember that God's purpose concerning *this* age was still a secret.

The prophets had predicted nothing about the dispensation of grace or the Body of Christ (Read carefully Eph. 3:1-11). They had spoken only of the sufferings of Christ and the kingdom glory to follow (See I Pet. 1:11 and cf. Zech. 13,14, etc.).

Now that the sufferings were over, the Spirit was being poured out in preparation for the glory to follow (See Joel 2:28-3:17) and presently Peter was to offer to Israel the return of Christ and the long-promised times of refreshing (Acts 3:19-21).

Thus, as far as God's revealed plan was concerned, the last days *had* begun--the days when Israel should at last be ushered into the glorious reign of Christ, her Savior-King.

What a pity to find some pointing to Pentecost, a Jewish feast day, as "the birthday of the Church"! Peter did not say these were the signs of the *first days* of the Body of Christ but of the *last days*--the last days of Israel's trouble and sorrow

¹³ See the writer's booklet entitled *This is That*.

and sin, when God would be jealous for His land and pity His people and restore them to Himself (See Joel 2).

THE DAY OF THE LORD

As we have seen, the signs which began at Pentecost were to usher in "*the day of the Lord.*" This familiar Old Testament phrase always stands in contrast to *the day of man.*

In Daniel 2 we have the great prophecy which to Israel spoke of *Gentile* dominion over this world. But essentially it speaks of *man's* dominion over this world apart from God, for the successive world powers there described are symbolized by the image of a *man.*

Israel, with Jehovah in her midst, had enjoyed political supremacy in the world. But God had now withdrawn His presence from Jerusalem and had delivered Israel into captivity. In Daniel 2 God is called "the God of heaven" and the day of man, politically speaking, begins on earth at that point.

It has been man's day now for a long time and the results have been anything but gratifying. Deluded statesmen still sit around tables trying to bring about peace without Christ, the Prince of Peace.

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Psa. 2:4).

Thank God, the prophecy of Daniel 2 closes with this statement:

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever" (Dan. 2:44).

Yes, man is having his day now, but the day of the Lord will come.

"The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.

"For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low" (Isa. 2:11,12).

WHAT PETER DID NOT KNOW

As clearly as Peter understood all this, so totally ignorant was he of God's plan to usher in an extended period of grace before actually judging the world and establishing Christ as King.

His very use of the term "last days" proves that he knew nothing of this divine purpose later to be revealed through Paul.

It was God--God in His sovereignty; not in fulfillment of covenants or prophecy, but *according to His own purpose and grace--who* was now to act in behalf of a ruined, sin-cursed world. (Rom. 5:19-21; II Tim. 1:9).

While the signs of the last days *began to* appear at Pentecost, they did not *all* appear. Indeed, after a time those which had appeared began to disappear again. According to Joel's prophecy, as quoted by Peter, the signs of Pentecost were to be followed by signs both in heaven and on earth, and the pouring out of the Spirit was to be followed by the pouring out of God's wrath.

Thank God, these latter signs did not appear--have not even yet appeared. God had not altered His plan to judge this wicked world, but in matchless love He interrupted the prophetic program, held off the day of judgment, saved the chief of sinners and ushered in the day of grace.

This secret purpose of God's grace was first made known through Paul, from whom Peter later learned of it.

Peter writes about it in the closing words of his last epistle, explaining how it was that the Lord, who was to have come to judge and reign, had now delayed His coming.

First he cautions his readers not to count the delay "slackness"--at least not the slackness of indifference--and then he explains just how the delay should be viewed:

"The Lord is NOT SLACK concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is LONGSUFFERING TO US-WARD, NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH, BUT THAT ALL SHOULD COME TO REPENTANCE" (II Pet. 3:9).

"And account that THE LONGSUFFERING OF OUR LORD IS SALVATION; EVEN AS OUR BELOVED BROTHER PAUL ALSO ACCORDING TO THE WISDOM GIVEN UNTO HIM HATH WRITTEN UNTO YOU" (II Pet. 3:15).

WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL

We have yet to deal with the closing verse of the passage from Joel quoted by Peter in his Pentecostal address:

Acts 2:21: "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

This statement from Joel 2:32 is quoted twice in the New Testament: once by *Peter* and once by *Paul*; once at the *beginning* of the Acts period and once at the

end; once while God was still pleading with Israel to accept her King and once after a judicial blindness (or hardness of heart) had begun to settle upon the nation: once while Israel alone was God's covenant people and once after God had begun to break down the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile, and Paul had declared that before God "there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek."

We must first consider the quotation of this passage by Peter if we would clearly understand the wonder of its use some years later by Paul.

QUOTATION BY PETER

We must notice first of all, that Peter quotes the verse right along with its foregoing context. This point is very important to the understanding of Peter's address.

The passage in Joel, remember, was about *Pentecost* and the Tribulation, and the prediction concerning Pentecost as quoted by Peter is followed immediately by that concerning the tribulation:

"And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; BLOOD, AND FIRE, AND VAPOR OF SMOKE:

"THE SUN SHALL BE TURNED INTO DARKNESS, AND THE MOON INTO BLOOD, before that great and notable day of the. Lord come:

"AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED" (Acts 2:19-21).

Has this come to pass as yet?

Do we see these signs today?

Is the Day of the Lord being ushered in now?

Every thoughtful Bible student will answer "No" to all three of these questions. Yet we must remember well that it is a connection with these terrors which were (and are) to usher in "the day of the Lord," that the prophet says: "*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*"

Most certainly *this prophecy has not yet been fulfilled*. These are not "the times of the signs" and surely this is not "the day of the Lord," but the day of man. This is why war and bloodshed go on practically without interruption and our ablest statesmen meet in vain to discuss plans for peace and safety.

But, as we say, God had a *secret* purpose of which Peter did not know. The signs of the tribulation were *not immediately* to follow those of Pentecost. Indeed, the signs of Pentecost were to vanish away again and God was to offer to His

enemies everywhere, *reconciliation* by grace, through the blood of the cross, which, in the eternal purpose, had "*slain the enmity*" between God and man and had made it possible for Him to be "*just, and [at the same time] the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus*" (Rom. 3:26).

And here is where Paul's quotation of Joel 2:32 comes in.

QUOTATION BY PAUL

Paul, it will be noticed, quotes the statement from Joel entirely out of its context. This might be considered an illegitimate use of the Scriptures, except that he wrote by inspiration and that it was God Himself Who was now to use this same statement in an infinitely more wonderful setting:

"FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE THE JEW AND THE GREEK: FOR THE SAME LORD OVER ALL IS RICH UNTO ALL THAT CALL UPON HIM.

"FOR WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED" (Rom. 10:12, 13)..

We ask again: Has *this* come to pass? And every saint cries "Yes! Hallelujah! Are not we some of the 'whosoever'?"

As significant as it is that Peter quotes this statement right in its prophetic context, even more significant it is that Paul now quotes it in this new setting.

The signs which began at Pentecost finally vanished away again and the horrors predicted did not--have not even yet--come to pass. God is not now saving whosoever calls, in the sense predicted by Joel and proclaimed by Peter.

The wonderful fact, however, is that God is now sending out a "whosoever" offer of eternal salvation *by His interruption of the program predicted by Joel and the ushering in of the dispensation of grace.*

How blessed is our lot! How much more we have than Peter ever dreamed of on Pentecost! To think that in "this present evil age," salvation is offered to all as the free gift of God, and that the vilest sinner may be "*justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*" entirely apart from any religious work! And to think that believers, as the ambassadors of Christ, have the high honor to deliver such a message to the lost!

PETER'S APPEAL TO ISRAEL

Having examined the occasion and the text of Peter's Pentecostal address, let us now proceed to examine the appeal which he bases on that text.

ISRAEL CHARGED WITH THE CRUCIFIXION

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

"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." --Acts 2:22,23.

The *purpose* of Peter's words here must be dearly seen if we are to understand their meaning.

In spite of Paul's emphatic declarations to the contrary (especially in his letter to the Galatians) it is often claimed that Peter preached the very same gospel as Paul.

"Did not Peter, at Pentecost," they ask, "preach Christ crucified and risen, just as Paul did?" Our answer is that at Pentecost Peter did *not* preach Christ crucified and risen as Paul later did.

How did Peter, in his Pentecostal address, deal with the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ? Was that his *gospel*? Did he proclaim it as good news? Was it his purpose to offer salvation to his hearers through faith in the death and resurrection of Christ? No, nor did he in fact make such an offer.

On the contrary, his purpose was to *convict* his hearers of their guilt in the crucifixion of Christ and to warn them that the One whom they with wicked hands had crucified and slain, had risen from the dead and was alive again.

When those who *were* thus convicted asked what they should do, Peter did not tell them simply to believe that Christ had died for them, as we do today. His "great commission" had not contemplated such a message. What he did was to command them to repent and be baptized, every one, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, so that they might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (See Verse 38 and cf. [Mark 16:15-18](#)).

We *now* know that the very death which Peter accused them of was the basis upon which God could offer them salvation at all, but Peter, at Pentecost, was not commissioned to preach "the gospel of the grace of God," nor did he know that gospel (Cf. [Acts 20:24](#) with [Eph. 3:1-3](#)).

How searching is Peter's indictment!

He points out that Jesus of Nazareth was a man "*approved of God*," indeed, *publicly approved "by miracles and wonders and signs"* which He had done "*in their midst*." He pierces their consciences by insisting that *they very well knew all this*, and *knowing* it had taken Him and with wicked hands had crucified and slain Him.

But notice carefully the order of verse 23, Peter declares that God in His "*determinate counsel and foreknowledge*" had "*delivered*" Christ into their hands. From this verse the murderers of Christ have frequently been defended, on the ground that they could do nothing else. God *meant* Christ to be crucified. But this is a very poor defense of those who committed that dreadful deed.

Peter did not say, nor even imply, that God had *caused* them to crucify Christ. Indeed, he insists that they were "wicked" in so doing. The truth is simply that God, knowing what wicked men would do to His Son, nevertheless determined to deliver Him into their hands.

In His perfect foreknowledge He had a two-fold purpose in this--one related to *prophecy* and the other to the *mystery*; one with which *Peter's* ministry was concerned and the other with which *Paul's* was concerned. The one related to prophecy and Peter's ministry is that with which we have here to do.

It was because God purposed, by Israel's very crucifixion of her Messiah, some day to touch and break the heart of His chosen people, that He thus delivered Christ into their hands. Indeed, it is by recognizing and acknowledging her guilt in Christ's death that Israel will some day be saved.

"And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

"In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem "

"And one shall say unto Him, What are these wounds in Thine hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends" (Zech. 12:10, 11; 13:6).

How thankful we should be that the death of Christ was not an accident which God failed to prevent! A universe out of God's control, with right upon the scaffold and wrong upon the throne--such a universe would be too horrible to contemplate. What would be the use of anything under such circumstances? We would merely be the helpless victims of everything gone wrong!

No, thank God! The Christ who was crucified and slain by wicked hands was first delivered by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God"!

This in no wise lessens the guilt of Christ's murderers. On the contrary, it is calculated to strike conviction into their sinful hearts.

ISRAEL SERVED NOTICE OF THE RESURRECTION

And now Peter's hearers are faced with the fearful possibility that the One whom they have slain may be alive again, as Peter serves them notice that He whom they have stooped so low to rid themselves of has come forth in power from the grave.

Nor does Peter merely affirm this to be a fact; he presses the truth of it home to his guilty hearers with unanswerable arguments.

"Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it.

"For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

"Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

"Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

"Thou has made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

"Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

"He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption.

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

"For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,

"Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." --Acts 2:24-36.

The Argument From Reason

"*It was not possible,*" says Peter, that death should hold Him. He *could not* remain captive in the grave.

First, it was *essentially* impossible; impossible in the very nature of the case.

He was the Author of life and had proved it again and again. None but He could say (without sounding foolish):

"... I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

"No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again ..." (John 10:17,18).

Christ had not been overcome by death. On the contrary, He had come into the world to meet death, grapple with it and overcome it. He had pushed death back through death itself and had overcome death by dying.

"... that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14).

Thus in the Revelation we find Him declaring:

"I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [hades] and of death" (Rev. 1:18).

But it was also *morally* and *judicially* impossible that our Lord should remain in the grave.

He had died because of *their* sin. *He* was no sinner. Death had no claim upon *Him*, wherefore God had now raised Him from the dead.

Still other reasons for the resurrection were later to be revealed through Paul, but the time for this had not yet come.

Peter, by the Holy Spirit, was now pressing home Israel's *guilt* in crucifying the Holy One and was serving them notice that God had raised Him from the dead.

The Argument From Scripture

Next the apostle offers a *Scriptural* argument as he quotes from two of the Psalms ([Acts 2:25-36](#)).

Quoting first from the 16th Psalm, Peter reasons that since David is dead and buried and since David knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that of his

seed He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne, he could not have been speaking of himself but prophetically of Christ, when he said:

"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [hades] neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption" (Ver. 27).

Peter's second quotation is from Psalm 110:1, where David says:

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand,

"Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool", (Acts 2:34,35).

In this passage David evidently speaks not of himself, but of another, whom he calls "My Lord." Hence it was Christ who, according to David's prophecy, was to be raised from the dead and ascend to heaven.

And this argument from the Scriptures is intimately related to another.

The Argument From Circumstances

"Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Ver. 33).

The ascended Lord was actively demonstrating the fact of His resurrection by the wonders of Pentecost. He had said:

"And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

This power had now been bestowed in the presence of the multitude. What reasonable explanation could there be of the wonders which Peter's hearers now saw and heard, except that Christ had indeed risen from the dead, ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit as He had promised?

The Testimony Of The Apostles

To all these arguments Peter adds his own testimony and the testimony of those standing with him, that they have personally seen Christ after His resurrection.

"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Ver. 32).

The multitudes listening to Peter may not have wished to think that Christ was alive again, but reason demanded it, the Scriptures had predicted it, the circumstances indicated it and now Peter and his comrades were there to bear personal testimony that they knew that it was so. They had been with Him, had

talked with Him and had seen Him with their own eyes, until the cloud had come to receive Him into heaven.

THE APPLICATION

And now the apostle, by the Holy Spirit, strikes home as with a hammer blow, the fact which his guilty hearers must be prepared to face:

"THEREFORE LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW ASSUREDLY, THAT GOD HATH MADE THIS SAME JESUS, WHOM YE HAVE CRUCIFIED, BOTH LORD AND CHRIST" (Ver. 36).

Surely Peter is not preaching the gospel of the grace of God here, as some would have us believe. His message clearly concerns the kingdom rights of the Son of God.

It is *Paul*, the apostle of the Gentiles, who *later* speaks of "*the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24).

It is *Paul* who bids us to "*Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel*" (II Tim. 2:8).

It is *he* who tells us that Christ was raised from the dead because of "*our justification,*" and that God "*hath quickened us together with Christ . . . and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*" (Rom. 4:25; Eph. 2:5-7).

CONVICTION AND CONVERSION

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" --Acts 2:37.

We have now come to the climax of the Pentecostal scene. Some, at least, of Peter's hearers have been brought under conviction and are asking, "*What shall we do?*"

Let us mark this passage carefully, for if we would avoid confusion as to God's message and program for *today*, we must clearly understand His message and program for *that day* in which the twelve apostles began to carry out the "great commission" given to them.

First let us note carefully the opening phrase of Verse 37.

"When they heard this."

Heard *what?*

Just what had Peter been preaching? Had he proclaimed the glad news which we now preach, that "*We have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace?*" Had he offered his hearers salvation by faith in the blood of the One who had recently died on Calvary? Had he said anything about being *reconciled* to God by the cross, or about the cross having put away the enmity between God and man?

No! He had *accused* his hearers of the crucifixion of Christ and had *warned* them that their Victim was alive again. We must clearly distinguish here between prophecy and the mystery later revealed to Paul, for, from the prophetic point of view it was the cross that had *made* the enmity between God and the nations (especially Israel) and this "controversy" will have to be settled before the world ever knows peace or prosperity.

Lest any of our readers miss this point, we quote again a few of the representative statements in Peter's address:

Vers. 22,23 "YE MEN OF ISRAEL, HEAR THESE WORDS; JESUS OF NAZARETH, A MAN APPROVED OF GOD AMONG YOU BY MIRACLES AND WONDERS AND SIGNS, WHICH GOD DID BY HIM IN THE MIDST OF YOU, AS YOU YOURSELVES ALL KNOW:

"HIM, BEING DELIVERED BY THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL, AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD, YE HAVE TAKEN, AND BY WICKED HANDS HAVE CRUCIFIED AND SLAIN."

Ver. 32, "THIS JESUS HATH GOD RAISED UP, WHEREOF WE ALL ARE WITNESSES."

Vers. 34-36, "FOR DAVID IS NOT ASCENDED INTO THE HEAVENS; BUT HE SAITH HIMSELF, THE LORD SAID UNTO MY LORD, SIT THOU ON MY RIGHT HAND,

"UNTIL I MAKE THY FOES THY FOOTSTOOL.

"THEREFORE LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW ASSUREDLY, THAT GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS, WHOM YE HAVE CRUCIFIED, BOTH LORD AND CHRIST."

It was clearly Peter's purpose to convict his hearers of their guilt in the crucifixion of Christ and to bring them to repentance.

And how did he answer their troubled, "*What shall we do?*" Did he tell them simply to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," as Paul later told the Philippian jailor? No, indeed. Belief in Christ was involved, to be sure, but there was more.

THE TERMS OF SALVATION

"THEN PETER SAID UNTO THEM, REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST." --Acts 2:38.

It is difficult for us to understand how honest men can continue to change the simple meaning of this verse to make it harmonize with the gospel of the grace of God, as though the baptism here had nothing to do with salvation. It would be fully as legitimate to interpret Heb. 11:4 to mean that Abel's sacrifice had nothing to do with *his* salvation.

We once asked a preacher who believed that the Body of Christ began at Pentecost whether he instructed his convicted hearers to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. He said: "*Yes, but not in those words!*" And thus our Fundamentalist brethren also claim to carry out the "great commission," teaching that "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"--*but not in those words!*

This shameful forcing and twisting of plain Scriptures to make the Pentecostal program conform to God's program for today and to make Paul's words sanction Pentecostal practices, must be stopped if Fundamentalists are to make any headway in their study of the Word.

We quite agree that Peter at Pentecost and Paul later, both *referred to* the cross and the resurrection, but the question is, *how?*

Paul gloried in the cross ([Gal. 6:14](#)) offering it as the great remedy for all our sins. This Peter did not and could not yet do at Pentecost. Notwithstanding previous *prophetic* statements about the cross, we do not have "*the preaching of the cross*" --the crucifixion preached as *good news* for salvation - until we get to Paul.

What terms, then, did Peter offer his hearers for salvation when they were brought under conviction.

"REPENT, AND BE BAPTIZED [and not only "those who feel led," but] EVERY ONE OF YOU, IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST, [and not merely "as a testimony to your burial with Christ," but] FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, AND [i.e., "And THEN", and not until then] YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST."

How different this all is from "*the gospel of the grace of God,*" which was later committed to the Apostle Paul and to us! Peter's message, however, harmonized perfectly with the "great commission": "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16).

Indeed, the requirements for salvation here are no different than those previously laid down by John the Baptist, for we read in Mark 1:4, that

"John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS."

The only difference between Peter's proposition and John's was one of *historical development*. The Holy Spirit had now come and Peter could add: "*and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*" But there was no change in the *meaning* of the ordinance, for at John's baptism too they had come "*confessing their sins*" (Matt. 3:6). John's baptism and Peter's both signified a confession of sin and a cleansing therefrom.

Peter's words at Pentecost have been dealt with most unfaithfully by those who would uphold their water baptism theories.

We have before us a popular book by a leading Fundamentalist of the past generation entitled: *Baptism, What Saith the Scripture?* In this book the author seeks to distinguish between *John's baptism*, in which "*the Jew expressed his repentance and his need of forgiveness*" (p. 12) and "*Christian baptism*," which, according to him, "*was not instituted till after the Lord's resurrection*" (p. 10).

Insisting upon the need of "*Christian baptism*," this author says:

"And if these considerations be not enough, is not Peter's message in Acts 2:38 imperative as to it?--'Repent, and be baptized every one of you,' etc." (p. 21).

Why did this author substitute an "etc." for the plain words, "*in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost?*"

Such abuse of the written Word is inexcusable, for the author well knew this verse and he knew also that had he quoted it in its entirety it would have proved that water baptism is *not* for Christians today.

Before us is another booklet entitled: *About Baptism*, by another Fundamentalist leader. This writer does practically the same thing. Seeking to establish a difference in the meaning of baptism before and after the resurrection, he says:

"Will you go to the book of Acts, please, the 2nd chapter? At this time John was gone; he has been beheaded; Christ has ascended to the glory; and the Holy Spirit has come, and the disciples are preaching.

"Acts 2:38. 'Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized ...' "

Manifestly, if this writer had finished the verse instead of substituting a few periods, his whole argument would have fallen. How do men of God answer to themselves and to God for dealing thus with this passage? This is what troubles us. Do they have some explanation for it in their own minds, or is it that their zeal

for the water ceremony has blinded them to the dishonesty of dealing thus with the holy Scriptures?

Nor have the two Fundamentalist leaders referred to above¹⁴ been alone in this. In an open discussion on this subject in 1943 we produced six books by immersionists, all dealing in the same way with this important verse.

At this same discussion a pastor exclaimed: "Do you mean to tell us that Peter at Pentecost did *not* preach the gospel of the grace of God?"

We answered that this was exactly what we meant, asking him what the gospel of the grace of God was. He seemed surprised at the question and replied in substance that it was simply that we were sinners, that Christ had died for our sins and that whoever believed in His shed blood would be eternally saved, wholly by grace through faith.

We agreed to this and asked him if he could find this in Peter's Pentecostal address. He looked at the passage for some time and finally said: "Well, Peter does say here: 'It shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,' but I know what you will say about that."

"What will I say?" I asked.

"Well," he answered, "You will say that when they *did* call, Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins."

Exactly! That is what *the record* says!

The keys of the kingdom were committed to Peter; "the gospel of the grace of God" to Paul ([Matt. 16:19](#); [Acts 20:24](#); [Eph. 3:1-3](#)) and Peter learned of the gospel of God's grace and the delay in Christ's return only as he heard it later from Paul (See [Gal. 2:2,7,9](#); [II Pet. 3:9,15](#)).

Until we see this clearly--until we see that the gospel of the grace of God belongs to the great mystery revealed only after Israel had rejected her King both in incarnation and in resurrection--we must remain entangled in the hopeless confusion which has embroiled those who are still trying to serve God acceptably under the *wrong commission*.

What a vast difference between Peter at Pentecost, demanding repentance and baptism for the remission of sins, and Paul later proclaiming *Christ's righteousness for the remission of sins!* ([Rom. 3:21-28](#)).

Paul also refers to "[Christ's] righteousness for the remission of sins that are past," in [Rom. 3:25](#). It was *now revealed* that the blood of beasts and the washing of water did not *in themselves* take away sins, but rather Christ's death on Calvary,

¹⁴ Dr. H. A. Ironside and Pastor Edward Drew.

which now, *in due time*, had been manifested and proclaimed as the great remedy for sin.

"For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus;

"Who gave Himself a ransom for all, TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME,

"Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity" (I Tim. 2:5-7).

"BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT THE LAW IS MANIFESTED

"Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:

"Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS THAT ARE PAST

"TO DECLARE, I SAY, AT THIS TIME HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST, AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS.

"WHERE IS BOASTING THEN? IT IS EXCLUDED . . ." (Rom. 3:21-27).

Hallelujah!

The Promise To Israel

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." --Acts 2:39.

At first sight it may seem that the "*You*" and "*Your children*" of Verse 39 refer to Israel, while the phrase, "*all that are afar off*" refers to the Gentiles. But a more careful examination of the passage will prove that this cannot be so.

First, the promise of the Spirit (cf. Verses 33, 38) was never made to the Gentiles. True, it *affected* the Gentiles, but it was unquestionably *made* to Israel. We Gentiles in the flesh are exhorted in Eph. 2:11,12 to *remember* that we were "*strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.*"

Nor does the phrase "afar off," used here and elsewhere in Scripture, refer exclusively to Gentiles. We Gentiles were *spiritually* "afar off" (Eph. 2:17) but Israelites outside of their own land were *geographically* "afar off" and are so designated again and again in the Old Testament Scriptures. Among other places, we find the phrase "afar off" in Daniel's famous prayer:

"O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; TO THE MEN OF JUDAH AND TO THE INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM, AND UNTO ALL ISRAEL, THAT ARE NEAR, AND THAT ARE FAR OFF, through all the countries whither Thou has driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against Thee" (Dan. 9:7).

Peter, addressing a Jewish audience, then, declared simply that the promise of the Spirit was both to them and their children and those (of their people) who were afar off. And this harmonizes with the closing verses of Chapter 3, where he reminds his Hebrew hearers that they are the children of the covenant and that unto *them first* God has raised up a Savior, "His Son Jesus," since *through them* the nations of the earth are to be blessed.

Three Thousand Converts

"And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." --Acts 2:40,41.

Three thousand souls baptized in one day may seem, at first, like a large number. In fact it was but a very small minority in the great nation which Peter and the eleven so earnestly sought to bring to Messiah's feet.

Our Lord, while on earth, had predicted that the kingdom would be "taken from" the leaders in Israel and "*given to a nation [not nations] bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt.21:43). It is not difficult to determine who were to comprise that "nation," for in Luke 12:32 we learn that "the kingdom" was to be *given to* the "little flock" of Christ's followers, and in Luke 22:28-30 we find that the twelve apostles were to be the appointed rulers in that kingdom.

These three thousand at Pentecost, then, added to the number of those already following Christ (1:15, cf. I Cor. 15:6) constituted the "little flock," the "nation" which was to bring forth the fruits of the kingdom. They were the believing remnant, the *true* Israel, and they did indeed bring forth those fruits.

Chapter VI - Acts 2:42-3:26

THE CHALLENGE TO ISRAEL

THE FRUITS OF THE KINGDOM

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

"And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common;

"And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

"And they, continuing dally with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

"Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." -- Acts 2:42-47.

THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

In this passage we find the first mention of "the church" in Acts. This fact has been used to support the traditional view that the church *of this age* (the Body of Christ) had its historical beginning at Pentecost--that Pentecost was "*the birthday of the Church.*" This is one of the great blunders which has caused such confusion and division among God's people today.

The word "church" (Gr. *Ekklesia*) simply means *a called-out gathering* and may refer to any "called-out" assembly. In Acts 19:32 the word is translated "assembly" and refers to a violent mob. In Acts 19:39 it is again translated "assembly" and refers to a lawful civil gathering. In most cases it refers to the company of God's "called-out" people.

God has had His "called-out" people in every age. Israel in Moses' day was "*the church in the wilderness*" (Acts 7:38). Our Lord on earth spoke of the "church" which was (and is) to be built upon Himself as "*the Christ [Messiah] the Son of the living God*" (Matt. 16:16-18). The Apostle Paul alone speaks of "*the church which is His body*" (Eph. 1:22,23; Col. 1:18).

It is a mistake, then, to suppose that wherever we read of "the church," the Body of Christ is referred to, for the word "church" is an inter-dispensational word which may refer to God's people in *any* age. Our Old Testament, translated from the Hebrew, does not, of course, contain the word *ekklesia*, but the Septuagint, the

Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses it more than sixty times with reference to Israel in passages where the *Authorized Version* employs such terms as *congregation* and *assembly*.

Not until Israel's rejection of the resurrected Christ and the raising up of Paul do we read of "the Body of Christ," while Paul consistently designates the Church of *this age* in this way and makes it crystal clear that this body is composed of *reconciled* Jews and Gentiles, both of whom have previously been *alienated* from God. (Read carefully [Rom. 11:15, 30-32](#); [Eph. 2:15-18](#)).

How contrary to Scripture, then, to teach that the Body of Christ had its beginning at Pentecost in Acts 2 simply because the word "church" is used there! At that time the Body had not yet begun and the Church had long been in existence! The descent of the Holy Spirit was not needed to make a church of the apostles and disciples at Jerusalem. They were already God's church. In the passage we are now considering we read that "*there were ADDED UNTO THEM about three thousand souls*" and that "*the Lord ADDED TO THE CHURCH DAILY such as should be saved*" (Vers. 41,47).

THE PENTECOSTAL PURPOSE

As we consider the scene described in this passage we must not lose sight of the background. From John the Baptist until Pentecost the establishment of the Messianic kingdom had been in view.

John the Baptist had come crying: "*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt. 3:2, etc.). Our Lord, in His earthly life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension and His sending of the Holy Spirit had been "*confirming the promises made unto the fathers.*"

"NOW I SAY THAT JESUS CHRIST WAS A MINISTER OF THE CIRCUMCISION FOR THE TRUTH OF GOD, TO CONFIRM THE PROMISES MADE UNTO THE FATHERS" (Rom. 15:8).

In His death He had sealed the New Covenant made "*with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah*" (Jer. 31:31). He had risen from the dead *to take His place upon the throne of His father, David* (Acts 2:30,31). He had ascended so that "*the promise of the Father*" (Acts 1:4) might be fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit and *that His Father might make His enemies His footstool* (Psa. 110:1).

God's *secret* purpose in the crucifixion, the resurrection and the ascension had not yet been revealed, nor have we any right to read Ephesians 2 into Acts 2.

The purpose of Pentecost, then, was *not* to baptize believing Jews and Gentiles into one body, for Gentiles were not even addressed--perhaps not even present--at Pentecost. The purpose of Pentecost was to endue Messiah's disciples with supernatural power and prepare them for the persecutions which, had not God in

grace intervened, would have brought on the "great tribulation" and ushered in "the day of the Lord" ([Joel 2:28-32](#); [Acts 2:16-21](#)).

THE PENTECOSTAL PROGRAM

Attention should be given here to two important details of the Pentecostal program which differ widely from that which God has given us to follow today.

1. "MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS WERE DONE BY THE APOSTLES" (Ver. 43).

2. "AND ALL THAT BELIEVED WERE TOGETHER, AND HAD ALL THINGS COMMON;

"AND SOLD THEIR POSSESSIONS AND GOODS, AND PARTED THEM TO ALL MEN, AS EVERY MAN HAD NEED" (Vers. 44,45).

In the fourth chapter this is put negatively as well as positively for emphasis:

"... NEITHER SAID ANY OF THEM THAT OUGHT OF THE THINGS WHICH HE POSSESSED WAS HIS OWN; BUT THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON."

"NEITHER WAS THERE ANY AMONG THEM THAT LACKED; FOR AS MANY AS WERE POSSESSORS OF LANDS OR HOUSES SOLD THEM, AND BROUGHT THE PRICES OF THE THINGS THAT WERE SOLD,

"AND LAID THEM DOWN AT THE APOSTLES' FEET: AND DISTRIBUTION WAS MADE UNTO EVERY MAN ACCORDING AS HE HAD NEED" (Acts 4:32, 34, 35).

This is nothing less than the carrying out of the Sermon on the Mount and the program outlined by our Lord in Matt. 10:7-10, Luke 12:22-34, etc.

And thus they continued daily *with one accord* in the temple, and breaking bread¹⁵ from house to house, did eat their meat *with gladness and singleness of heart* (Ver. 46).

What a scene! What blessed fellowship! What peace and prosperity! What love and joy and enthusiasm! What spiritual power! What a foretaste of the kingdom to come!

And how were they enabled to live together in such utter selflessness and such spiritual power? Ah, this is the secret of millennial blessing! The Spirit had come, according to promise, and had taken supernatural possession of them, controlling them completely, so that they were empowered not only to work miracles, but also to live lives that fully honored God (See [Ezek. 36:27,28](#)). Today by comparison,

¹⁵ This doubtless refers to their daily meals for the "meat" in the closing phrase means *nourishment*.

we, the members of Christ's Body, have the Spirit dwelling within and may appropriate His help at any time but, consistent with the present dispensation, we must appropriate by *faith* what God provides in *grace*. Hence, with regard to the Pentecostal believers we find the bare statement of fact: "They were ALL *filled* with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4) while the Apostle Paul *exhorts* us: "Be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18).¹⁶

As we know, the kingdom which the Pentecostal believers preached and practiced and prayed for was rejected, and that blessed program could not continue. The circumstances in which we find ourselves today bear witness that the Son of God is a Royal Exile from His own world. However, God has reserved for His children in "this present evil age," even greater blessings than those enjoyed by the Pentecostal believers.

They looked for Christ to come to *earth* and change conditions *here*. *Our* position and prospect are both *heavenly*. It is true that we have not yet been taken *physically* to heaven, where *we* will one day serve our Lord in perfection, but we are told that *God* sees us already there, seated at His own right hand and "blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3; 2:4-6). So perfect is our oneness with Christ *morally* that we are "accepted" in Him and even pronounced "complete" in Him (Eph. 1:6; Col. 2:10) and so intimate is our union with Him *spiritually* that we are called the members of His body (I Cor. 12:27, etc.).

And now it is ours to *occupy* our position and *appropriate* our blessings *by faith*; to live experientially above this sin-cursed world as in the very presence of God. There is no blanket solution to the problem of Christian experience. The Spirit does not take supernatural *control* of us and cause us to do His will. The characteristic features of the present dispensation are *grace* and *faith*, and we must take each step, overcome each temptation, by *faith* as He supplies the *grace*.

The Pentecostal believers were "filled with the Spirit" because they were "*baptized* with the Spirit" (Acts 1:5, etc.). With us the filling of the Spirit is an objective to be attained, and in seeking, by faith, to attain it, rich, deep blessings are already ours, to say nothing of the rewards to come. It was no particular victory for the Pentecostal believers to be filled with the Spirit, for He simply took possession of them according to His own sovereign will and prophecy. But great spiritual victories are ours as we, "through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of our bodies" in order that they may be the temples of God indeed. What a challenge to faith all this is!

But we must return again to the Pentecostal scene.

THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN

"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

¹⁶ See the author's booklet: *The Believer's Walk in This Present Evil Age*.

"And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

"Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

"And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

"And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

"And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

"And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

"And all the people saw him walking and praising God:

"And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him." --Acts 3:1-10.

THE APOSTLES AND JUDAISM

There is still another important detail in which the Pentecostal program differs from that of the present dispensation. It is the fact that the disciples were very careful *not* to start another sect separate from Judaism. At the close of Chapter 2 we read that they continued daily with one accord "*in the temple.*" In the opening verse of Chapter 3 we find Peter and John going "*into the temple at the hour of prayer.*"

But to the superficial student of Scripture this might well pose a problem. Had not our Lord said: "*It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it A DEN OF THIEVES*"? (Matt. 21:13).

Had He not bidden the rebellious nation farewell, with the words: "BEHOLD, YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE"? (Matt. 23:38).

And had He not "*departed from the temple,*" saying to His disciples: "THERE SHALL NOT BE LEFT HERE ONE STONE UPON ANOTHER, THAT SHALL NOT BE THROWN DOWN"? (Matt. 24:2).

Why are Peter and John attending the temple now at the hour of prayer? Could this temple possibly seem like the Father's house of prayer to them after all our Lord had said?

This must surely present a problem to those who hold that Israel was set aside at the cross and that the Body of Christ began at Pentecost under the "Great Commission."

Shall we call Peter and John bigots or die-hards? Shall we say they were slow to overcome their Judaistic prejudices and recognize the new order of things?

If so, we must also ask how men so out of the will of God are said to have been filled with the Spirit by the Word itself. Moreover, the verses which immediately precede this one (Verses 42-4.7) leave no doubt that *"all that believed... continuing daily with one accord in the temple,"* were very much *in* the will of God.

What has happened, then, to modify or recall the divine denunciation of Israel and the temple?

The answer is found in our Lord's prayer on Calvary's cross:

"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM; FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO" (Luke 23:34).

In this very chapter of Acts Peter indicates that this prayer of our Lord procured a respite for the condemned nation for, pleading with the "men of Israel," he says:

"AND NOW, BRETHREN, I WOT THAT THROUGH IGNORANCE YE DID IT, AS DID ALSO YOUR RULERS . . . REPENT YE THEREFORE . . . AND HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST, WHICH BEFORE WAS PREACHED UNTO YOU" (Acts 3:17,19,20).

In other words, Israel was being offered another opportunity to accept Messiah and become the channel of blessing to the world, and the "Church" referred to in early Acts is not the Body of Christ at all, but the Messianic Church to be established on earth (Cf. [Matt. 16:16-18](#) and [Acts 3:19-21](#) with [Eph. 1:19-23; 2:16](#)).

Those who do not see this--who hold that the Body of Christ began at Pentecost- must necessarily come to confusion here.

Perhaps the outstanding example of this is again found in the writings of the most popular Fundamentalist leader of the past generation.

Contradicting his own writings left and right, he argues that those who teach that Israel was offered the kingdom after Matt. 23:38 are "extreme dispensationalists," since Israel was set aside for "this entire dispensation" when our Lord said: *"Your house is left unto you desolate."* Yet he also argues that Israel rejected the opportunity to receive Christ *"both in incarnation and in resurrection"!*

He charges that the twelve were so prejudiced against the Gentiles that God had to raise up Paul to go into all the world with the gospel. Yet he outdoes himself to show what a prejudiced Jew Saul of Tarsus was!

He says the twelve did not have the faith to carry out their "great commission" or the spirituality to forsake Judaism. Yet he avers that if we but had the faith and spirituality of the apostles, the power that attended their ministry would attend ours!

Little wonder that there is confusion in the ranks of the Fundamentalists!

The fact is that Peter and John went to the temple at the hour of prayer because *Israel had not yet been set aside and this was still God's appointed house of prayer.*

They were most faithful to their great commission, for under that commission (which was based upon the covenants and prophecies) the conversion of the nations must begin with the conversion of *the nation--Israel* (See [Zech. 8:13](#); [Luke 24:47](#); [Acts 1:8](#); [3:25,26](#)).

Nor were these men unspiritual for clinging to Judaism and its ceremonies, for no revelation had yet been given that because of the cross the Mosaic law could be set aside.

In a word, the dispensation of the grace of God had not yet begun, nor had the mystery, God's unprophesied purpose concerning the Body of Christ, as yet been revealed. This was not to take place until the raising up of Paul, that *other* apostle.

A BEGGAR AND A NATION

The healing of the lame man was a demonstration of the miraculous powers granted under the so-called "Great Commission," but it was more. It was a symbol of great significance.

In Verse 4 we read that Peter, "*fastening his eyes*" upon the lame man with John, said: "*Look on us.*"

Now what did the apostles and the lame man see as they looked at each other?

The apostles, looking at the lame man, saw one who may indeed have had a little money in his cup but was nevertheless a helpless beggar, lame from birth, sitting at the Beautiful gate, *outside* the temple proper: near, indeed, but still outside.

As the lame man looked upon the apostles, however, he saw something very different. *He* was "laid daily at the gate of the temple"; *they* "continued daily... *in the temple*" and were now entering at the hour of prayer. He saw men without "silver and gold," to be sure, but *they were not beggars* for, as Acts 4:34 declares, they had no lack, and what was more, they possessed the "*powers of the age to come.*"

What a comparison we have here between the nation Israel and the believing remnant! Israel had never been able to walk since *"the day that [God] took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt"* (Jer. 31:32). And now Israel had sought temporal deliverance and earthly prosperity like the lame man begging here for an alms. An alms indeed it would have proved, too, had Israel been granted her wish, for she needed more than temporal deliverance and prosperity. She needed *redemption from sin* (Matt. 1:21; Acts 3:26; Rom. 11:26). The price of this redemption was not silver and gold but the blood of the new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34 cf. Matt. 26:28). Now Israel lay at the threshold of millennial blessing, as it were, but without redemption and the Spirit she lacked the strength to enter in and could but remain a helpless beggar. Some years after the healing of the lame man, Peter wrote to the Jewish believers of his day:

"FORASMUCH AS YE KNOW THAT YE WERE NOT REDEEMED WITH CORRUPTIBLE THINGS, AS SILVER AND GOLD, FROM YOUR VAIN CONVERSATION RECEIVED BY TRADITION FROM YOUR FATHERS;

"BUT WITH THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST, AS OF A LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH AND WITHOUT SPOT" (I Pet. 1:18,19).

There was the rub. Israel was seeking deliverance from her troubles but not from her sin. She would not repent. Therefore the nation was laid as a helpless beggar outside the temple, while the true worshippers, the "little flock," worshipped daily within! And it was this despised remnant that had what Israel needed to help her rise to her feet and enter the temple too. Indeed, the burning question now was: Would she even yet receive it?

WALKING AND LEAPING AND PRAISING GOD

What a foreshadowing of millennial blessing to come, and what a sign of blessing proffered Israel then, at Pentecost, as Peter lifts the beggar by the right hand, saying:

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk!" (Verse 6).

Suddenly the lame beggar has become a worshipper and he enters *with them* into the temple, *"walking, and leaping and praising God"*!

For the present Israel still remains spiritually a poor, helpless beggar, outside of the presence of God, but the blessed day will come when the chosen nation will be saved and with the resurrected remnant will enter before God with songs of rejoicing. This is why the Apostle Paul writes to Gentiles who have been saved by grace:

"FOR I WOULD NOT, BRETHREN, THAT YE SHOULD BE IGNORANT OF THIS MYSTERY, LEST YE SHOULD BE WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS; THAT

BLINDNESS IN PART IS HAPPENED TO. ISRAEL, UNTIL THE FULNESS OF THE GENTILES BE COME IN.

"AND SO ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED: AS IT IS WRITTEN, THERE SHALL COME OUT OF SION THE DELIVERER AND SHALL TURN AWAY UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB:

"FOR THIS IS MY COVENANT UNTO THEM . . .," (Rom. 11:25-27).

Israel wholly restored walking and leaping and praising God--will be one of the greatest wonders the world has ever seen.

"FOR IF THE CASTING AWAY OF THEM BE THE RECONCILING OF THE WORLD, WHAT SHALL THE RECEIVING OF THEM BE, BUT LIFE FROM THE DEAD?" (Rom. 11:15).

PETER'S SECOND SERMON

THE LAME MAN HEALED BY THE REJECTED CHRIST

"And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

"And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?

"The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go.

"But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

"And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

"And His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." --Acts 3:11-16.

Little wonder a crowd gathers! It is heart-stirring, even to us who read the account, to see the once lame man now "walking, and leaping and praising God," and clinging to Peter and John in touching gratitude. Oh, that the day may be hastened when all Israel shall worship before God in such gratitude and praise!

DRIVING HOME CONVICTION

AS the people ran together in Solomon's porch Peter was quick to take advantage of the opportunity to bring them face to face once more with the fact that God was holding them responsible for what had so recently taken place on Calvary's hill.

Why, asked Peter, should they wonder at this miracle or look so intently at the apostles, as though by their own power or godliness they had made this man to walk?

Only God, of course, could work such a miracle, and nothing was clearer than that God had glorified His Son--whom they had rejected--by so instantly and completely restoring this man in His name.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, moreover, were the three Hebrew fathers with whom the great covenant of Israel's future blessing had been made and confirmed. It was *this* God, the God of *Israel*, who had thus glorified the rejected Christ.

How this all confirms Peter's charge that his hearers have delivered *their own Messiah* to Pilate, a heathen judge, and have denied Him in Pilate's presence when Pilate himself was determined to let Him go!

Furthermore, think of the wickedness of *Israelites* preferring and choosing the freedom of a murderer to that of the Just One, when Israel's law so emphatically commanded that "*the murderer shall surely be put to death*" and that mercy should in no wise be shown him (Num. 35; Deut. 19).

And think of the folly of setting a murderer free and killing the Prince of life, releasing the killer and killing the One who alone can give life! And that Christ truly was the Prince of life, Peter was here to prove, declaring: "*We are witnesses and here is the evidence*" (See Vers. 15,16).

What an indictment! How calculated to strike deep conviction into their hearts!

GUILT MUST BE ACKNOWLEDGED

But why does Peter thus hold Israel to account for the crucifixion, when the Lord Himself prayed that they might be forgiven? Is he ignorant of the Lord's dying petition: "*Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*"?

The explanation is that before forgiveness can be *applied* it must be *accepted*. To tell an offender that you have forgiven him, when he does not feel he has wronged you, will not bring him one step closer to you; it may even insult him and drive him farther away. He must first be brought to see his guilt and to realize his *need* of forgiveness.

Let the sinner own his guilt and cry for forgiveness and his sin will be remembered against him no more, but until the guilt has been acknowledged, forgiveness cannot be applied.

It is true, of course, that today God offers men *more* than forgiveness. He offers them *grace*. Rather than charge them with the death of Christ or the sins which brought that death about, He assures them that He is "*not imputing their trespasses unto them,*" praying and beseeching them to be reconciled to Himself, explaining that *He made* Christ to be sin for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:19-21).

But this marvelous manifestation of grace is nevertheless based upon the fact that man has already been historically proven guilty. Even today, when God offers reconciliation to His enemies by grace through faith alone, no man will be inclined to accept that offer who is not first convicted by the Holy Spirit of his guilt. And those who do not accept the offer of God's grace will surely find that their sins *will* be imputed to them when they stand before the great white throne.

Prior to the raising up of Paul the fulness of grace was not yet manifested. God was still demonstrating historically the *guilt* of man and his *need* of divine grace. Hence Peter's offer of forgiveness was preceded by a charge of wrongdoing, for while God had indeed forgiven Israel, as far as His attitude toward them was concerned, it was still necessary to bring them to an acknowledgement of their guilt if this forgiveness was to be *realized by them*. All this on the simple premise that to offer forgiveness to one who feels he has done no wrong is like sending a cancelled bill to one who denies that he owes you anything.

A LEGAL TECHNICALITY

"And now, brethren, I wot [know] that THROUGH IGNORANCE YE DID IT, as did also your rulers.

"But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled." --Acts 3:17,18.

No, the Lord's prayer for His murderers has not been forgotten. But now another question arises.

As we have stated, God's law demanded that murderers should be executed without mercy. Cities of refuge had been provided for the protection of the *manslayer* exclusively. Only such as had slain others *accidentally* (the words in Num. 35 and Deut. 19 are "*ignorantly*" and "*unawares*") could expect to find help there. The murderer who made the mistake of supposing that judges in the cities of refuge would be *lenient*, would soon find himself delivered to death by those very judges. Murder was in no wise to be condoned under the law of Moses. Six times in Num. 35 alone we read:

"THE MURDERER SHALL SURELY BE PUT TO DEATH."

And in Deut. 19:13 it is written:

"THINE EYE SHALL NOT PITY HIM, BUT THOU SHALT PUT AWAY THE GUILT OF INNOCENT BLOOD FROM ISRAEL "

But was not the crucifixion of Christ murder in the very first degree? Can any excuse be found for jurors who plot the defendant's death beforehand? who condemn him to death before he has even been heard? who set up false witnesses to insure his condemnation? who subject him to inhuman torture before he is even found guilty? Can any excuse be found for the many irregularities which characterized that trial, conviction and execution as plain murder? Can such wickedness be explained away by kind words?

Why, then, is the charge here changed from murder to manslaughter? Why does Peter say: "*I wot that through ignorance ye did it?*"

Ah, here is a signal display of the tender mercy of God, for whereas men use technicalities in law to their own advantage, God used one here *to the advantage of His enemies*.

The fact is that before the crucifixion Israel's leaders *did not know* that Jesus was the Christ. True, they *could* have known, yes, and should have known, but the fact remains that they *did not* know. They were in a similar position to that in which Saul of Tarsus was later found. He too could and should have known, but he *did not* know, and later wrote: "*I obtained mercy, because I DID IT IGNORANTLY IN UNBELIEF.*"

No excuse, of course, could be found for the hate and injustice and cruelty which Israel had shown toward Christ, but the fact is that they did not know that He was the Christ. Our Lord Himself implied this when He said:

"... WHEN YE HAVE LIFTED UP THE SON OF MAN, THEN SHALL YE KNOW THAT I AM HE . . ." (John 8:28).

In other words, those responsible for the crucifixion well knew that they were *murdering* their Victim, but they did not know that their Victim was *Christ*. Whatever may be the full implication of I Cor. 2:8, it surely teaches that had "the princes of this world" known who their Victim was "*they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*"

This, of course, did not justify their action, but it was a basis upon which God might show mercy. Had they recognized Him as Messiah they would not have dared to condemn and crucify Him, but they did not believe Him to be the Messiah, hence our Lord's appeal: "*they know not what they do,*" and Peter's concession: "*And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it.*"

But what a responsibility rests upon them now! *Now* they know. They have nailed Him to the tree and in so doing *have recognized Him!* They know now that they have crucified their King. But they are still too proud to acknowledge it. They have paid hush money to the soldiers who guarded His tomb in vain. They have hoped to keep the affair quiet. But now they are surrounded with overwhelming proofs that He is alive. Not least among these proofs is the amazing restoration, in a moment, of this man whom they have seen and known so well as the lame beggar who sat at the temple gate. The despised apostles have healed him *in the name of Jesus*, the Holy Spirit thus bearing supernatural witness that *the Crucified is alive again!*

If, in the face of all this, Israel continues in her rebellious way, her sin will be *unpardonable*. Our Lord had served warning of this while He was yet on earth. As they blasphemed Him, He had replied:

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

"And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this worm [age] neither in the worm [age] to come" (Matt, 12:31,32).

What will they do now? If they stand by their wicked deed they will no longer be able to say: "We did it ignorantly and in unbelief." The only reason *Paul* could later say this was because he had not been included in the Lord's warning. He had not been with Christ on earth or been convinced that He was the Messiah. No, if the people of Israel resist the Holy Spirit and reject Christ now, they will be wholly without excuse.

But if, on the other hand, they repent and turn to *God--what glories await them!* Hear Peter as he speaks of it.

FORGIVENESS OFFERED

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

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

"Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began."

--Acts 3:19-21.

What a proclamation! How merciful is God! How slow to anger! Not only is forgiveness offered to Israel here, but with it the return of Christ and the long-promised times of refreshing!

Those who suppose that Israel was set aside at the cross for rejecting the kingdom, and that the Body of Christ began at Pentecost, should surely stop and meditate upon this passage. The fact is that we do not find one specific offer of the kingdom to Israel until we reach this passage. How then could the Body of Christ have had its beginning at Pentecost?

The kingdom was only proclaimed "*at hand*" prior to Calvary. At Pentecost Israel was notified that Christ had risen from the dead, and that He surely would occupy David's throne. There is the reminder that "*the promise is to you,*" but here in Acts 3 for the first time we find Peter making the *proposition* that if Israel will repent the times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord and God will send Jesus Christ back to earth to reign.

As to Peter preaching the gospel of the grace of God at this time, it is significant that not once in the messages of Acts 2 and 3 does Peter tell his hearers that they may look to the cross or trust in the blood of Christ to be saved. They are *charged* with the crucifixion of Christ and called upon to repent. Even when they cry: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter replies that they must repent and be baptized every one for the remission of sins. And here again he calls upon them as a nation to repent, promising that if they do the rejected Christ will return and the times of refreshing will come.

What preacher of grace today would proclaim to his hearers the message which Peter here proclaims? Surely we would be most unscriptural if we told our hearers to repent so that Christ and the times of refreshing might come to earth from the presence of the Lord. On the contrary, we call upon men to *believe* so that they might be raised to sit with Christ in the heavenlies.

All this is not to deny that men who believe *do* repent, nor that those who truly repented at that time were in fact saved through the blood of Christ. We are dealing here with the message preached and it cannot be denied that to them it was: *Repent and God will send Jesus down here*, while to us it is: *Believe and God will take you up there*. To them the message was, "*Him... ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain Repent, and be baptized every one of you .. for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:23,38). To us it is:

"... WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7).

How perfectly in order it was for Peter, here at Jerusalem, to offer the return of Christ, and to add: "Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things " Jerusalem is the one city in all this world where God has set His name and where Messiah is to reign. As the capital of the Jewish nation at that time and the seat of its government, Jerusalem must repent before He could come back to earth. How can we forget the solemn and touching words of the rejected Lord to His beloved city:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.

"For I say unto you, YE SHALL NOT SEE ME HENCEFORTH, TILL YE SHALL SAY, BLESSED IS HE THAT COMETH IN THE NAME OF THE LORD" (Matt. 23:37-39).

THE TIMES OF REFRESHING

There are comparatively few Bible students who associate the phrase "times of refreshing" with the glorious changes some day to take place on earth as predicted by the Old Testament prophets. This is because even Premillenarian Fundamentalists have made Pentecost the birthday of "the Church which is His body," while in reality it marks the time of Israel's great opportunity to receive Christ as King and to enjoy the blessings of His reign. The language is clear:

"... THE TIMES OF REFRESHING SHALL COME FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD: AND HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST, WHICH BEFORE WAS PREACHED UNTO YOU."

Some years ago we asked a class of boys in a Sunday School assembly what they would like to have changed in this world. One boy said he wished there might be no more war (it was just at the close of World War II); another lad suggested that sickness should be abolished, another that poverty might be banished. One little fellow said people should love the Lord more, and "no more wild animals," while an older lad expressed a wish that politics might be purified.

Too few people realize that all this and much more has actually been promised in connection with the return of Christ to reign. It is not God's purpose that this world shall forever be a scene of war and bloodshed; of slums and hospitals and jails; of godlessness, crime and corrupt government.

Blessed times of refreshing will be ushered in with the return of Christ to reign. We quote but a very few of the many Scripture passages which bear on this subject.

1. Government will be purified.

Jer. 23:5: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and A KING SHALL REIGN AND PROSPER, AND SHALL EXECUTE JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE IN THE EARTH."

Isa. 11:2-5: "And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

"And shall make Him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and HE SHALL NOT JUDGE AFTER THE SIGHT OF HIS EYES, NEITHER REPROVE AFTER THE HEARING OF HIS EARS:

"BUT WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS SHALL HE JUDGE THE POOR, AND REPROVE WITH EQUITY FOR THE MEEK OF THE EARTH: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall He slay the wicked.

"AND RIGHTEOUSNESS SHALL BE THE GIRDLE OF HIS LOINS, AND FAITHFULNESS THE GIRDLE OF HIS REINS."

2. War and bloodshed will be abolished.

Isa. 9:6: "... HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED . . . THE PRINCE OF PEACE."

Micah 4:3: "And He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP A SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE."

3. The vegetable creation will be delivered from the curse.

Isa. 35:1,2,6: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them [for Israel]; and THE DESERT SHALL REJOICE, AND BLOSSOM AS THE ROSE.

"It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.

"... IN THE WILDERNESS SHALL WATERS BREAK OUT, AND STREAMS IN THE DESERT."

4. The animal creation will be subdued.

Isa. 11:6-9: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

"And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

"And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den.

*"THEY SHALL NOT HURT NOR DESTROY IN ALL MY HOLY MOUNTAIN"

5. Physical infirmity will be removed.

Isa. 35:5,6: "THEN THE EYES OF THE BLIND SHALL BE OPENED, AND THE EARS OF THE DEAF SHALL BE UNSTOPPED.

"THEN SHALL THE LAME MAN LEAP AS AN HART [STAG], AND THE TONGUE OF THE DUMB SING "

6. Trouble and poverty will be done away.

Isa. 65:19,21-23: "And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people: AND THE VOICE OF WEEPING SHALL BE NO MORE HEARD IN HER, NOR THE VOICE OF CRYING."

"And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.

"THEY SHALL NOT BUILD, AND ANOTHER INHABIT; THEY SHALL NOT PLANT, AND ANOTHER EAT: FOR AS THE DAYS OF A TREE ARE THE DAYS OF MY PEOPLE, AND MINE ELECT SHALL LONG ENJOY THE WORK OF THEIR HANDS.

"THEY SHALL NOT LABOR IN VAIN, NOR BRING FORTH FOR TROUBLE; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them."

7. The masses will be eager for the Word of God.

Isa. 2:3: "And many people shall go and say, COME YE, AND LET US GO UP TO THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD, TO THE HOUSE OF THE GOD OF JACOB; AND HE WILL TEACH US OF HIS WAYS, AND WE WILL WALK IN HIS PATHS: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Isa. 11:9: "... THE EARTH SHALL BE FULL OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD, AS THE WATERS COVER THE SEA."

8. Christ will be honored and exalted.

Isa. 2:11: "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, AND THE LORD ALONE SHALL BE EXALTED IN THAT DAY."

Zech. 14:9: "AND THE LORD SHALL BE KING OVER ALL THE EARTH: IN THAT DAY SHALL THERE BE ONE LORD, AND HIS NAME ONE."

Zech. 14:20,21: "In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD

"Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD OF HOSTS "¹⁷

9. *The prayers of God's people will be answered without delay.*

Isa. 65:24: "AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT BEFORE THEY CALL, I WILL ANSWER; AND WHILE THEY ARE YET SPEAKING, I WILL HEAR."

10. *Sorrow and sighing will flee away.*

Isa. 35:10: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, AND SORROW AND SIGHING SHALL FLEE AWAY."

We do not read that a state of *perfection* will yet be attained, even in that day, but some idea of the magnitude of the change to take place is given us in these Old Testament Scriptures as well as in other New Testament Scriptures where, for example, we read that the devil will be bound ([Rev. 20:1-3](#)) and the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms our Lord and of His Christ ([Rev. 11:15](#)).

These were the blessings which Peter now offered to the "men of Israel," provided they would repent and turn to Christ, for mark well, all these blessings revolve around *Israel* and are bound up with her salvation.

What a transformation will take place in this sin-cursed world when the Lord Jesus returns to reign! Unbelievers may laugh at such a thought, but as we behold the futile efforts of statesmen to bring peace and prosperity to the world without Christ, we remember the words of the Psalmist: "*He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision*" (Psa. 2:4) and we await with eager anticipation the day when *God* shall intervene and set His King upon His holy hill Zion.

It may be very soon that Christ will come to take the members of His Body away ([I Thes. 4:13-18](#)). Then, His ambassadors recalled, He will declare war upon this Christ-rejecting world, put down the rebellion and set up Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords.

THE ISSUE MADE CLEAR

"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your Brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you.

"AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT EVERY SOUL, WHICH WILL NOT HEAR THAT PROPHET, SHALL BE DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE," --Acts 3:22,23.

¹⁷ That the LORD [Jehovah] here refers to God *the Son* is evident from 12:10; 13:6; 14:1-4.

As Peter offers to Israel the return of her rejected Messiah, he makes the issue crystal clear. It is, *Repent or perish!* He quotes these words from Moses ([Deut. 18:15-19](#)) to drive home the fact that his hearers can expect forgiveness and blessing only if they will acknowledge the *authority* of the Christ whom they have rejected. It is not an optional matter. "*He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses*" (Heb. 10:28) and Moses was but a type of Him whose word was in itself final and authoritative. Hence, Moses had emphatically declared that rebellion against Messiah would not be tolerated; that refusal to hear Him would mean utter destruction.

It is doubtless this prophecy from Moses' writings that forms the background of our Lord's repeated cry: "*He that hath ears to hear let him hear!*" and of the Father's command: "*Hear ye Him,*" and of the Samaritan woman's observation: "*I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things*" (Matt. 11:15; 17:5, John 4:25).

THE CLOSING APPEAL

"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

"Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

"Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." --Acts 3:24-26.

From the mistaken notion that Pentecost was "the birthday of the Church," a more serious blunder has naturally followed; namely, that by "these days" Peter meant the days of this present dispensation, the days in which we now live. Thus the Old Testament prophets are supposed to have predicted what is taking place today. But the dispensation of grace, the blessing of the Gentiles through Israel's *fall*, the forming of the Body of Christ with its position in the heavenlies--all this was *not* the subject of prophecy, but of "*the mystery*" which had been "*hid from ages and from generations,*" until Israel had sealed her rejection of the King and His kingdom and God revealed it through Paul, the chief of sinners saved by grace ([Col. 1:24-27](#)).

The prophets *could not* have prophesied about this hidden purpose, nor could Peter have known about it here, just after Pentecost, for how could he then have appealed so passionately to Israel to accept Christ as *King*? Indeed, our Lord, just before His ascension had declined to tell His apostles whether the kingdom would "*at this time*" be restored to Israel, still keeping God's purpose for this present dispensation a secret. Thus the apostles could present Israel with a *bona fide* offer of the kingdom and a sincere plea to accept it, leaving Israel no grounds for complaint when it became necessary for God to set the nation aside. Hence, in the passage we are considering, Peter says *nothing* about the dispensation of grace or

the Body of Christ, but rather about the covenant promises and the blessing of "all the kindreds of the *earth*" *through Israel*.

Not only Moses, but Samuel and the long line of prophets which followed him had likewise fore told of these days, and Israel stood here at the very threshold of the long-hoped-for blessing.

How different this all is from the message which we preach today! Peter does not tell his hearers that "*there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek*" or that "*God hath concluded them all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon all.*" On the contrary he tells them that *they are first* in God's program, calling upon them to repent, that the nations might find salvation through them. He knows of no other hope for the world.

Our Lord Himself, when on earth, had also worked in strict harmony with this program. When a Gentile woman appealed to Him for help, he said:

"LET THE CHILDREN FIRST BE FILLED: FOR IT IS NOT MEET TO TAKE THE CHILDREN'S BREAD, AND TO CAST IT UNTO THE DOGS" (Mark 7:27).

In His first great commission to the twelve apostles He said:

"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).

This did not indicate a lack of love for the Gentiles, but rather the opposite. He knew that according to prophecy and the covenants the Gentiles were to be saved *through Israel*. Hence the urgent call to Israel to repent.

We find no interruption of this program, or departure from it, until we come to the raising up of Paul, and even he recognizes that this had *been* the divine program. In Acts 13:46 we find him saying to the rebellious Jews at Pisidian Antioch:

"IT WAS NECESSARY THAT THE WORD OF GOD SHOULD FIRST HAVE BEEN SPOKEN TO YOU: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

This is clearly what the apostle had in mind when he wrote years later:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; TO THE JEW FIRST, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Many a sincere missionary to the Jews has placed the emphasis on the wrong clause in this verse, using it as an argument for giving the Jew a prior claim to the gospel in this dispensation of grace. This is a serious misinterpretation of the

passage, for it is clear that Rom. 1:13-16 is Paul's defense for going *to the Gentiles*, not the Jews:

"... that I might have some fruit among YOU ALSO, even as among other GENTILES.

"I AM DEBTOR BOTH TO THE GREEKS, AND TO THE BARBARIANS [here the Jews are not even mentioned]; BOTH TO THE WISE, AND TO THE UNWISE,

"SO, AS MUCH AS IN ME IS, I AM READY TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOU THAT ARE AT ROME ALSO.

"FOR . . ."

Thus the context of Rom. 1:16 proves that Paul does not mean that the Jew still continues to have a priority over the Gentiles (otherwise Rom. 10:12, 13 would flatly contradict 1:16) but that until then this *had been* the order. In fact, at the very time when Paul wrote this, God was already in process of setting Israel aside (See [Rom. 11:7-33](#)).

This sheds light on why the apostle says he is "not ashamed," or more correctly, "unashamed" of the good news of Christ. He does not say this merely as some young Christian might say it. His point is that even though Israel has rejected the good news of Christ, *he* is by no means ashamed of it, indeed, even has a fuller revelation of it.

But here, just after Pentecost, Peter still proclaimed that good news which was based upon covenant promises and the writings of the prophets, saying to the "men of Israel": "*Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant . . . Unto you first* "

ISRAEL'S FATE IN THE BALANCE

The question now was, *How would Israel respond?* Humanly speaking, the issue hung in the balance. The risen Lord had declined to tell His apostles whether or not the kingdom would be restored at this time because God was to put the proposition up to Israel ([3:19-21](#)) and to place upon *her* the responsibility of accepting Christ or rejecting Him further. Thus Peter renews the call to repentance, saying to the favored people:

"Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him TO BLESS YOU, IN TURNING AWAY EVERY ONE OF YOU FROM HIS INIQUITIES" (Ver. 26).

Ah, but here is the rub. Israel would fain be delivered from Rome, but not from sin. Yet this had been the issue, even before John the Baptist had begun to call the people to repentance. Had not the angel said to Joseph:

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus: FOR HE SHALL SAVE HIS PEOPLE FROM THEIR SINS" (Matt. 1:21).

Not until Israel has learned this lesson will the promised blessing be granted. After explaining the secret of present Gentile blessing apart from Israel's instrumentality, the Apostle Paul goes on to say:

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall TURN AWAY UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB" (Rom. 11:26).

Alas, until this day the ancient people, *"being ignorant of God's righteousness,"* still *"go about to establish their own righteousness."* God hasten the day when the scales will fall from their eyes and they will see themselves as they are; when they will turn in true repentance to their Messiah!

Meantime let us all bow in humble gratitude before God as we reflect that out of darkness and wrath He has brought to light the riches of His grace; that He has cast the favored nation aside (along with the other nations) only that He might have mercy upon all, and might offer to individuals everywhere, reconciliation by grace, through faith in the finished work of Christ.

Chapter VII -Acts 4:1-31

ISRAEL'S RESPONSE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT'S OFFER

THE QUESTION OF EARLY ACTS

In Chapter 4 of the Book of Acts we begin to find the answer to the apostles' question: "*Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6).

As we have observed, our Lord did not tell His apostles whether or not the kingdom would be restored *at that time* because, humanly speaking, that depended upon the answer to another question: *Would Israel now accept Christ?*

In the records of our Lord's earthly ministry it is stated again and again that many of the Jews believed on Christ. In the Book of Acts it is the same. The chapter on Pentecost records the turning of three thousand to Christ, while Chapter 4 opens with the number brought up to five thousand men.

But this by no means implies the conversion of Israel *as a nation* at that time, nor did these individual conversions warrant the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom, for these thousands of Messiah's followers in Israel still constituted only a small minority in the nation and they did not represent Israel's government.

The primary question in early Acts, then, is: What will *the nation Israel*, her *government*, her *rulers*, do about Christ? To this question (and so to the question of the apostles) we now begin to find the answer.

As we open Chapter 4 Peter has just finished explaining to the wondering multitude at the temple that it is no personal power or godliness in John or him that has brought about the restoration of the lame man, but the power of the risen, exalted Christ. Filled with the Spirit, he has called upon the "men of Israel" to repent, so that Messiah may return, and with Him the long-promised "times of refreshing."

THE APOSTLES IMPRISONED

"And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them,

"Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

"And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day; for it was now eventide.

"Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand."

--Acts 4:1-4.

The reference to the Sadducees here is significant. First of all, they were the most powerful sect in the Sanhedrin. In Acts 5:17 we learn that "the high priest.. . and all ... with him" were of "the sect of the Sadducees," and a comparison of this passage with Acts 4:1 and 5:24 indicates that the priesthood as a body belonged to that group.

So strongly were they entrenched in the Sanhedrin that the High Priest, Caiaphas, a Sadducee, had dared to ridicule the Pharisees openly in the council for their timidity in dealing with Christ ([John 11:47-50](#)).

It was the strongest party in Israel's government, then, that led the opposition against Christ in the issue that had arisen.

But there is greater significance to this Sadducean hostility to Christ. It had been the Pharisees who had led the opposition to Christ before His death and resurrection. Now the Sadducees had taken the lead. The reason is clear when we take into account the beliefs of these two sects.

From Matthew 22:23 we learn that *"the Sadducees . . . say that there is no resurrection,"* while in Acts 23:8 we find their teaching as to this contrasted to that of the Pharisees:

"FOR THE SADDUCEES SAY THAT THERE IS NO RESURRECTION, NEITHER ANGEL NOR SPIRIT: BUT THE PHARISEES CONFESS BOTH."

Necessarily, therefore, the multiplied testimonies to the resurrection of Christ were embarrassing the Sadducees even more than the Pharisees. The Pharisees at least believed in the resurrection of the body. With the Sadducees it was different. They had always opposed the doctrine of the resurrection. Poor apostates! They did not see that the resurrection (particularly the resurrection of Christ) was the very hope of Israel ([Acts 23:6](#); [24:14,15](#); [26:6-8](#); [28:20](#)).

Little wonder they were grieved as the apostles preached "through Christ" (Gr. *"in Christ"*) the resurrection from the dead, especially with a restored cripple standing by as evidence that the miracle-working Christ was indeed alive.

Now, they feel, they must fight for their very existence, for not only is their whole Sadducean system in danger of being overthrown, but they are about to be convicted of the murder of Messiah. Bad enough, they think, that the apostles should oppose their teaching concerning the resurrection, but to offer evidences of *Christ's* resurrection as proof is infinitely worse.

They must hold all the more firmly now to their teaching that resurrection is impossible. They dare not allow that the Jesus whom they have crucified may be

alive again. Fearful thought! They must use all the weight of their religious influence and teaching as Sadducees to prove that "that deceiver" is dead.

The doctrinal beliefs of the Sadducees and their determined denial of the resurrection, of course, in no wise lessened their guilt, for they had for some time been faced with facts so convincing that their continued denial could only be wilful. Closing their eyes to overwhelming evidence they had "*set themselves . . . against the Lord, and against His anointed.*"

Had they not, in their envy, been so disturbed about the mighty works of Christ that they had met in council with the Pharisees, saying: "*What do we? for this man doeth many miracles?*" (John 11:47).

Were they not aware that He had predicted His resurrection? Had they not taken precautions against this possibility? Had they not appealed to Pilate:

"Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

"Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first" (Matt. 27:63,64).

And had they not seen the futility of these precautions? Had they not heard the testimony of the frightened Roman guards returning from the tomb? Had they not paid them "large money" to induce them to change their testimony? (Matt. 28:11-14).

Now, with scores of actual witnesses to Christ's resurrection testifying boldly, unanswerable evidence on their side, it is pathetic to find these Sadducees more determined than ever to frustrate the truth, even by oppression and persecution.

With all this in view, the Sadducees' displeasure at the apostles' teaching takes on a new aspect. It appears entirely devoid of any possible virtue; least of all, that of sincerity.

Laying hands on the apostles, the rulers now hold them in custody for trial on the morrow, when the Sanhedrin will gather. Meantime the number of believers grows, for while enemies of the truth may persecute the preacher, they cannot stop the people from *believing* him.

THE APOSTLES ON TRIAL

"And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes,

"And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

"And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?"

--Acts 4:5-7.

An august assembly is here described. The highest-ranking members of the Sanhedrin are present. They are mentioned by name. This is no ordinary session of the council. We can almost see them as they enter to take their places. There is an air of imperious dignity about them and they seem determined that in this test they shall not be the ones to suffer defeat.

By their first question the rulers give themselves away, however. They are not even seeking evidence as to whether or not Christ is alive. They are opposing the apostles for the very same reason that they have opposed Christ from the beginning. They are jealous of their power.

True spiritual power had long departed from them and it had troubled them that One had arisen in their midst who spoke "*with authority and NOT as the scribes.*" And to see this authority attested by mighty miracles had enraged them even more.

"And when He was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto Him as He was teaching, and said, BY WHAT AUTHORITY DOEST THOU THESE THINGS? AND WHO GAVE THEE THIS AUTHORITY?" (Matt. 21:23).

Imagine, asking the Great Physician to produce His doctor's diploma! Suppose one should arise in our midst, going from city to city, instantly and completely healing all the sick simply by the word of his mouth and without charge. Should the authorities demand of him a physician's license? Should they not rather acknowledge that he is above all physicians? Should they not hold banquets in his honor and erect statues to his memory?

And now the rulers deal with the apostles as they had dealt with Christ. Who, they feel, are these upstarts, that they should draw the multitudes to them and try to prove Christ alive by their miracles? And so, the apostles are brought to trial on a charge of--*healing a lame man!*

How plain it is that the apostles, even apart from their gift of healing, had a spiritual authority of which Israel's apostate rulers knew nothing, and that the rulers were merely unwilling to yield to others their influence over the people. They had made themselves quite clear in this very first question. They meant to silence the apostles by intimidation. They had really meant to say: "You are undermining our authority over the people. Stop it or we will crush you."

THE ACCUSERS ACCUSED

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

"If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole;

"Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.

"This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." --Acts 4:8-12.

What a reply! It could only have been given by one filled with the Spirit. There is subtle significance in every phrase, devastating power in every sentence.

"If we this day be examined of the GOOD DEED done to the impotent man!" And with this, in a moment, he has the arrogant judges on the defensive as he, the accused, becomes the accuser of the Sanhedrin--and with such evidence at his side!

See the mounting force of his words. They have the power of a gathering storm:

"If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole:

"BE IT KNOWN UNTO YOU ALL, AND TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

"THAT BY THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH, WHOM YE CRUCIFIED, WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD, EVEN BY HIM DOTH THIS MAN STAND HERE BEFORE YOU WHOLE."

We stand amazed at Spirit-filled Peter as he faces the supreme court of his nation, charging them with the murder of Messiah, telling them that *He* is the Stone they have despised and rejected and that He has now become the Head of the corner. We stand amazed as he declares to Israel's leaders that the nation's salvation is to be found in this rejected Christ and in Him alone.¹⁸

It may seem at first sight that Peter is out of order speaking thus to God's appointed rulers, but we must not forget the words of our Lord to these same rulers, as He warned them of the consequences of their rebellion:

¹⁸ Note, Peter says, "whereby we [not 'ye'] must be saved." While it is true that individual salvation is to be found in Christ alone, Peter here evidently refers to the salvation of the nation over which these men were the rulers. Compare here Matt. 1:21 and Rom. 11:26.

"THEREFORE SAY I UNTO YOU, THE KINGDOM OF GOD SHALL BE TAKEN FROM YOU, AND GIVEN TO A NATION BRINGING FORTH THE FRUITS THEREOF" (Matt. 21:43).

The "nation" to whom the kingdom was to be given was the "little flock" of His followers ([Luke 12:32](#)) and Peter and the eleven had already been appointed the supreme judges of that nation, to rule with Christ at His return:

Matt. 19:28: "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Thus, while the apostles have been called to trial, in a deeper sense it is the rulers of Israel who are on trial for their rejection of Christ. Once more they are faced with the facts: You have slain your Messiah. Repent and receive Him now, or perish.

THE JUDGES CONVICTED

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

--Acts 4:13.

This part of the account has been greatly misunderstood. It is generally supposed that Peter and John, though recently but fishermen, had carried themselves so well that the rulers had concluded that they had grown culturally and intellectually by their association with Christ in His earthly ministry.

This is not the point. The verse says: "When they saw the *boldness* of Peter and John, and perceived that they were [not *had been*, but *still were*] unlearned and ignorant [or, *uneducated* and *common*] men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

The point is that these judges--veterans all--could easily see that the men before them were no clever deceivers. They were uneducated and common men, whose boldness plainly sprang from *deep conviction*. A basic honesty shone forth from them as they faced their accusers, relating what they had actually seen and knew to be the truth, with the result that the judges were convinced in their own hearts that Peter and John had indeed been with *the resurrected Christ*.

THE DECISION OF THE JURY

"And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

"But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,

"Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.

"But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly [strictly] threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

"And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." --Acts 4:14-18.

Here we get another glimpse of the intense wickedness of these religious deceivers to whom the people of Israel had so long looked for guidance.

The whole procedure had been irregular in the first place. The jury is supposed to *hear* charges, not *make* them. But now the case goes badly for *them*. They are again charged with the murder of Christ and warned that He has risen from the dead. They are convinced that the defendants are speaking the truth. They are confronted with the clearest evidence. They admit it. Yet these judges of Israel's Supreme Court are determined not to be embarrassed further and do not hesitate to try to silence honest testimony by threats and intimidation. And they will go farther if necessary.

Thus the religious rulers of Israel, the administrators of the law of God, refuse the witness of the Spirit and intensify their opposition to God's Anointed, their Savior King.

As for the apostles, a peculiar spiritual power is theirs even now and they calmly answer those who have dealt so unjustly with them.

THE APOSTLES' RESPONSE

"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." --Acts 4:19,20.

Here is a courage that runs deep. They have thought this over well before saying it. They say it because they are conscious that they have been carrying out their Lord's commission and that God is, and will continue to be, on their side. They are ready, if need be, to die for the truth, but silent they will not be while God gives them breath.

THE APOSTLES' TRIUMPH

"So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.

"For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.

"And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them." --Acts 4:21-23.

We leave it with the reader to judge for himself who has come out victorious in this trial. Having informed the judges that they most definitely intend to continue preaching Christ and the resurrection, the apostles are dismissed. The rulers dare not detain them longer.

THE PRAYER FOR BOLDNESS

"And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

"Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?

"The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.

"For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together.

"For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

"And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

"By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus." --Acts 4:24-3..

Note well the subject of this wonderful prayer.

Do they say: "O, God, grant that none of these evil things with which they threaten us may come to pass?" Do they say: "O Lord, be merciful and deliver us from this persecution?"

They do not. Their prayer is made of different stuff.

It does not even seem to occur to them to think of their own safety. The wicked religious leaders of Israel are using threats and intimidation to deprive their nation of the long-promised blessing which has now been offered, and the apostles, though humble their station in life, recognize the call to courage and pray only that they may be given boldness to meet the situation without flinching.

But there is a *dispensational* as well as a moral lesson for us here, for these believers ask that God will give them boldness *by stretching forth His hand to work miracles*. In other words, it was as God bore witness with miraculous demonstrations that they would be emboldened to declare His Word in the face of opposition and persecution.

Compare this with the case of Paul, the prisoner of Christ, who prayed for boldness to make known the mystery entirely apart from any sign from heaven to encourage him ([Eph. 6:18-20](#)).

In early Acts, however, we have to do with *prophecy*, not the mystery, and since according to prophecy these signs were to usher in the reign of Christ, the prayer of this company at Jerusalem was perfectly in order.

THE FATHER'S RESPONSE

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." --Acts 4:31.

Thus the apostles meet the crisis with faith and courage, and God does not fail to give them the needed help and encouragement.

Nevertheless the attitude of the rulers remains unchanged and Israel is no nearer to millennial blessing.

Already the favored nation has begun to answer the great question at issue. She will *not* repent and accept her Messiah. The kingdom is not yet to be restored to Israel.

This does not mean, however, that the apostles' testimony to Israel will be immediately terminated and that they will now go to the Gentiles. How, according to all Old Testament covenant and prophecy, could the Gentiles be saved apart from the salvation of Israel? And so God lingers in mercy over His rebellious people as the apostles continue to go forth, boldly proclaiming the risen Christ as Israel's only hope.

How gloomy the prospect seems; and it will become still darker. We must not anticipate here, except to thank God for the glorious truth that,

"WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND" (Rom. 5:20).

It was when all hope seemed gone that God revealed His surprise of grace: the mystery kept secret since the world began, and, saving the chief of sinners, sent him forth with "the gospel of the grace of God."

Israel, like the nations, has now been alienated from God, but *individual* Jews and Gentiles are being gloriously *reconciled* to God in one body by the cross--the very cross which had so deeply involved them in guilt.

Thus while that death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too.

--*John Newton.*

Strange as it may seem, we need boldness to proclaim even this glorious message. Indeed, Satan hates the gospel of the grace of God more than any message that has ever been preached. This is evident from the sufferings which the apostle Paul endured. But while God still deals with men in grace let us proclaim the glad message with all boldness and say with Paul:

"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death" (Phil 1:20).

Chapter VIII - Acts 4:32-5:16

A FORETASTE OF THE KINGDOM

A FORETASTE OF KINGDOM BLESSING

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

"And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." --Acts 4:32-35.

In striking contrast to the envy, the deceit and the calloused indifference to justice on the part of Israel's rulers, we see again the truly blessed state of the "little flock" of Messiah's followers.

We are impressed with their oneness of heart and soul and with the spontaneous manner in which each gives his *all* to the rest, so that even the rich sell their investments and bring the proceeds to the apostles for distribution among the needy.¹⁹

This is nothing less than a foretaste of the kingdom reign of Christ. Indeed, these disciples, supernaturally motivated and controlled, are practicing the kingdom program in anticipation of Messiah's return.

It is strange that those who claim that the Sermon on the Mount applies to the present day do not practice its precepts as these disciples did by selling their all and giving to the poor. Instead, the opponents of dispensational truth water down the plain commands of Matt. 5:40-42; 6:19,25,31-34; 10:9; Luke 12:32,33; 18:22, etc., to make them fit the day in which we live. They interpret these commands to mean that we should not permit the laying up of earthly treasures to hinder our spiritual blessing or usefulness; that we should be *willing* to sell all for Him *if necessary* and to "give to him that asketh" *if the Lord should so direct!*

¹⁹ This is not contradictory but *complementary* to Isa. 65:21-23, for it was evidently their *investments* that they sold and the proceeds of which they brought to the apostles for distribution among the needy. Any who resided in houses of their own evidently continued to possess and occupy them (E. g., John Mark, Acts 12:12) but even these they did not consider their own but freely shared them with others.

The believers at Pentecost did not seek to evade our Lord's plain commands in this way. Understanding clearly what the kingdom program was, they joined heartily to carry it out.

They took seriously the warnings of our Lord about disobeying these commands:

Matt. 5:19: "WHOSOEVER THEREFORE SHALL BREAK ONE OF THESE LEAST COMMANDMENTS, AND SHALL TEACH MEN SO, HE SHALL BE CALLED THE LEAST IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: BUT WHOSOEVER SHALL DO AND TEACH THEM, THE SAME SHALL BE CALLED GREAT IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN."

Matt. 7:26,27: "AND EVERY ONE THAT HEARETH THESE SAYINGS OF MINE, AND DOETH THEM NOT, SHALL BE LIKENED UNTO A FOOLISH MAN, WHICH BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON THE SAND:

"AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BEAT UPON THAT HOUSE; AND IT FELL: AND GREAT WAS THE FALL OF IT."

The disciples, we say, took these words to heart. They were quite unlike those modern theologians who insist that the Sermon on the Mount is for our obedience, yet practice only certain parts of it, entirely disregarding commands which would be difficult, if not impossible, to carry out today.

We have already seen in Acts 2:44,45 that,

"... ALL THAT BELIEVED were together, and HAD ALL THINGS COMMON;

"And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need."

It was not a question of whether or not they *felt led* to give their all for the common good. This was *expected* of them and they *all* did it.

Here in Acts 4 this is emphasized again as one of the contributing factors to the blessedness of their state.

"... NEITHER SAID ANY OF THEM THAT OUGHT OF THE THINGS WHICH HE POSSESSED WAS HIS OWN"

"NEITHER WAS THERE ANY AMONG THEM THAT LACKED: FOR AS MANY AS WERE POSSESSORS OF LANDS OR HOUSES SOLD THEM, AND BROUGHT THE PRICES OF THE THINGS THAT WERE SOLD" (Ver. 32,34).

Little wonder that "great power" and "great grace" was upon them all!

But this is not God's program for "this present evil age." Think of the disillusionment that would come to any person practicing this program today! That even the opponents of dispensational truth know this in their hearts is evidenced by the fact that *they* do not practice it.

And think of the bewilderment of the person who, reading this passage and sincerely seeking to practice the Pentecostal program, should then read for the first time in Paul's epistles, written later, about "*the poor saints which are at Jerusalem*" (Rom. 15:26) and his declaration:

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house., he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Tim. 5:8).

Such a person, unless he had some theory to uphold, would surely conclude that a great dispensational change had taken place since Pentecost.

THE CASE OF Joses BARNABAS

"And Moses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

"Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" -- Acts 4:36,37.

Here a particular case is advanced: that of Joses Barnabas. It was the apostles who had named him Barnabas, or "Son of Consolation," evidently because he had been sympathetic to their cause and had helped in it, for the word "*consolation*" comes from the Greek *parakletos*, "one called alongside [to help]."

It has been suggested that this Joses Barnabas may be the Joseph Barsabas who, with Matthias and the eleven apostles, had followed the Lord Jesus from His baptism by John until His ascension into heaven ([Acts 1:21-26](#)). If this is so it may be that he was not appointed as the twelfth apostle because he had not yet cast in his lot unreservedly with Messiah's followers.

At any rate, this Joses Barnabas now forsakes all to join the Spirit-filled throng at Jerusalem and is so respected and beloved that he is later sent to look into the reports of the conversion of the Gentiles at Antioch, from whence he sends for Saul of Tarsus ([Acts 11:19-26](#)) and finally becomes, with Paul, an apostle of the Gentiles ([Gal. 2:9](#)).

A FORETASTE OF KINGDOM JUDGMENT

"But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,

"And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

"But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?

"Whiles it remained, was it not thine own"? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

"And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.

"And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

"And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in.

"And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.

"Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

"Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

"And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things." --Acts 5:1-11.

THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

It is sometimes supposed that the sin of Ananias and Sapphira marks the beginning of the breakdown of the divine communism practiced in early Acts.

This is not so, for while these two deceivers departed seriously from the God-given program, they were stricken dead immediately and the program continued unchanged.

Nor must it be thought that Ananias and Sapphira were slain simply for lying. All of Adam's children have been guilty of telling lies--often much greater ones--but all have not been stricken dead for it.

What we have here is rather a foretaste of conditions which will prevail in the kingdom, when any deviation from the divine order will be visited by immediate judgment.

Ananias and Sapphira were not slain for dishonesty alone, but for dishonestly keeping back part of their goods, and so violating the standards of the kingdom. They were stricken dead for trying to join the Messianic Church while deceitfully holding on to private investments. Note carefully the wording of Verse 3:

"But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart TO LIE TO THE HOLY GHOST, AND TO KEEP BACK PART OF THE PRICE OF THE LAND?"

Their Problem

As Ananias and Sapphira came into contact with the believers at Jerusalem they must have observed that their way of living was blessed and wonderful beyond anything known until that time. It would be like heaven on earth to belong to such a group.

Moreover, they apparently had their eyes on the honor that would naturally go to those giving up their all in such a cause. They "loved the praise of men."

But--they loved money even more. They were not prepared to actually part with all their possessions to cast in their lot with the followers of Messiah. They were like the rich young ruler, only less honest, for he at least *went away sorrowful* (See [Matt. 19:16-22](#)) while Ananias and Sapphira tried to gain the advantages of the Messianic pro-gram without paying the price.

Their Solution

We might have concluded that Ananias and Sapphira were tempted to keep back part of the price of their property *after* having sold it, but Verses 2,4 and 9 seem to indicate too clearly that their sin was deliberate and planned.

So as not to be deprived of the blessings enjoyed by the happy throng at Jerusalem, Ananias and Sapphira had agreed upon the following plan:

They owned an estate. They would sell it--really sell it--and then bring a good part of the price to the apostles, keeping the rest for themselves, although not mentioning this last fact.

The actual selling of their property would make the desired impression upon the disciples, and as to that which they were keeping for themselves, they did not have to tell others their business. In fact, even if Peter should ask whether they had "sold the land for so much," they could answer: "Yea, for so much," for they *had* sold it for so much--and more!

How many believers since that day have followed the example of this shrewd couple! As though God did not know what they owned and how much of it they were giving to Him!

The Result

But this was no time to deal dishonestly with finances, for along with "the powers of the age to come" went the gift of knowledge, and their lie was immediately detected.

Even as Peter rebuked Ananias (who came in first) for lying to the Holy Spirit and keeping back part of the proceeds of his land, Ananias fell down dead. Whether this was from shock or by purely supernatural means, it was still the finger of God and it had a salutary effect upon the group as a whole.

The whole scene is one of judgment. Nothing is said of sorrow or mourning, but rather it is noted that "*great fear came on all them that heard these things,*" and as to the smitten Ananias, we read simply that,

"THE YOUNG MEN AROSE, WOUND HIM UP, AND CARRIED HIM OUT, AND BURIED HIM" (Ver. 6).

It was three hours later when Sapphira came in (Ver. 7). It would be interesting to speculate on what she might have been doing in those three hours, but we do know that she had that much more time to consider her action and that she was given even further opportunity to repent, as Peter asked her: "*Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?*" (Ver. 8).

One would think that being questioned as to the actual amount of the sale would have unnerved her, but her attitude was entirely foreign and contrary to that which was making the Messianic Church such an overwhelming success. Brazenly she lied and said: "*Yea, for so much.*"

In her case Peter informed her of the judgment awaiting her though, as with her husband, he did not actually pronounce death upon her. And once more the young men came in, carried out her dead body and buried it alongside that of her husband, with the result that "*great fear came upon all the church*" (Ver. 11).

And rightly so, for Messiah's kingdom would be little improvement upon the present state of affairs if by pretense and deceit men were permitted to lay up store for themselves while others gave their all for the common good.

Thus the character of the kingdom was to be (and is to be) one of absolute equity and justice.

Jer. 23:5: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and A KING SHALL REIGN AND PROSPER, AND SHALL EXECUTE JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE IN THE EARTH."

Rev. 19:15: "... AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON"

Isa. 66:24: "AND THEY SHALL GO FORTH, AND LOOK UPON THE CARCASSES OF THE MEN THAT HAVE TRANSGRESSED AGAINST ME. . ."

THE LESSON TO US

As we know, the proclamation of the kingdom has been interrupted by the dispensation of the grace of God. Rather than proceed immediately with the prophetic plan, crushing the world's rebellion against Christ, setting Him up as King, etc., God in grace has postponed the judgment and held the establishment of His kingdom in abeyance while He offers reconciliation to all men everywhere entirely by grace, through faith in the merits of the rejected Christ.

The story of Ananias and Sapphira could not possibly fit into the present dispensation. However, many of God's dear children, alas, come dangerously close to being as unfaithful--not to say dishonest--with their earthly possessions as they, and as a result will lose rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

Simply because we in this age are not commanded to sell all that we have and give to the poor, does it follow that we are justified in greedily gathering in and hoarding all we can for ourselves, while the cause of Christ and others about us suffer need?

How many Christians, especially in times of prosperity, become money-mad! They prosper in business; their income increases and before they are aware of it they are giving nearly all their time and energy to the getting of earthly gain while spiritually they shrivel and wither away.

Perhaps they began by telling themselves that with greater riches for themselves they could do more for the Lord, but it does not generally work out that way, for the more they become engrossed in the pursuit of wealth the less they think of their obligation to the Savior who died for them.

That others, no more obligated to God than they, make great sacrifices for the cause of Christ seems to have little effect upon them. They will even make it appear to others that they are doing their part in the Lord's work, while in their hearts they know they are living for self. Like the poor rich man who in his folly could think only of pulling down his barns and building greater ones, they plan and toil almost exclusively for this life.

Under the Pentecostal order they would have had to give it all up to be Christ's disciples. Under the Law they would have been obliged to bring at least their tenths, but with all the riches of God's grace bestowed upon them, many seemingly sincere children of God do not even give Him that much, they are so occupied with getting riches for themselves.

And this while God says, through *our* apostle, to *us* who live *today*:

"SET YOUR AFFECTION ON THINGS ABOVE, NOT ON THINGS ON THE EARTH" (Col. 3:2).

"FOR THE LOVE OF MONEY IS A ROOT OF ALL KINDS OF EVIL" (I Tim. 6:10, R.V.).

Concerning giving under grace the apostle Paul says:

"But this I say, HE WHICH SOWETH SPARINGLY SHALL REAP ALSO SPARINGLY; AND HE WHICH SOWETH BOUNTIFULLY SHALL REAP ALSO BOUNTIFULLY.

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: FOR GOD LOVETH A CHEERFUL [Gr. HILARIOUS] GIVER" (II Cor. 9:6,7).

"THEREFORE . . . SEE THAT YE ABOUND IN THIS GRACE ALSO" (II Cor. 8:7).

Yes, the contrast between this self-interested couple and the Spirit-filled disciples still speaks to us today. The disciples were thinking of others, Ananias and his wife of themselves.

Those who have had some measure of responsibility in the work of the Lord have often been troubled in heart over two things: 1) that some who can afford so little should make such great sacrifices and 2) that some who could help in such a large way should do so little.

Paul himself was troubled about these things. He was burdened that the Macedonians should beg him so earnestly to accept gifts which they could ill afford (II Cor. 8:1-5) while the Corinthians, who were much better off financially, had delayed for more than a year to send a gift they had promised, so that it became necessary to send Titus to Corinth to awaken them to their responsibility in this regard (II Cor. 8:6-10).

To those who could not afford to give much the apostle wrote:

"IF THERE BE FIRST A WILLING MIND, IT IS ACCEPTED ACCORDING TO THAT A MAN HATH, AND NOT ACCORDING TO THAT HE HATH NOT" (II Cor. 8:7).

But to those who always meant to help but never did, he wrote:

"I SPEAK NOT BY COMMANDMENT, BUT BY OCCASION OF THE FORWARDNESS OF OTHERS, AND TO PROVE THE SINCERITY OF YOUR LOVE.

"FOR YE KNOW THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT, THOUGH HE WAS RICH, YET FOR YOUR SAKES HE BECAME POOR, THAT YE THROUGH HIS POVERTY MIGHT BE RICH."

"NOW THEREFORE PERFORM THE DOING OF IT; THAT AS THERE WAS A READINESS TO WILL, SO THERE MAY BE A PERFORMANCE ALSO OUT OF THAT WHICH YE HAVE" (II Cor. 8:8,9,11).

THE POWER OF PENTECOST PRESERVED

"And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

"And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: But the people magnified them.

"And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)

"Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.

"There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one." --Acts 5:12,16.

It was not dishonesty alone, then, that brought the wrath of God down upon Ananias and Sapphira, but dishonesty *under such circumstances*. They were stricken dead for pretending to join in with the program of Messiah's long-promised kingdom (in which all was to be shared in common) while actually keeping part of the price of their property for themselves.

It is true that with the crucifixion in view our Lord had countermanded His original order to sell all and distribute to the poor ([Luke 22:35,36](#)) but on Calvary He had prayed for Israel's forgiveness and here in Acts the program is resumed again with the legitimate assumption that the nation will now repent, accept Messiah and so bring peace and prosperity to the world.

Now the apostles had begun to actually *offer* the kingdom. The "times of refreshing" were at hand. In fact Messiah's followers were already experiencing a foretaste of these blessings as they gladly gave their all to each other and lived out of one common treasury.

In the light of all this, such sin as that of Ananias and Sapphira could not, of course, be tolerated, for then how would the long-awaited kingdom differ from what

had gone before or from what is taking place in "this present evil age," when men distrust each other and scheme and plot to get each other's wealth?

But the judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira had a wholesome effect. The "great fear" that came "upon all the church" was followed by *great power*. Many signs and wonders were wrought among the people. The sick were brought into the streets in beds and couches so that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might fall on them. Nor was this limited to Jerusalem alone, for we read that multitudes from the cities round about, brought their sick and demon-possessed to be restored, "and they were healed every one."

And the judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira had a salutary effect on those outside as well, for no one dared join the company who was not one with them in heart. Yet this in no way discouraged men from *honestly* joining the movement. Indeed it brought a greater respect for it, for we read:

"AND BELIEVERS WERE THE MORE ADDED TO THE LORD, MULTITUDES BOTH OF MEN AND WOMEN" (Acts 5:14).

It is significant that at this time we find the believers "all with one accord in *Solomon's porch*" (Ver. 12).

Solomon's porch was a large outer court of the temple where the multitudes gathered together for prayer (Cf. [Acts 3:1,11](#)). Remember that no revelation had as yet been given about freedom from the law. This was first proclaimed through Paul ([Acts 13:38,39](#); [15:1,2](#); [Gal. 2:2](#); [Rom. 3:21-26](#)). Hence it was proper for these Jewish believers in Messiah to observe Moses' law, and perfectly natural for them to gather in Solomon's porch daily under these circumstances. Faith in Messiah had evidently not caused them to lose interest in the temple worship. Furthermore, this would be a good place to reach the multitudes with their message (See [John 10:22-24](#) and [Acts 3:11](#)).

But there is greater significance in the connection of Solomon's porch with this fresh manifestation of the Spirit's power. Solomon was a type of Christ, David's greater Son ([II Sam. 7:12-16](#)) and the peace, prosperity and glory of his reign foreshadowed that of Christ's.

David, it is true, was also a king of Israel and also a type of Christ, but he was mainly a type of Christ in His humiliation and finished work. David was the man of blood; Solomon the king of glory. David won for Israel the peace and blessing enjoyed under Solomon ([I Chron. 22:7-9](#)).

It is not strange, then, to find the disciples daily in Solomon's porch, for it was the greater Solomon whose glorious reign was now being offered. Indeed, even before His coming the disciples were experiencing a foretaste of the peace, prosperity and blessing of His kingdom. Little wonder that Ananias and Sapphira were judged for tampering with the God-given program, nor, as we have seen, will anything of the kind be tolerated when the kingdom is actually set up.

ANOTHER LESSON TO US

It is true that we are now living under a different dispensation than Ananias and Sapphira, that the sins of even believers are dealt with in a different manner and that the power of the Spirit is manifested in a different way.

But the *principles* of God do not change. Grace is not mere tolerance or laxity.

Sometimes believers wink at sin and condone wrong, saying : "We are under grace." Leaders in the Church fail to rebuke open sin on the plea that "we are under grace."

But such unfaithfulness is as far removed from true grace as the east is from the west. Indeed the whole idea of God or His representatives condoning sin is diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Spirit-inspired apostle of grace.

Any true Berean should know that *there are more exhortations to godly living in the epistles of Paul than in all the four Gospels and the book of Acts put together.* And as to members of the assembly who *live* in sin, the man of God is directed to rebuke such openly, and the assembly to expel and shun them if they persist (I Tim. 5:20; Tit. 1:13; 2:15; II Thes. 3:13-15, etc.). We are well aware that in many churches serious sin has been tolerated so long that it has become increasingly embarrassing to deal with, but such problems do not change the Word of God or lessen the pastor's or the assembly's responsibility to obey it.

Even the "great fear" that had such a wholesome effect upon the Pentecostal Church should not be entirely absent in the Church of today.

Do you say, "*Perfect love casteth out fear?*" Of course! But I John 4:18 speaks of our love to Him, not His to us. Did we love and serve Him perfectly all fear would of course be cast out, and in the measure that we *do* love Him fear is cast out, but surely we are still very far from perfect in this. Hence it is necessary for God still to discipline His people, both directly and through those whom He has placed in authority in the Church.

It is true that there are many things the believer need not fear, such as the loss of salvation, the opposition of our adversary, etc., but that fear does and should have a place in the experience of believers is clearly taught in the Pauline Epistles.

In II Cor. 7:1 the apostle exhorts:

"... Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,
PERFECTING HOLINESS IN THE FEAR OF GOD."

In I Tim. 5:20 he instructs Pastor Timothy:

"Them that [practice] sin rebuke before all, THAT OTHERS ALSO MAY FEAR."

And in Rom. 11:20 he says, almost bluntly: "... BE NOT HIGH-MINDED, BUT FEAR."

It is sometimes said that the Greek word here means "reverential trust." This is not so. It is true that the Hebrew word *yirah* has the idea of reverence in it, but this New Testament word *phobos* means *fear*.

Three times it is rendered *terror* in our Authorized Version. In speaking of the judgment seat of Christ, for example, the apostle says:

"KNOWING THEREFORE THE TERROR OF THE LORD, WE PERSUADE MEN . . ." (II Cor. 5:11).

And even apart from this, to behold *God* paying for *our* sins with *the blood of His Son*; to reflect on *what we have escaped--and how*; surely this should produce in us a godly fear and give us a deeper sense of His infinite grace.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
O, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.
Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

One who can look at Calvary and *not* tremble has not really seen Calvary and has little comprehension of the grace of God.

This fear- not the fear of being lost, or the slavish fear of one being bludgeoned into obedience, but the fear that springs from a realization of God's holiness, our sinfulness and His grace in accepting us through the merits of the Crucified--*this* fear has a beneficial effect upon God's people. It is *this* fear- not at all incompatible with grace- that causes us to "*purge out the old leaven*" (I Cor. 5:7). And not until the old leaven is purged out can we be truly used of God.

"If a man therefore purge himself from these, He shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (II Tim. 2:21).²⁰

Thus the story of Ananias and Sapphira is not without its lessons for us. They indeed lived under a different dispensation, when a different message was being preached and the Holy Spirit worked in a different manner, but the principle is the same. God still hates sin and will not bless where it is condoned. But when it is recognized and humbly dealt with, the power of the Spirit will again be manifested.

²⁰ For a fuller discussion of this subject see the author's booklet, entitled: *The Fear of God*.

Chapter IX - Acts 5:17-6:7

THE CONTINUED GROWTH OF THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

THE ADVERSARY ENRAGED

"When the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees) and were filled with indignation,

"And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.

"But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

"Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

"And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

"But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told,

"Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.

"Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

"Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people, Acts 5:17-25.

A purged church, power restored, the adversary enraged. This is a natural sequence, for our adversary, the devil, cannot bear to see God's people make spiritual progress.

The high priest and his associates had tried to exercise self-control in this crisis, but were now beginning to lose their tempers.

It will be profitable here to review the background briefly in order that we may see how powerful was the testimony to Christ's resurrection and how futile the attempts to suppress it.

At the trial of Christ, of course, it was *"the chief priests and elders"* who had *"persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus."* As a result, *"all the people"* had joined them in crying: *"His blood be on us, and on our children"* (Matt. 27:20,25).

But a few days later, confronted with evidence that our Lord had actually risen from the dead, these leaders were not so ready to take the responsibility for His crucifixion. Now they paid "large money" to the soldiers who had guarded the tomb to persuade them to change their account of what they had seen and heard.

From this point on the chief priests and elders remained out of sight, as it were, and did nothing to stir up matters. Meanwhile the apostles preached Christ in the very temple itself, with the multitude of the disciples *"continuing daily with one accord in the temple"* (Acts 2:46).

But things grew worse for Israel's religious leaders as the lame beggar at the Gate Beautiful was restored and multitudes more believed.

"Grieved" that the apostles should be able to produce such evidence of Christ's resurrection --and, indeed, that the Sadducean system was thus being undermined -- and determined to suppress the testimony if possible, they brought the apostles to trial.

But at the trial the chief priests were immediately set on the defensive, as the apostles charged them with the murder of Christ and warned them that He had indeed risen from the dead (Acts 4:1-14).

Convinced in their own hearts that the apostles had seen and been with the resurrected Christ, the rulers merely threatened them not to speak further in the name of Jesus. But to these weak threats the apostles replied firmly that they could not *but* speak what they had seen and heard (Acts 4:17-20).

It is clear that the rulers had made a mistake in bringing the apostles to trial, for *"finding nothing how they might punish them"* they were forced to *"let them go,"* even in spite of their declaration that they would continue to preach Christ.

With the apostles so decisively the victors in this contest, the chief priests again withdrew, hoping that perhaps the storm might yet blow over. But instead the Pentecostal church was blessed with greater power than ever, as signs and wonders were wrought among the people and *"believers"* were *"the more added unto the Lord."*

And now a contest indeed develops! The high priest and his associates rise up in anger, lay hands upon the apostles and put them in "the common prison" the public ward. But an angel of the Lord opens the prison doors, saying: *"Go, stand [Lit. take your stand] and speak in the temple"* (Acts 5:17-20).

This is encouragement enough. The apostles, braving the danger involved, defy the rulers by appearing openly in the temple to teach the people.

Meanwhile the Sanhedrin and the entire Senate²¹ of Israel, ignorant of all this, solemnly gather for the trial! But the officers who are sent to bring the apostles from prison return,

"Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within" (Ver. 23).

What a picture! How God is holding them in derision! The Supreme Court of the nation gathers to try the apostles for preaching Christ, not knowing that the apostles (imprisoned only the night before) are even now preaching Christ boldly in the temple! And all the while the keepers of the prison have been standing without the prison doors, carefully guarding--*nothing!*

The rulers, naturally, are dumbfounded at the officers' information, and thoroughly alarmed at its implications.

How the movement is gaining momentum! How bold and confident these worshippers of Messiah are becoming!

Have the apostles had inside help? Can it be that another miracle has taken place? The rulers seem to sense the truth.

THE SECOND TRIAL OF THE APOSTLES

THE HIGH PRIEST'S CHARGE

"Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

"And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them,

"Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us,"

--Acts 5:26-28.

The captain and officers of the temple now proceed to bring the apostles to trial, but "without violence," for fear of being stoned by the people.

How empty and lacking in authority do the words of the high priest now seem! Exasperated, he complains:

²¹ The Assembly of the Elders, a larger body than the *Sanhedrin* and probably identical with "all the estate of the elders" in Acts 22:5.

"Did not we straitly [strictly] command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us" (Ver. 28).

This opening question betrays the weakness of the high priest's position in the contest. He had indeed strictly ordered the apostles not to teach in this name, but they had boldly declared that they would do so nevertheless--and he had been forced to dismiss their case.

As to filling Jerusalem with this doctrine, his own guilt gave him an exaggerated idea of what the apostles were accomplishing, for Messiah's followers were still so much in the minority that after the stoning of Stephen they could be driven from Jerusalem by persecution.

Furthermore, the apostles were not seeking to bring the guilt of Christ's blood upon the rulers. The very opposite was true.

The bitter antipathy of the high priest against Christ and the apostles is seen in his terms: "*your doctrine*" and "*this man*." He does not even say what the doctrine is nor name the name of Christ. This is the first example of that avoidance of the name of Christ by the Jews which later became so general among them. In the Talmud, for example, He is most frequently referred to as *peloni*: "*so and so*."

THE APOSTLES' DEFENSE

"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

"And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

--Acts 5:29-32.

How firm and courageous are the apostles in their reply, yet how gracious!

They could have reminded the rulers of the interesting fact that they (the rulers) had let the apostles go from the last trial knowing full well that they had intended to go right on preaching Christ. But instead they simply reply: "*We ought to obey God rather than men*."

But as to bringing Christ's blood upon the rulers, the apostles make it very clear that while Israel and her rulers are indeed guilty of the death of Christ, God has raised Christ from the dead:

"TO GIVE REPENTANCE TO ISRAEL, AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS."

While hanging on the cross where they themselves had placed Him, He had tenderly interceded:

"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM: FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO" (Luke 23:34).

And Peter had but recently offered Israel repentance on these same grounds, saying to the multitudes:

"And now, brethren, I wot that THROUGH IGNORANCE YE DID IT, AS DID ALSO YOUR RULERS . . . Repent ye therefore . . . (Acts 3:17-19).

And all this, when they themselves had cried: "*His blood be on us, and on our children*" (Matt. 27:25).

If anything is made clear in the early chapters of Acts, it is the fact that God was loathe to take the people of Israel at their word and judge them for the crucifixion of His Son. Instead He continued to stretch forth His hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people, giving them every opportunity to repent and turn to Christ (See [Rom. 10:21](#)).

Even in this passage we find Christ presented to Israel's rulers as "*a Prince and a Savior*." What will the end be if they reject Him now?

But such a question is not even asked by the apostles. They are still hoping to win the nation to Christ.

It is not until some time later that we find Paul, that *other* apostle, saying to the Jews at Pisidian Antioch:

"BEWARE THEREFORE, LEST THAT COME UPON YOU, WHICH IS SPOKEN OF IN THE PROPHETS;

"BEHOLD, YE DESPISERS, AND WONDER, AND PERISH ..." (Acts 13:40,41).

And it is he who later said to the unbelieving Jews at Corinth:

"YOUR BLOOD BE UPON YOUR OWN HEADS; I AM CLEAN: FROM HENCEFORTH I WILL GO UNTO THE GENTILES" (Acts 18:6).

Again, it is this Paul who later wrote by the Spirit to those individual Jews for whom there was still hope:

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

"OF HOW MUCH SORER PUNISHMENT, SUPPOSE YE, SHALL HE BE THOUGHT WORTHY, WHO HATH TRODDEN UNDER FOOT THE SON OF GOD, AND HATH COUNTED THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, WHEREWITH HE WAS SANCTIFIED, AN UNHOLY THING, AND HATH DONE DESPITE UNTO THE SPIRIT OF GRACE?" (Heb. 10:28,29).

"SEE THAT YE REFUSE NOT HIM THAT SPEAKETH. FOR IF THEY ESCAPED NOT WHO REFUSED HIM THAT SPAKE ON EARTH, MUCH MORE SHALL NOT WE ESCAPE, IF WE TURN AWAY FROM HIM THAT SPEAKETH FROM HEAVEN:

"WHOSE VOICE THEN SHOOK THE EARTH: BUT NOW HE HATH PROMISED, SAYING, YET ONCE MORE I SHAKE NOT THE EARTH ONLY, BUT ALSO HEAVEN" (Heb. 12:25-26).

ISRAEL'S OPPORTUNITY

Before we consider the outcome of the apostles' trial we must carefully note, then, that this was still the day of Israel's opportunity.

Those who contend that the Body of Christ began on the day of Pentecost and that we are to work under the so-called "Great Commission," have surely not given this fact due consideration.

Not one word has yet been said in the record concerning the joint body of which believers today are members. Not once have we come across any such phrase as "*the dispensation of the grace of God,*" or "*the gospel of the grace of God.*" Not once has there been an offer of salvation through *faith in Christ's shed blood*, and certainly the good news of salvation, on *any* terms, has not yet been sent to the Gentiles.

What we have here is God's dealings with *the nation Israel*. So far from having set Israel aside at Calvary, God is here dealing in mercy with *her exclusively*.

Had Israel accepted her Messiah, the apostles would then have proceeded to "make disciples of all nations," and the nations would have found salvation and blessing *through Israel* in fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and the prophetic Scriptures. That was the whole idea of the "Great Commission."

It was when this final offer to the favored nation was again rejected that salvation went to the Gentiles *in spite of Israel*--through the apostle Paul.

It was as God set Israel aside that He sent Paul forth with "the gospel of the grace of God," offering *reconciliation* by grace through faith to all men everywhere;

"THAT HE MIGHT RECONCILE BOTH [JEWS AND GENTILES] UNTO GOD IN ONE BODY BY THE CROSS" (Eph. 2:16).

But how could He begin to offer *reconciliation* to the Jews until He had begun to cast them aside? (Rom. 11:15). And how could He form a joint-body while dealing with Israel exclusively (cf. Acts 11:19, Eph. 2:16,17)?

If those who seek vainly to carry out the so-called "Great Commission" could only see this they would have the answer to their problems concerning water baptism, "divine healing," tongues, etc.

And now let us turn again to the record of the apostles' trial.

GAMALIEL'S ADVICE

"When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

"Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

"And said unto them [i.e. the other jurors] Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

"For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

"After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

"And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

"But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." --Acts 5:33-40.

The rulers, again charged with the murder of Christ, and finding the apostles unmoved in their determination to preach Him, are cut to the heart and take counsel to slay them also.

But here the eminent Gamaliel raises a steadying hand, giving an order "to put the apostles forth [out] a little space [while] ." He has a private word to say to his fellow jurors.

Warning them to "take heed" as to their decision regarding these men, he reminds them that there have been others who have made great boasts, only to be brought to nought, and contends that it will be safer and wiser to let the apostles alone than to oppose them, assuring his colleagues that *"if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought."*

Gamaliel's advice was, perhaps, as good as such a man could give, but it was poor advice at that. Perhaps more could have been accomplished by ignoring, than by opposing these men, if they had not been standing on the side of truth, but when the truth is proclaimed in power neither method will avail against it.

"FOR WE CAN DO NOTHING AGAINST THE TRUTH, BUT FOR THE TRUTH" (II Cor. 13:8).

How many today, in their opposition to the truth, or to certain truths, follow Gamaliel's advice! Fearing to assail the truth openly and yet continuing to stand with the opposition, they seek to maintain a "hands off" policy.

But let such dishonorable men probe deeper into Gamaliel's reasons for advising the Sanhedrin as he did and see if they do not reflect their own. It is quite evident that Gamaliel did not argue as he did so that the apostles might be more effectively silenced. His concern was apparently to keep his fellow jurors from doing anything too drastic in their opposition against Christ lest he himself should become further involved. As a Pharisee, he well knew that,

"THERE IS NO WISDOM NOR UNDERSTANDING NOR COUNSEL AGAINST THE LORD" (Prov. 21:30).

There he stood on what he feared might be the wrong side; the side of opposition against the Lord, and he betrayed this fear as he said:

"BUT IF IT BE OF GOD, YE CANNOT OVERTHROW IT; LEST HAPLY YE BE FOUND EVEN TO FIGHT AGAINST GOD" (Ver. 39).

Did others in the Sanhedrin share his apprehension? At any rate, *"to him they agreed"* (Ver. 40).

Would that this had been all, and that the apostles had been dismissed without further humiliation. But before releasing them the rulers stoop to one more unjust and cowardly act.

"... and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go" (Ver. 40).

THE APOSTLES AGAIN VICTORIOUS

"And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

"And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." --Acts 5:41,42.

The venerable members of the Sanhedrin had now stooped to become common bullies, but their attempt to cow the apostles only emphasized the fact that the apostles had again won a decisive moral victory. Nor did the lashes bring all suffering and pain, for were they not bearing them for the blessed Messiah whom they hoped would soon reign?

Thus they left the trial rejoicing, and redoubled their efforts to make Christ known to Israel.

And so we witness the fall of Israel's rulers and the rise of the "little flock" destined some day to reign with Christ in His kingdom ([Luke 2:34](#); [Matt. 21:42](#); [Luke 12:32](#); [Matt. 19:28](#)).

THE PENTECOSTAL PROGRAM MAINTAINED

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

"Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God, and serve tables.

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word.

"And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

"Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

"And the Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." --Acts 6:1-7.

We have already answered the teaching that the case of Ananias and Sapphira marked the first step in the breakdown of the Pentecostal program (in which all goods were held and shared in common).

Those who hold this erroneous view generally look upon the murmuring of the Grecian believers over the daily distribution as another step in the supposed breakdown of this program.

But neither is this so, for just as Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead that the Pentecostal program might be maintained, so here, no sooner is the murmuring heard than the apostles take action to correct the situation.

That the hospitality of the believers toward each other had been universal and wholehearted surely cannot be questioned by the open-minded reader of early Acts.

This was the communism which was founded on our Lord's "*new commandment... that ye love one another,*" the communism which was to prevail in the long-promised kingdom; a communism which said: "*I have plenty; you take what I don't need.*" What a travesty on this blessed order is the Soviet "Communism," which says: "*You have plenty; give me what you don't need!*"

It was because Christ and His kingdom were rejected that the true communism finally broke down and "this present evil age" settled down upon the world; this age in which it has again become necessary for God to instruct His people to make material provision for themselves and their families ([I Tim. 5:8](#)). But the Pentecostal program had not yet broken down at the time referred to in the above passage.

As we say, the hospitality and generosity of the Pentecostal believers toward each other had been wholehearted and sincere, but we must not forget that the apostles were responsible for the care of a fast growing community. It is not strange, therefore, that these Grecian²² widows should have been unintentionally neglected and that the murmuring referred to above should have resulted. This, to be sure, would not have happened had Christ Himself been reigning, but the believers were still waiting for Him to return.

The passage above makes one thing clear: Both the apostles and the multitude intended with all their hearts that this blessed order of things should continue.

SEVEN DEACONS APPOINTED

Taking immediate steps to see that *all* were amply provided for, the apostles called the multitude together and pointed out how their increased business responsibilities were crowding out the very ministry to which they had been called. "*It is not reason [or right]*" they argued, "*that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables.*"²³

²² Grecians are to be distinguished from Greeks. The Greeks were Gentiles, the Grecians merely Greek-speaking Jews, generally foreign-born Jews of more or less Greek culture. This indicates how wholly the Pentecostal church was still made up of Jews.

²³ This passage has been grossly misinterpreted. It has nothing whatever to do with church suppers, much as these *may* prove a curse. The apostles referred to *the necessary distribution of food*. They would not neglect their calling even to feed hungry widows!

Their suggestion was that the *multitude* choose seven honest, Spirit-filled, capable men (6:3) to appoint over this business, so that the apostles might give themselves unreservedly to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.²⁴

And here we have a glowing demonstration of the sincere love that prevailed among the believers and made the divine communism possible.

One would suppose that for this board of seven, a majority of Hebrews would naturally have been chosen. Surely these few Grecians could not justly expect to be represented by a majority. Or, as a generous gesture to the Grecians this board might have been made up of three Hebrews, three Grecians and one neutral party. Surely the Grecians would have accepted such an arrangement as more than fair. But it is quite evident--and most significant of the spiritual state of the multitude--that they chose *all Grecians*, for all seven names are Greek, not Hebrew! One, Nicolas of Antioch, was even a proselyte!

How these Spirit-controlled believers loved and trusted each other! The Hebrew Church had put its treasury and its own material welfare entirely into the hands of the Grecians among them!

What a foretaste of Millennial blessing! What a change this wicked, selfish, greedy, suspicious, cynical world will see when the program of Pentecost is fully ushered in the days to come! What headaches and heartaches will be avoided, what complications overcome! And now these deacons (servants of the assembly) are installed by prayer and the laying on of the apostles' hands.

It is well to remember that the laying on of hands does not *necessarily* imply the impartation of any spiritual gift. All through the Scriptures--Old Testament as well as New--its primary signification is *identification*. Here the apostles give these men their backing--*endorse* them, so to speak ---by the laying on of hands.

THE PHENOMENAL GROWTH OF THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

The result of the new arrangement:

"And the Word of God increased; AND THE NUMBER OF THE DISCIPLES MULTIPLIED IN JERUSALEM GREATLY; AND A GREAT COMPANY OF THE PRIESTS WERE OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH" (Ver. 7),

Who can read this passage with an unbiased mind and contend that it records the breakdown of the Pentecostal program? That program broke down later and was superseded by another, but as to the Hebrew assembly dying out during the Acts period, let us look at the record:

²⁴ The "Word" from which they ministered was, of course, the Old Testament. None of the New Testament had yet been written, much less one word of the Pauline revelation concerning the Body of Christ. This is another indication that a Jewish, kingdom program still held sway.

Acts 2:41: 3,000 *added* to the original group.

Acts 2:47: Believers *added daily*.

Acts 4:4: The number has grown to about 5,000 men.

Acts 5:14: *More added; multitudes both of men and women*.

Acts 6:1: The number is *multiplied*.

Acts 6:7: The number is *multiplied greatly* and a *great company of the priests* become obedient to the faith.

Thus, while the apostles are threatened and imprisoned and beaten by the rulers, the cause for which they stand continues to grow steadily.

Even the fierce persecution led by Saul after the stoning of Stephen, while it drove this multitude temporarily from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) did not by any means diminish its numbers, for "*they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word*" (Acts 8:4). Moreover, God *saved* Saul, the flaming leader of the persecution who, misunderstood and distrusted on every hand, had to be sent back home to Tarsus ([Acts 9:30](#)).

And now see the result:

"Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were MULTIPLIED" (Acts 9:31).

All the enmity and persecution of the rulers had proved fruitless. The enemies of Christ had been defeated. God had crippled the opposition by *saving Saul!* From this point on the high priest and the rulers went into bitter seclusion, staying practically out of sight until, toward the close of the Acts, we find them leaping like a viper out of the fire to attack Paul, but, like the symbol in Acts 28:3-5, this "generation of vipers" was shaken back into the fire, while Paul and what he stood for remained unharmed.

Meanwhile, in Acts 15 we find the multitude back at Jerusalem again for the great council there, which is apparently held without opposition from the rulers. And before we have closed the Book of Acts we find the believing elders there saying to Paul:

"... THOU SEEST, BROTHER, HOW MANY THOUSANDS [WHAT MYRIADS] OF JEWS THERE ARE WHICH BELIEVE; AND THEY ARE ALL ZEALOUS OF THE LAW" (Acts 21:20).

This does not mean, of course, that either the majority in Israel, or the rulers in Israel had turned to Christ. As a *nation* Israel still remained unrepentant.

We bring this all in here because it is so important to understand that the present dispensation of the mystery was not ushered in, nor the kingdom postponed, because of the failure of the Jewish *believers* (whatever their failures may have been) but because of *the grace of God* to His *enemies*.

The company of Jewish believers described in the passage above formed the nucleus of the kingdom to come.²⁵ God did not give up the twelve apostles or the Hebrew Church. He gave up *unbelieving Israel*, and that only "*that He might have mercy upon ALL*" (Rom. 11:32). Thus, humanly speaking, Israel was set aside because of her persistent rejection of Christ. From the divine side, however, Israel was set aside to demonstrate the failure of man and the infinite grace of God. God had *made* a difference between Jew and Gentile to show that essentially "there is no difference," and those who suppose that God was a "respector of persons" in giving Israel such great advantages over the Gentiles for some 1500 years, should observe that God has set her aside and allowed her to remain *out* of His favor for some 1900 years.

And thus in early Acts we witness the fulfillment of Luke 2:34 concerning "*the falling and rising up of many in Israel*" (See R. V.).

In these early chapters of Acts the kingdom is being taken from the rulers ([Matt. 21:43](#)) and given to the "little flock" ([Luke 12:32](#)). The rulers fall while the despised followers of Messiah rise to take their places.

²⁵ With the raising up of Paul, however, all who were still alive came into an *additional* hope as fellow members of the Joint body (II Cor. 5:16,17; I Cor. 12:13) a dual position theirs.

Chapter X - Acts 6:8-7:60

ISRAEL'S HOUR OF CRISIS

STEPHEN ENCOUNTERED IN DEBATE

"And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

"Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.

"And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."
--Acts 6:8-10.

The first name in the list of seven deacons is, as we have seen, that of Stephen, and to him the sacred narrative now draws our attention.

Although primarily appointed to assist in "the daily ministrations," this man of God, "full of faith ["grace"--R.V.] and power," was now to be called upon for higher service.

In Jerusalem there were synagogues rounded by foreign Jews for their own use while visiting the holy city on feast days, and also for the use of their sons, sent there for their education as, for example, Saul of Tarsus had been (See [Acts 22:3](#)). Schools and colleges were in most instances attached to these synagogues, so that the majority of the members appear to have been students.

With the members of these synagogues Stephen, himself doubtless a Hellenist, quite naturally came into contact. Among them were those of the Libertines,²⁶ the Cyrenians, the Alexandrians, the Cilicians and those of the Province of Asia.

As Stephen wrought great wonders and signs among the people the members of these synagogues "disputed" with him. The word *disputed* here is more often rendered *questioned*. Thus, whatever disputing there was originated with *them*. Weymouth's translation reads that they were "roused to encounter Stephen in debate."

This was quite natural since, as we have seen, this group was probably made up largely of young students--and Jewish students then were surely not too different from some American and European students now. Engaged as they were in their studies under Israel's spiritual leaders, they no doubt felt well qualified to deal with Stephen, and began heckling him with questions.

²⁶ This name does not imply liberal tendencies even theologically. They were liberated ones, ' or ' freedmen ---evidently from former bondage as Roman slaves.

It is not improbable that Saul of Tarsus was among them, for we learn from Acts 21:39 that Tarsus was "a city in Cilicia" and we know that Saul was now at Jerusalem, where he had been studying under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Since Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) and "consenting unto his death" (Acts 8:1); indeed, since Saul became the chief persecutor of the Pentecostal Church very shortly after this, it seems quite probable that he was one of the company that sought to overcome Stephen in debate.

At any rate, Stephen proved more than a match for them.

"And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10).

STEPHEN FALSELY ACCUSED

"Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.

"And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council,

"And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law:

"For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.

"And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel." --Acts 6:11-15.

One would suppose that Stephen's questioners, fully answered and unable to gainsay him, would have acknowledged the truth and accepted Jesus as their Messiah. But fallen human nature does not react so. Their pride had now been hurt. Unable to *answer* him, they began to *persecute* him.

The shameful sight we now witness is a testimony to the depravity of human nature. These men, probably having come to Jerusalem at first with worthy motives and high aspirations, now stoop--as their leaders had done before them--to privately incite dishonorable men to commit perjury by bearing false witness against Stephen before the Sanhedrin.

Of course there were segments of truth in their accusations, but truth perverted can be more damaging than the most blatant lie.

Stephen had not spoken blasphemous words either against Moses or against God. But at this general accusation the people and elders and scribes seize him and bring him before the council.

Here they actually advance false witnesses, which accuse him of speaking blasphemous words against the temple and the law.

The specific charge:

"For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us" (Acts 6:14).

The charge that "this Jesus of Nazareth" (note the contempt in their reference to Christ) was to destroy the temple, was practically the same as that which had previously been brought against Christ Himself (See [Matt. 26:61](#)). But neither the Lord nor Stephen had made any such statement.

Our Lord had indeed predicted, with heavy heart, that the temple would be destroyed ([Luke 19:41-44](#), etc.) but He had never intimated that *He* would destroy it. It was also true that He had spoken of His body as "this temple," but so far from saying that *He* would break it down, He had said that if *they* broke it down *He would raise it up again* in three days! (See [John 2:19](#)).

There are those who suppose that the charge about changing the customs which Moses had delivered had some foundation in fact. They suppose that Stephen had probably predicted the dispensation of grace which we now enjoy. But this cannot be, for the present dispensation of grace was a mystery, hid in God until revealed to and through the Apostle Paul ([Eph. 3:1-3](#), etc.).

If Stephen had indeed spoken of any changes from the Mosaic dispensation it could only have been in the same sense that our Lord spoke of such changes. For example, we find our Lord quoting from the law of Moses in His Sermon on the Mount and repeatedly adding the words: "But I say unto you," etc. But this implied no contempt for Moses' law, nor any suggestion of altering its precepts or lowering its standards. The fact is simply that under the Messianic reign a still higher standard was to be maintained. There was to be a change indeed, but only in the sense that God's people, by the Spirit, would obey the law *spontaneously* from their hearts! Even their own prophet Jeremiah had prophesied such a change.

"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" (Jer. 31:31-33).

What peril is involved in rejecting the truth! The rulers of Israel had a short time ago stood at the moral crossroads. Rather than acknowledge the truth, they had allowed selfish pride to draw them deeper and deeper into the gulf of guilt and condemnation in which we now find them. And now these Hellenists--probably mostly young divinity students--take the same perilous path. Unable to answer the truth and yet too obstinate to accept it, they persecute and falsely accuse the one who proclaims it.

And so it is in our own day. When religious leaders, though looked up to by thousands of sincere people, continue to reject the great body of truth which God has revealed for us today, it is seldom long before they are found persecuting and slandering its exponents. Unable to meet them with the Word, yet unwilling to bow to the Word, they stoop to Satan's methods in opposing what they should be championing.

But God was not to leave Israel with one single excuse for rejecting Christ, for as the Hebrew grand jury and the Hellenist accusers all fastened their attention upon Stephen, his face was supernaturally transformed "as it had been the face of an angel." It was *this* man of God, miraculously transformed, who was now to answer the charges made against him.

This was a fateful day in Israel's history. John the Baptist had called upon Israel to repent. They had beheaded him. The Lord Himself had taken up the call where John had left off. He was crucified. Peter and the eleven at Pentecost had again called upon Israel to repent, and now Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit and divinely transformed before them, is to make one final appeal. What will the answer be?

STEPHEN'S ADDRESS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Stephen's remarkable address before the Sanhedrin is worthy of the most careful examination. We therefore present the entire text along with our comments and trust that the reader will take the time to read it and will see much more in it than we have seen or found room to comment upon in these pages.

This notable address before Israel's supreme court has frequently been called "Stephen's defense." In reality, however, Stephen probably had little thought of defending himself. He was clearly on the offensive as he reasoned with Israel's rulers and later indicted them for the murder of Christ.

The Sanhedrin could no more try Stephen, actually, than a criminal can try a righteous man. Indeed, each time the council had brought the apostles up for trial the accusers had found *themselves* on the defensive as the apostles had held them accountable for the death of Christ. Thus, in early Acts it is really Israel that is on trial, rather than the apostles and Stephen.

Stephen's address as it is given here is a remarkably comprehensive synopsis of Israel's history. Doubtless it was designed to show 1) that Christ's rejection was no proof that He was not the Messiah, for Israel's outstanding heroes had frequently been accepted only after having first been violently rejected, and 2) that the Mosaic Covenant was *not* a permanent institution, for Abraham had enjoyed a close relationship with God long before the Mosaic law had been given, and Moses himself had promised *another* Leader, saying of him: "*Him shall ye hear*" (Ver. 37).

With this in mind let us turn to the address itself.

THE ABRAHAMIC CALL AND COVENANT

"Then said the high priest, Are these things so?"

"And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken: The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Canaan,

"And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.

"Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Canaan: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

"And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet He promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

"And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.

"And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve Me in this place.

"And He gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs."

--Acts 7:1-8.

Stephen begins by pointing out that "the God of glory" had appeared to Abraham and the patriarchs, had made great promises concerning Abraham's seed and had given him the covenant of circumcision--all long before the Mosaic covenant. This, of course, did not mean that the law could now be ignored, but it reminded them that God had chosen Abraham and his seed before the giving of the law by Moses and it prepared them for a consideration of the claims of Christ.

Stephen also points out that it did not *seem* at first that God's word to Abraham could be true. As to the promised land, God "*gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on,*" though He had "*promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him.*" And as to "his seed," God had promised that the land of Canaan would go to Abraham's seed, "*when as yet he had no child.*" Stephen's hearers would clearly recall the details of that story, for Abraham was nearly one hundred years old and Sarah nearly ninety when they were still expected to believe that God would give them the promised seed.

This opening of Stephen's address was calculated to induce his hearers to give careful and thoughtful consideration to the claims of Christ. The Jews had expected Messiah to come as a victorious leader to free them from Roman bondage and were disappointed that He had had so much to say about sin and had insisted that they repent. Since He did not appeal to their imagination nor fulfil their dreams they did not--rather did not wish to--believe that He was the Messiah.

Stephen's opening remarks should have caused them to stop and think, for at the first it also seemed unbelievable that Abraham should ever be the father of any great nation. And as to his seed possessing the land of Canaan, reason would have argued: "Let us first see whether he *has* any seed." Moreover the promise of possessing the land must have seemed hopeless indeed to his seed years later as they continued for four hundred long years in Egyptian bondage. But in each case God's Word had proved to be true and now the rulers of Israel, rather than continuing in blind prejudice to reject this "Jesus of Nazareth" would do well to examine the Scriptures carefully and ask themselves in the light of God's Word whether or not He was indeed the Christ.

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

"And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt; but God was with him,

"And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.

"Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction; and our fathers found no sustenance.

"But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.

"And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

"Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

"So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers,

"And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem." --Acts 7:9-16.

Joseph, of course, is presented here as a type of Christ. He too was hated by his brethren and given over to death, but later he became an exalted ruler and the savior of his brethren.

Stephen's statement that "*The second time Joseph was made known to his brethren,*" is particularly significant, for while Israel had rejected Christ at His first coming, Peter and the apostles were now offering His *return* to bring the "times of refreshing" if Israel would but repent.²⁷ Indeed, they had predicted that He would return to take the throne eventually no matter what Israel's attitude now ([Acts 2:20,30,36; 3:21-23](#)).

Note the growing power of Stephen's skillful argument. He had not even mentioned Christ yet, for that would only have enraged them so that he would not have been heard, but every Jew in the Sanhedrin knew what he meant. By the mere repetition of this familiar history he was saying: "Do not be too sure that you have disposed of Christ by nailing Him to a tree. Joseph's brothers also thought they had disposed of him when they threw him into the pit. But they were wrong, and after a time they were made to face him whom they had rejected."

MOSES AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

"But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

"Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.

"The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live,

"In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:

"And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

"And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

²⁷ It should be noted here that there is no discrepancy between Acts 7:14 and Gen. 46:27, for in the Genesis passage those of "the house of Jacob" are referred to, that is, those who "came out of his loins," while in Acts 7:14 it is his "kindred."

"And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

"And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian:

"For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them; but they understood not.

"And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?

"But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?

"Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?

"Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.

"And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.

"When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight; and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him,

"Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.

"Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.

"I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

"This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.

"He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

"This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

"To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

"Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

"And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

"Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?

"Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon."
--Acts 7:17-43.

Here Stephen, in giving his hearers a summary of Israel's history from Egypt to Babylon, really proceeds with a well developed plea to his hearers to reconsider their attitude toward Christ.

Moses, the rulers' idol, yet the one whom they constantly disobeyed, is now introduced. Little had it seemed at first that he would ever become Israel's great deliverer.

As a babe he had escaped death at Pharaoh's hands only because God had providentially intervened. But God laughs at man's rebellion and pride and before long Pharaoh himself was paying the expenses to clothe, feed and educate in his own courts the man who was to do the very thing he had so greatly feared!

Then, at forty years of age, Moses left the glory of Pharaoh's court for a visit with his brethren, only to hear them say: "*Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?*" (Ver. 27). And the royal prince had to flee as an exile to Midian.

But this same Moses later returned in power to deliver his people. Another of Israel's heroes bitterly rejected before being finally accepted.

But the lesson does not end here, for Stephen reminds the rulers that even after Israel's deliverance under Moses "*our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt*" (Ver. 39).

And even this was not all, for while Moses was yet in the mount receiving the tables of the law, the people, complaining about "this Moses," made a golden calf and danced, like heathen, about it. And this rebellion against Moses and God had

continued until God gave them up to their idolatry and allowed them to be carried away as captives into Babylon.

Such was the tendency of even God's covenant people to despise His prophets and to depart from His Word. In the minds of the rulers Stephen left the question: Were they doing this again by rejecting Christ? And were they too, perhaps, in danger of being "given up" to even greater evils?

It was not Stephen; it was *they* who were despising Moses and the law. Had not Moses himself said:

"A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; HIM SHALL YE HEAR" (Ver. 37).

What Stephen, tactfully, did *not* quote, but what the rulers well knew, was the rest of the prophetic declaration, where *God* goes on to say:

"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him" (Deut. 18:19).

Did not this prophecy about Messiah clearly indicate that the Old Covenant was a temporary institution? Did it not prove that Christ was to supersede Moses? And the remarkable part is that Christ had not come to destroy the law, but to *fulfill* it ([Matt. 5:17](#)) and to bring in the New Covenant by the shedding of His blood and the coming of His Spirit, so that Israel might carry out the law *from the heart* (Read carefully [Jer. 31:31-34](#), [Acts 21:20](#)).

We repeat, it was not Christ nor the apostles nor Stephen who were guilty of despising Moses and the law; it was these rulers in Israel, and as they sat there listening to Stephen's address they were in danger of being given up to greater judgment than their ancestors had suffered.

THE TABERNACLE AND THE TEMPLE

"Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as He had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

"Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus [Joshua] into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

"Who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

"But Solomon built Him an house.

"Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet,

"Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool: what house will ye build Me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of My rest?

"Hath not My hand made all these things? --Acts 7:44-50.

In closing his address Stephen dealt with still another of their accusations. They had charged him with speaking blasphemous words against the temple. This, of course, was untrue. The fact was that *they* were guilty of blasphemy against the Holy One of whom the temple was but a type.

The tabernacle had been replaced by the temple, but even this glorious abode did not do God justice. The temple was but a type of a still more glorious abode: *Christ*, in whom dwelleth "all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." He was God, *manifested in the flesh*. Had not Isaiah said: "*They shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us*"? (Matt. 1:23).

STEPHEN'S INDICTMENT AGAINST ISRAEL

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

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

"Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." --Acts 7:51-53.

That the rulers understood perfectly what Stephen had been getting at is clear from these verses and the rest of the account.

Apparently it became evident that the rulers would reject any appeal Stephen had hoped to make, and he sensed that they would not listen much longer, for suddenly the tone of his message changes. Rather than an appeal there is a stinging indictment. He seems to disown them as he changes his repeated "our fathers" to "*your fathers*," and charges them with resisting the Holy Spirit, betraying and murdering Christ and despising Moses and the law which they pretended to uphold. In his indictment Stephen went backward from their sin against the Spirit, to that against Christ, to that against Moses and the law, for the effect it would have upon *them*. Actually their sin against the Spirit was that which sealed their doom.

Though Stephen had stood before them filled with the Holy Spirit and supernaturally transformed as he dealt with them, they would not listen. They had

there and then resisted the Holy Spirit and committed the unpardonable sin of which our Lord had so solemnly warned them (Matt. 12:31,32).

THE MURDER OF STEPHEN

THE RULERS' RAGE AND STEPHEN'S VISION

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

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."

--Acts 7:54,55.

"Cut to the heart" by Stephen's sharp indictment, Israel's rulers "gnash on him with their teeth." His words are more than their guilty consciences can bear. They have murder in their hearts.

But he now, seemingly oblivious to their rage, looks steadfastly into heaven,²⁸ beholding the glory of God and Jesus *standing* at His right hand.

Much discussion has always centered around the fact that Christ is here seen *standing* rather than sitting. Mark 16:19 clearly says:

"So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

Further, Hebrews 10 teaches that the Lord sat down at the Father's right hand *because the work of salvation was finished*. Why is He here seen standing?

Some have offered as the only explanation the theory that the Lord had risen to His feet again to welcome His martyr, Stephen, home, but let us reflect a moment, and let us not anticipate revelation, reading Hebrews 10, which had not yet been written, into Mark 16.

First, as to our Lord's position at the Father's right hand, we have frequently asked the question: What sort of throne does the Son now occupy with the Father? Is it made of ivory, gold or precious stones? How large is it? Just where is it situated?

Such questions readily bring out the fact that the present position and glory of our Lord is something infinitely beyond human comprehension. Someone has said that if the Father and the Son are now seated in heaven, their throne must rest upon stars a million miles apart. Of course! Have we not just finished considering Stephen's quotation from Isa. 66:1: "*Heaven is My throne, and earth is My Footstool*"? How can finite minds take this in?

²⁸ As *they* looked steadfastly on *him* (See 6:15). Also, the phraseology of both 6:15 and 7:55 in the original is the same as 1:10, where we find the eleven looking steadfastly *into (eis)* heaven.

Hence, the session of our Lord at the Father's right hand must have greater than local significance, and the view that He rises here to greet His martyr Stephen appears, to say the least, superficial. There must be a deeper significance. Indeed, if this theory were correct, the vision would at least have been given to Stephen *after* they had taken him out to stone him, rather than having proved to be that which enraged them most and *caused* them finally to cast him out and stone him (See [Vers. 56-58](#)).

In the Epistle to the Hebrews our Lord is several times represented as seated, resting in the accomplished work of redemption. Says the apostle:

"... WHEN HE HAD BY HIMSELF PURGED OUR SINS [HE] SAT DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH" (Heb. 1:3).

This indication of an *accomplished* redemption is set in sharp contrast to the fact that the Old Testament priest continually *stood* at his work. The furniture of the tabernacle included altars, a layer, an ark,²⁹ a lampstand and a table, but no chairs, for the priest's work was never done. By contrast the work of Christ on the sinner's behalf was done *once* and *for ever*.

"... EVERY PRIEST STANDETH DAILY MINISTERING AND OFFERING OFTENTIMES THE SAME SACRIFICES, WHICH CAN NEVER TAKE AWAY SINS:

"BUT THIS MAN, AFTER HE HAD OFFERED ONE SACRIFICE FOR SINS FOR EVER, SAT DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD;

"...

"FOR BY ONE OFFERING HE HATH PERFECTED FOR EVER THEM THAT ARE SANCTIFIED" (Heb. 10:11-14).

What contrasts! *Many* sacrifices; one sacrifice! These "*can never*"; this "*for ever*"! Every priest "*standeth daily*"; Christ "*sat down*."

It is significant that in Ver. 13 the apostle does not include the "until" from Psa. 110:1, for he contemplates only the once-for-all work of Christ, the accomplished redemption in which He rests "for ever."

But if our Lord did not rise to His feet to welcome Stephen, and if His standing there does not signify any element of incompleteness in His work of redemption, what then does it signify?

²⁹ The word is rendered "coffin" in the last verse of Genesis. The ark was simply a coffin for the covenant of the law (See Ex. 25:10,16; Deut. 10:1,2; I Kings 8:9). It was covered with the "mercy seat" and sprinkled with the blood.

In answering this question we must again caution the reader not to anticipate revelation in considering Stephen's experience. Up to this time *nothing whatever* had been said about Christ sitting at the Father's right hand because He had finished the work of redemption. The proclamation of the finished work of Christ, or "the preaching of the cross," as it is called, belonged to "the dispensation of the grace of God" and "the mystery" *later* committed to Paul by revelation (See [1 Cor. 1:18-25](#); [Eph. 3:1-3](#)). *Prophetically* our Lord's session at the Father's right hand had a very different signification and, remember, the believers of Stephen's day had a *prophetic* background. The mystery of God's present purpose had not yet been revealed.

Who can read Mark 16:19 without recalling Psa. 110:1, which is given so prominent a place in the Gospels and the Acts?

"THE LORD SAID UNTO MY LORD, SIT THOU AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES THY FOOTSTOOL."

Here, plainly, the finished work of redemption is not at all in view. Rather the Lord is invited to the Father's right hand because He has "enemies" on earth who will not have Him. But He is to remain seated with His Father as a royal Exile only "until" the time when His enemies shall be made His footstool.

Little wonder that so often in the Psalms we find the cry: "Arise, O God" and "Arise, O Lord." It is in connection with the judgment of Christ's enemies and the deliverance of the faithful remnant that we find the Father and the Son rising again in such prophetic passages as the following:

"ARISE, O LORD, IN THINE ANGER; LIFT UP THYSELF BECAUSE OF THE RAGE OF MINE ENEMIES . . ." (Psa. 7:6).

And since Israel's rebellion was but the climax of the *world's* rebellion against God and His Christ ([Acts 4:23-28](#)) we read further:

"ARISE, O LORD; LET NOT MAN PREVAIL: LET THE HEATHEN [LIT. NATIONS] BE JUDGED IN THY SIGHT" (Psa. 9:19).

Had Israel, by her persistent rejection of Messiah, brought the wrath of God upon herself and the other nations? Had the rejected Father and His rejected Son risen to smite the world in judgment? Was Christ about to avenge His persecuted disciples? Surely conditions were ripening for the outpouring of God's wrath, as far as prophecy was concerned.

Thank God, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20). In matchless love and mercy God still postponed the judgment and ushered in the present dispensation of grace. But let us not get ahead of our story.

STEPHEN STONED

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

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

"And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

"And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

--Acts 7:56-60.

Overwhelmed with the glory of the heavenly vision, Stephen exclaims that he sees Christ standing at God's right hand. The rulers, so familiar with such passages as we have cited from the Psalms, can contain themselves no longer. In a frenzy of rage they cry out, at the same time stopping their ears lest they should have to hear any more of this, and, running upon him all together, they cast him out of the city and stone him to death. So bitter is their hatred of Christ, and such is the conduct of the very men who but a short time ago had complained: "*Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us*" (Acts 5:28).

But in striking contrast to their hysteria, Stephen, calling on the Lord Jesus to receive his spirit, kneels down and asks God to forgive them their sin. And with that, we read: "*He fell asleep.*"³⁰ Whether or not Stephen's prayer was answered we shall have to wait to see.

THE ADDED PARABLE

At this point we must consider one of our Lord's parables recorded by Luke. It is frequently called "*the added parable,*" because of Luke's comment:

"And as they heard these things, He ADDED and spake a parable, BECAUSE HE WAS NIGH TO JERUSALEM, AND BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD SHOULD IMMEDIATELY APPEAR" (Luke 19:11).

In this parable our Lord describes how Pilate and other Roman rulers received their authority from Caesar, and likens this procedure to His own case:

³⁰ There is no foundation whatever in this passage for the unscriptural doctrine of soul sleep. It is the *body* that is spoken of as asleep (Dan. 12:2, etc.) because it rests from its labor and pain and is to be raised again.

"He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

"But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:12-14).

The analogy is simple and clear. Christ had been chosen by God to reign and was to go far away --into heaven itself--"to receive for Himself a kingdom and to return." During his absence His servants would work for Him but, as it sometimes happened in the cases of rulers called by Caesar to be vested with authority, His citizens would hate Him and send a message after Him, saying: "*We will not have this Man to reign over us.*"

The rest of the parable describes the King's dealings with His servants and predicts the doom of His enemies, but suffice it here to say that undoubtedly Stephen is the *messenger* referred to. It was he whom the nation Israel now sent back to God with the message: "*We will not have this Man to reign over us.*"

THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

What confusion there has been on the subject of the unpardonable sin! How many--some of them in mental institutions – have been haunted by the fear that they have committed this sin – and that, while Bible teachers themselves are so far from agreed as to what the unpardonable sin is!

Surely those who know the gospel of the grace of God will not strike fear into the hearts of their hearers by the threat of an *unpardonable* sin, for

"...we have redemption through His blood, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7).

"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND:

"THAT AS SIN HATH REIGNED UNTO DEATH, EVEN SO MIGHT GRACE REIGN THROUGH RIGHTEOUSNESS UNTO ETERNAL LIFE BY JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD" (Rom. 5:20, 21).

Surely there is no room for an *unpardonable* sin here. It has been well said that sinners who die in unbelief in this dispensation of grace will go to the lake of fire with all their sins *unpardoned*, but not because one of them was *unpardonable*.

Our Lord's warnings about the unpardonable sin had the coming of the Holy Spirit in view. Nor was this because the Holy Spirit is a more important member of the Trinity than the Holy Father or the Holy Son. It was simply that with the coming

of the Holy Spirit to plead with Israel all three members of the Trinity would have done their part to bring the nation to repentance and salvation.

All through Old Testament times Israel had resisted the Father. The Father, in turn, had sent the Son, who had taught and labored among them, only to be rejected too. Now the Son was to send the Spirit, and Israel would have her last chance. Hence the Lord said:

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men . . . neither in this world [age] neither in the world [age] to come" (Matt. 12:31,32).

As the number seven in Scripture speaks of *perfection* so the number three speaks of *completeness*. God Himself is a trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The number three, too, is stamped upon His creation. We ourselves have the number three stamped upon us, for we are body, soul and spirit. The structural universe bears the same number, being made up of time, space and matter. And each of these again is threefold. Time: past, present and future. Space: length, breadth and height. Matter: energy, motion and phenomena.³¹ And the Scriptures, in dealing with the universe, designate "*Things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth*" (Phil. 2:10).

In homiletics, the *three-point* sermon is the standard. In business we have our "*three days of grace*" and the auctioneer's "*Going, going--gone!*" or "*First, second--third and last call!*" Even in sports the number three is prominent. What boy does not know that in baseball there are three strikes to an out and *three* outs to an inning? And it is always *three* cheers, never two or four. And the simplest form of the race begins with a "*Ready, get set--go!*"

The number three is prominent even in parental discipline. When the writer was a boy it was not strange to hear his father say: "Now this is the *second* time I've spoken to you. *If I have to speak again--!!!*"

And thus it was with the nation Israel. When our Lord warned Israel's leaders that sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven them it was simply because the Holy Spirit was soon to descend and give them their third and last opportunity to repent. And after all their sin and blasphemy against the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit *did* come down at Pentecost, working among them so mightily and confronting them with such overwhelming proof of our Lord's kingdom rights that their continued rejection of Him was utterly inexcusable and unpardonable.

Yet they did continue in their rebellion. They had resisted the Father and the Son, and now Stephen had to say: "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."

³¹ See Nathan R. Wood's enlightening book: "The Secret of the Universe."

THREE BRUTAL MURDERS

Every student of the Word should know the three brutal murders around which all history revolves. These three murders represent Israel's response to God's three-fold call to repentance. They explain the unpardonable sin and form the background for the dispensation of grace.

It was John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, who was sent as the forerunner of Christ to call Israel to repentance. He was beheaded by Herod, the wicked and licentious "king of the Jews." After John, Christ Himself took up the cry: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Him they crucified. Then, at Pentecost, Israel was given a third opportunity to repent, until they shed blood again, stoning Stephen to death.

It should be noticed, too, that their guilt, as well as their bitter enmity, increased with the second and third murders. As to the beheading of John the Baptist, they *permitted* it.³² As to the crucifixion of Christ, they *demanded* it (Luke 23:23,24). As to the stoning of Stephen, they *committed* it, casting him out of the city with their own hands and stoning him there.

And so that generation in Israel committed the unpardonable sin which our Lord warned would not be forgiven, either in that age, or in the age to come.³³

A YOUNG MAN NAMED SAUL

There was at least one blasphemer among them, however, who had not been included in our Lord's warning, for he had not been under Christ's ministry. This was Saul, who had come to Jerusalem from **Tarsus** in Cilicia.

Saul was in somewhat the same position as the Jewish leaders had been before the crucifixion of Christ. At that time they had not known that Jesus was the Christ. True, they *could* have known, yea, *should* have known. But the fact remains that they *did not* know. Our Lord Himself had said to them: "*When ye have lifted up the Son of man, THEN shall ye know that I am He*" (John 8:28). This agrees with our Lord's prayer on the cross: "*Father, forgive them, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO*" (Luke 23:34). It also agrees with Peter's declaration to the "men of Israel": "*And now, brethren, I wot that THROUGH IGNORANCE YE DID IT, as did also your rulers*" (Acts 3:17).

Now, of course, the rulers *did* know that Jesus was the Christ and their sin was unpardonable, but Saul of Tarsus had not been among them when Christ was on

³² Had Israel responded to John's call to repentance Herod would never have dared to even put him in Jail. This explains why our Lord did nothing to release John from prison, even though it had offended John. It was not HIS, but *theirs* to do something about John's unjust imprisonment and every moment he spent in prison testified against *them* (Read carefully Luke 3:18-20;7:19-29 and Matt. 14:1-11).

³³ Remember, *this present age of grace* was still a mystery when this was spoken, so that "the age to come" refers to the coming kingdom age.

earth. He did *not* know. True, he too *could* have known and *should* have known, but again the *fact* remains that he *did not* know. Hear his own inspired words:

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

"Who was before A BLASPHEMER, AND A PERSECUTOR AND INJURIOUS: BUT I OBTAINED MERCY, BECAUSE I DID IT IGNORANTLY IN UNBELIEF" (I Tim. 1:12,13).

Here we find Saul among the murderers of Stephen, soon to become the leader of Israel's, yea of the world's, rebellion against God and His Christ. Have not the people of Israel gone far enough in their rejection of Messiah?

Chapter XI - Acts 8:1-3

ISRAEL DECLARES WAR ON GOD

THE APOSTLES' MISSION BOGGED DOWN

"And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

"And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

"As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison." --Acts 8:1-3.

Those who would understand what became of our Lord's "great commission" to the twelve should always associate Acts 8:1 with Acts 1:8.

When our Lord originally commissioned the eleven apostles He included instructions as to the geographical order of their ministry for Him, saying:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in JERUSALEM, and in all JUDAEA, and in SAMARIA, and unto the UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH" (Acts 1:8).

This is in agreement with what Luke records in his Gospel as to the Lord's command:

"... that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM" (Luke 24:47).

Now in the opening verses of Acts 8 we find the Jewish believers going from *Jerusalem* to *Judaea* and *Samaria*. This has led some to conclude that this passage records progress in the carrying out of the "great commission."

The very opposite, however, is the case. These disciples did not leave Jerusalem in response to any command of our Lord. They were *scattered* and *fled* for their lives. And the twelve apostles, the very ones our Lord *had* commanded to go from Jerusalem to all the world, *stayed at Jerusalem!*

It was natural, of course, that the believers at Jerusalem should flee when the fearful persecution broke out there, but how shall we regard the conduct of the apostles in staying there?

Were they delinquent in their duty? The Scriptures answer plainly that they were not, but it is sad to think that many do charge these faithful and Spirit-filled men with failure to obey the divine orders because they did not leave Jerusalem with the rest.

Lectures on the Book of Acts, referred to earlier in this volume, takes this view. Indeed, this book finds fault with the apostles for having stayed at Jerusalem even this long. Erroneously supposing that the eleven had been sent forth with the gospel of the grace of God, the author says:

"God sometimes has to act through disagreeable circumstances in order to compel His saints to work in accordance with His plan for them... Up to the present, then, we have found the gospel going out in the city of Jerusalem and throughout Judaea, but the disciples were very, very slow in fulfilling the rest of the program" (Pp. 176,177).

But first of all the author of *Lectures on the Book of Acts* confuses the multitude of the disciples with the apostles here, for it was the apostles to whom our Lord had particularly given the commission, and these "disagreeable circumstances" did *not* compel *them* to leave Jerusalem! The twelve stayed right where they were!

Evidently confused, the author says on the next page:

"Thus they went out into the whole land of Palestine--'except the apostles'--the very ones who had been commissioned to preach to every creature. For some reason they remained in Jerusalem..." (p. 178).

"*For some reason*" the twelve remained at Jerusalem! It is fortunate that the apostles understood their commission better than some of our Fundamentalist leaders have understood it.

The reason the twelve stayed at Jerusalem is that they had been sent to proclaim, not the gospel of the grace of God, but the kingdom rights of Christ. These twelve had been promised thrones in that kingdom (Matt. 19:28). That kingdom was to be established at Jerusalem and could not be established until *Jerusalem* had accepted Messiah.

Had not God promised Abraham that in his multiplied seed all nations should be blessed? ([Gen. 22:17,18](#)). How then could the nations be blessed through Israel when Israel herself would not receive the blessing? Is it not clear from all Old Testament prophecy that Christ was to reign in *Jerusalem* on David's throne? Had not our Lord Himself made it clear that He would not return until *Jerusalem* should say: "*Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord*"? (Matt. 23:37-39).

How could the apostles complete their commission by going on from Jerusalem now? How could the kingdom be established on earth if *Jerusalem* and the *nation* Israel did not turn to Christ? Where would Christ reign beside Jerusalem; in Washington, Moscow, London, Rome?

But the author of *Lectures on the Book of Acts* is confused on this point too, for overlooking the great volume of prophetic testimony on this subject, he gives an entirely different reason for the instruction to begin at Jerusalem:

"Now notice the order--Jerusalem, the very city where Christ was crucified, then in the eyes of God the most wicked city on earth: there the grace of God was to be first manifested ..." (p. 21).

Yet Peter blamed his hearers in Jerusalem for the crucifixion of Christ, and when Paul, the apostle of grace, would have begun his ministry at Jerusalem, the Lord appeared to him and said: "*Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem; for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me*" (Acts 22:18).

In the light of his erroneous views as to all this it is not strange that the so-called Archbishop of Fundamentalism became the outstanding opponent of "*the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery*" (Rom. 16:25).³⁴

But we should like to press home a question to all who share these views as to the twelve and their great commission: Which took the greater courage, to flee from Jerusalem now or to remain there in the raging persecution, in daily peril of death? Would not unfaithful men have fled at such a time as this?

It was rare courage and fidelity to their "great commission," then, and not cowardice or unfaithfulness, that caused these twelve apostles to remain at Jerusalem while the rest fled.

In this part of the book of Acts we have described for us Israel's rejection of God's offer of the return of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom. Stephen is stoned and Messiah's followers are driven from Jerusalem,--except the apostles, who remain there notwithstanding the danger.

Thus the continuance of the apostles at Jerusalem and the flight of the believing multitude indicated the same thing: that Israel was *not* turning to Christ. Since the apostles had been sent to proclaim His *kingdom* (*which* was to be established at Jerusalem) their task at Jerusalem was not yet, done. Should not these brave men be given high credit, then, for faithfully staying at their posts in the face of persecution and death?

As we look back upon the scene now we see in this persecution another indication that Israel was adamant in her rejection of Christ and that the kingdom was not yet to be set up. The "secret crisis," as Sir Robert Anderson calls it, had passed. Israel had declared war on Christ and Stephen's burial, accompanied as it

³⁴ We have gone into considerable detail here because Dr. Ironside's writings on this subject still continue to lead sincere believers astray on these important matters, *confusing* them both as to what happened in early Acts and as to the program of the *present "dispensation of the grace of God."*

was by "great lamentation," was the burial of Israel's kingdom hopes for a long time to come.

In this passage, then, rather than seeing the Great Commission (which would have brought in the kingdom) further carried out, we find that program stalled. True, God permitted the twelve to continue their labors at Jerusalem for some time after that, but this was because He would leave Israel without excuse. After this the kingdom rights of Christ still continue to be proclaimed for some time; the apostles--even Paul--continue to remind Israel of His qualifications and credentials, *but there is no record of another offer of the kingdom*. Already God is preparing to usher in a new dispensation while the establishment of Messiah's kingdom on earth is held in abeyance.

SAUL THE REBEL LEADER

One person stands out more prominently than all the rest in this wicked rebellion. It is Saul of Tarsus, the young man who held the clothes of Stephen's murderers: a promising and already distinguished young man. We read that this Saul was "consenting" unto Stephen's death. Does this mean that he was a member of the Sanhedrin? He was a "young man" ([Acts 7:58](#)) as we have said, and it was a great exception for a young man to be made a member of the Sanhedrin. Yet in Gal. 1:14 he later testified:

"[I] profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers,"

If not already a member of the Sanhedrin, he must have been promoted to that position soon after the slaying of Stephen, for both Acts 23:6 and Phil. 3:5 make it clear that he was a Pharisee, and testifying before Agrippa concerning his persecution of the saints at Jerusalem, he says that when they were put to death he cast his vote against them ([Acts 26:10](#)).³⁵

At any rate this young zealot, in his flaming hatred of Christ, so relentlessly pressed the battle against Christ's followers and so incited others to join in the persecution that it was not long before he received "authority and commission" from the chief priests to stamp out the worship of the Nazarene in "strange cities" and even in faraway **Damascus** ([Acts 26:11,12](#)).

There has been some discussion as to whether or not Paul was the chief of sinners. The answer to this question is simply that the Scripture says he was, and sets forth this fact to demonstrate the truth that *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save SINNERS."*

³⁵ This probably means that he was married and had children at that time, for evidently only fathers were admitted to Israel's supreme court, on the ground that parents were apt to be more humane in their Judgment of others. His wife could not have lived very long after this, however. See I Cor 7:7,8.

"THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING, AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTATION, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; OF WHOM I AM CHIEF.

"HOWBEIT FOR THIS CAUSE I OBTAINED MERCY, THAT IN ME FIRST [CHIEFLY] JESUS CHRIST MIGHT SHOW FORTH ALL LONGSUFFERING, FOR A PATTERN TO THEM WHICH SHOULD HEREAFTER BELIEVE ON HIM TO LIFE EVERLASTING" (I Tim. 1:15,16).

The question has probably arisen through a misunderstanding of terms. When Paul is spoken of as the chief of sinners, some suppose that it is meant that he was the *worst* of sinners. Of course he was not. Even in his unsaved state he "*lived in all good conscience*" (Acts 23:1) and later testified: "*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*" (Acts 26:9). This could hardly have been said of Judas or of the chief priests, for example, and in this sense they were worse sinners than Paul.³⁶

But the word *chief* does not mean *worst*; it means *foremost*. It denotes *rank*. The original word is translated "chief" at least six other times in our Authorized Version, giving us an insight into the usage of the word:

Matt. 20:27, "*chief among you,*" Luke 19:47, "*chief of the people,*" Acts 16:12, "*chief city,*" Acts 17:4, "*chief women,*" Acts 25:2 and 28:17, "*chief of the Jews.*"

In none of these instances could the word *chief* be rendered *worst*.

Now, Saul was the chief, the *foremost*, of sinners. He was their *leader* at this time when sin abounded. Remember, the Gentiles had long ago rebelled against God at Babel. Three times in Romans I we read that "*God . . . gave them up,*" "*God gave them up,*" "*God gave them over*" (Rom. 1:24,26,28). Then, choosing Abraham's seed, He proposed to restore and bless the world through them. But here Abraham's seed join the Gentiles in their rebellion against God, and Saul of Tarsus leads them. Thus Saul was the chief of sinners; he led Israel, yea the world, in rebellion against God and His Christ. He was the personification of the world's real attitude toward God and His Christ (Psa. 2:1-3).

We read of him alone: "*As for Saul, He made havock of the church*" (Acts 8:3). To the Galatians he writes: "*Ye have heard . . . how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it [laid it waste]*" (Gal. 1:13).

"*Entering into every house, and haling [dragging out] men and women,*" he "*committed them to prison*" (Acts 8:3). And according to his own testimony, given later, he "*punished them oft in every synagogue [in Jerusalem] and compelled them to blaspheme*" (Acts 26:11). Nor did it satisfy him when the disciples began

³⁶ This shows how far conscience can lead men astray. Nor did it excuse him that he persecuted the saints with a clear conscience, for, as we have pointed out, he *could* and *should* have known that Jesus was the Christ.

fleeing from Jerusalem. He was determined to pursue them. *"Being exceedingly mad against them [he] persecuted them even unto strange cities"* (Acts 26:11).

"And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1,2).

Armed thus with *"authority and commission from the chief priests"* (Acts 26:12) Saul made it his purpose to arrest as many as he could and *"to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished"* (Acts 22:5).

And so the promising young student became a religious madman. According to the testimony he himself later gave, he *"persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women"* (Acts 22:4). *"And many of the saints,"* he says, *"did I shut up in prison.. . and ,when they were put to death, I gave my voice, [vote] against them"* (Acts 26:10).

How prominent he had become in the growing persecution may be seen from the anxious words of Ananias in Acts 9:13,14: *"Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call out thy name."*³⁷

But let us return to the passage under consideration and the great persecution at Jerusalem.

God is here about to usher in a new dispensation and in doing so He introduces Saul of Tarsus, not a devout disciple of Christ, but the Lord's most vicious and relentless enemy on earth; not to crush him, but to save him and make him the supreme demonstration of His boundless grace. Man's sin had risen to its height,

"BUT WHERE SIN ABOUNDED, GRACE DID MUCH MORE ABOUND" (Rom. 5:20).

At this point in our study of Acts we find ourselves too eager to look ahead. To get the full picture we must now proceed with the story of the scattered believers and Philip's ministry in Samaria.

³⁷ If Ananias was correct, it would seem that Saul had been appointed Commander in Chief in the war which had been declared on Christ.

Chapter XII - Acts 8:4-25

THE TRIUMPH OF THE TRUTH

THE MINISTRY OF THE SCATTERED DISCIPLES

"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.

"Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

"And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.

"For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

"And there was great joy in that city." --Acts 8:4-8.

Amid the lengthening shadows of "this present evil age" those who have consecrated themselves to the service of God do well to meditate on such passages as this. It is a great encouragement, when the evil day comes, to look back at the triumph of truth in other ages and to realize that come what may, nothing need rob us of the "treasure" that has been committed to us and has become so precious to us: the blessed "mystery," with its good news of the grace of God ([II Cor. 4:7](#); [II Tim. 1:12-14](#), R.V.).

Men may persecute the servants of God, they may cast them into prison, they may confiscate their goods, but they cannot rob them of their *message*. They may even take their lives, but in doing so they only demonstrate again that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," and that death can often proclaim the truth with louder voice than life and health could possibly have done it.

And this, in the final analysis, is all that matters. The only reason God has left us here--the only good reason for wanting to be here--is to glorify God by proclaiming the blessed message of grace to the multitudes about us. Every other reason for living--or dying--revolves around this reason.

Thank God, the proclamation of the truth does not suffer from *opposition*. It suffers only from *indifference* or *perversion*. In the case described in the passage above, persecution was used of God to *further* the truth, for "*they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.*"

"FOR WE CAN DO NOTHING AGAINST THE TRUTH, BUT FOR THE TRUTH"
(II Cor. 13:8).

All about us today there are blood-bought saints who lack the gratitude to God and the compassion toward man to offer themselves and their goods to the One who died to save us all from eternal perdition. But once let the powers that be *prohibit* them from worshipping God; let them oppose and persecute those who preach Christ, and there will be a great awakening as these unfaithful ones begin to realize for the first time how precious a treasure the truth is--how worth toiling and suffering and sacrificing for!

PREACHING THE WORD

Here it must be pointed out, however, that "the Word" which these scattered disciples preached was not exactly the same as "the Word" which II Tim. 4:2 instructs us to preach today. These disciples proclaimed the kingdom rights of Christ and called upon Israel to repent and receive Him as her King. But since Israel persisted in her rejection of Christ, God cast her aside as a nation and has now committed unto us "*the word of reconciliation*" (II Cor. 5:19). In both the disciples' case and ours, of course, the *word* referred to is the Word of God, but in their case it was the Word of God for *that* day, while in our case it is the Word of God for *this* day--and there is a difference.

TO NONE BUT THE JEWS ONLY

Those who hold that the dispensation of the grace of God and the Church of this age began historically at Acts 2 or before, generally teach that in this passage we have the disciples going out to the nations under the Great Commission with "the gospel of the grace of God," for does it not say that they "went everywhere preaching the Word"?

But it is a blunder to teach that we have here the further carrying out of the commission to the twelve for, as we have seen, under that commission Jerusalem must first be brought to Messiah's feet, and these disciples had just fled from Jerusalem for their lives. And it is an even greater blunder to teach that these disciples went forth proclaiming the gospel of the grace of God to the nations, for Acts 11:19 explicitly states:

"THEY WHICH WERE SCATTERED ABROAD UPON THE PERSECUTION THAT AROSE ABOUT STEPHEN TRAVELLED AS FAR AS PHENICE, AND CYPRUS, AND ANTIOCH, PREACHING THE WORD TO NONE BUT UNTO THE JEWS ONLY."

Up to this point in the record of Acts the scene has been entirely Jewish. In Acts I the apostles wait at *Jerusalem* for the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:4). Meantime they choose Judas' successor so that there may be twelve men to reign over the twelve tribes of Israel when the kingdom is ushered in (1:15-26, cf. [Matt. 19:28](#)). On the day of Pentecost, a *Jewish feast day*, Peter stands up with the eleven and offers repentance to Israel, declaring that God has raised Christ from the dead *to sit on David's throne* (2:29-32). If any Gentiles were present in Peter's audience he certainly ignored them, for he addressed his countrymen alone (2:14, 22, 36).

Indeed, a few days later we find Peter offering Israel millennial blessing and the return of Christ, pleading with them to repent, since it is *through them*, Abraham's seed, that the nations are to be blessed (3:19-26).

All this while the disciples continue daily with one accord *in the temple* (2:46). They are very careful *not* to start a sect separate from Judaism. Christ is offered, not as the Mediator between God and men, but as *Israel's Messiah*. Peter and John are seen entering the temple at the appointed hour of prayer (3:1). Multitudes are healed in *Jerusalem* (5:16) a great company of the *priests* believe (6:7) and it is the *Jewish Sanhedrin* that calls the apostles to account for what they have done and taught (4:5-7; 5:17-27; 6:10-13). Indeed it is Stephen's stern indictment against the *Hebrew leaders* that brings about the great persecution of Acts 8:1 and it is the *Jewish leaders* who stone him to death (7:54-60).

Nor does Acts 8:4 indicate any change in the Jewish character of these chapters for as we have pointed out, "*they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled . . . preaching the Word to none but unto the Jews only*" (Acts 11:19).

How, then, can it be argued that the Church of this age, the Body of Christ, is in view at this point in the Acts record, or that the disciples went forth preaching the gospel of the grace of God? Is the Body of Christ--could it ever have been--composed of "*Jews only*?" Is the gospel of the grace of God to "*Jews only*?" (See [Rom. 11:32](#); [II Cor. 5:14-16](#); [Eph. 2:14-16](#); [3:1-6](#)).

THE JEWS AND THE SAMARITANS

So widespread has this erroneous interpretation of early Acts become, that even the Scofield Reference Bible contains the following note on Philip's ministry in Samaria:

"The Jews having rejected Stephen's witness to, and of, them, the Gospel now begins to go out to 'all nations.'" One would gather from this that salvation was already going to the Gentiles through Israel's fall, but this is not so. The Samaritans are not considered Gentiles in the Scriptures, though indeed the Jews of Judaea looked upon them as worse than Gentiles.

The ten tribes, it will be remembered, broke away from Judah and Benjamin in the apostasy under Rehoboam. After that the two tribes were generally called *Judah* and the ten *Israel*.

Renouncing Jerusalem and the temple, the ten tribes had made Samaria their capital city, hence Israel is also referred to as Samaria in the Old Testament ([I Kings 13:32](#); [II Kings 17:24,26,28](#); [Ezek. 16:53](#), etc.).

After the Syrian conquest, in which Israel was carried into captivity, the King of Syria sent colonists to repopulate the land. These intermarried with those of the ten tribes still remaining in the land and brought them to a still lower moral and spiritual

level. The Lord, however, sent lions into their midst to devour them until the King of Syria found it necessary to send one of the Hebrew priests to Samaria to teach them "the manner of the God of the land" (II Kings 17:25-28).

After the Babylonian captivity the Jews did not permit the Samaritans to help them rebuild the temple at Jerusalem ([Ezra 4](#)) whereupon the Samaritans built a rival temple on [Mt. Gerizim](#) (Cf. [John 4:20](#)).

Since the Samaritans had renounced Jerusalem and its authority, the Jews would have no dealings with them, but it is important to remember that whatever their heresies, Samaria represented the ten tribes, that they held to the law of Moses, worshipped the true God and looked for the coming of Messiah.

There came to be, of course, an increasing number of individuals from the ten tribes who did not go along with the great apostasy nor inter-marry with the Syrians, and lived in Judaea, Galilee and other places in and outside of Palestine. Thus the term *Israel* later began again to be applied to *all* from the twelve tribes who were true to the God-appointed priesthood and to the temple at Jerusalem. In the same way, Israelites from the ten tribes came to be called *Jews*, along with those of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

If anything is clear in the prophetic Scriptures it is that one day the breach between the ten tribes and the two will be fully healed and that all *ten tribes* of Israel will be restored and exalted in the kingdom ([Ezek. 37:15-19](#); [Jer. 31:31-34](#); etc.).

Thus in the proclamation of the kingdom as recorded in the four Gospels and the Acts, the term *Israel* refers to *all twelve tribes* (See [Matt. 19:28](#); [Acts 1:6](#); etc.). Paul later used the term in the same way ([Acts 26:7](#); [28:20](#)).

Philip's ministry among the Samaritans, therefore, was no departure from the prophetic kingdom program, nor did it constitute the sending of the gospel to the Gentiles through Israel's unbelief. Philip went to the Samaritans to seek to win them to the true Messiah, who was to reign *in Jerusalem over all twelve tribes of Israel*.

It was not until after the raising up of *another* apostle---Paul---that the gospel of the grace of God was proclaimed and salvation sent to the Gentiles through Israel's fall. This also explains the miraculous element in this passage, for these demonstrations were associated with the kingdom and ceased only when Israel as a nation was set aside.

It was not prejudice, then, that kept the apostles and disciples ministering only among the people of Israel, but a clear understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant and of the prophetic program, in which the blessing of the nations depended upon the blessing and exaltation of Israel.

PHILIP AND THE SAMARITANS

And now, as if to emphasize the national aspect of Israel's rebellion, we find these Samaritans putting the leaders at Jerusalem to shame as with one accord they give heed to Philip and trust Christ as their Messiah. Once before the Samaritans at Sychar had responded thus when Christ Himself had appeared in their midst ([John 4:39-42](#)).

Who would have thought that Israel's leaders, yea, the very Pharisees and scribes, would have rejected their Messiah while the children of apostate Samaria gladly accepted Him! But so it has always been.

The truth is not the private property of a favored few who may look down with contempt upon those who do not possess it. The truth is God's Word to be *believed*. How frequently those in the most unfortunate circumstances do believe it and reap the blessed results, while those who stand in the place of privilege suppose they have no more to learn, reject it and suffer the consequences!

AND THERE WAS GREAT JOY

IN THAT CITY

Of course! This is always the result of believing God. When the return of Christ was postponed through Israel's unbelief, Peter could still write to the believers of the dispersion:

"WHOM HAVING NOT SEEN, YE LOVE; IN WHOM, THOUGH NOW YE SEE HIM NOT, YET BELIEVING, YE REJOICE WITH JOY UNSPEAKABLE AND FULL OF GLORY" (I Pet. 1:8).

And to us who believe God in "this present evil age," Paul, by the Spirit, says:

"NOW THE GOD OF HOPE FILL YOU WITH ALL JOY AND PEACE IN BELIEVING, THAT YE MAY ABOUND IN HOPE, THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY GHOST" (Rom. 15:13).

But we come now to the case of Simon the sorcerer and catch a glimpse of the unspeakable wickedness of which the human heart is capable, even when surrounded by an atmosphere of spiritual blessedness and joy.

THE CASE OF SIMON MAGUS

"But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one:

"To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

"And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.

"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

"Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done." -- Acts 8:9-13.

THE "FAITH" OF SIMON

Simon Magus, as we call him because of the magic he practiced, had exercised almost complete control over these Samaritans before the coming of Philip. We read that he "bewitched" the people, that is, literally, *he drove them out of their senses*, claiming that he himself was "some great one." And he had exercised this power over them for a long time, so that *"they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest."*

But as our Lord, by His words and deeds, had attacked the very kingdom of Satan, so did Philip. Simon's hold over the people was being broken as on every hand both men and women believed on Christ and were baptized. Indeed Simon himself was convinced that Philip had something greater than he. *He too believed and was baptized* and, continuing with Philip, marvelled at the miracles he performed.

Needless to say, however, Simon's faith was merely intellectual. It was the kind of faith spoken of in John 2:23-25:

"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did.

"But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men,

"And needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man,"

An then the record goes on to tell how the Lord dealt with a man who possessed this kind of faith and told him: *"Ye must be born again."*

So it was with Simon Magus. Outwardly he seemed like the rest--they had believed and so had he--but he had not *trusted in* Messiah with his *heart*. This is evident from the fact that Peter presently had to say to him: *"Thy heart is not right in the sight of God."* Simon had believed merely in the sense that he had given mental assent, being convinced of the truth of Philip's claims. But this is not the faith that saves. Saving faith is of the heart; it *trusts*. The following are a few passages which bear witness to this fact:

"If thou believest with all thine HEART..." (Acts 8:37).

"Lydia... whose HEART the Lord opened.. ." (Acts 16:14).

"If thou shalt... believe in thine HEART..." (Rom. 10:9).

"FOR WITH THE HEART MAN BELIEVETH UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS..." (Rom. 10:10).

This is an important lesson to learn, for even today there are multitudes who believe, intellectually, that the Bible is God's Word, that they are sinners, that they need to be saved. They even believe that Christ died for them, but they are not *saved*, because they have not *trusted Him*; they have not *committed* themselves to Him for salvation. According to the Word of God the only faith which He can accept is *a heart trust*.

PETER AND JOHN ARRIVE

"Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:

"Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost:

"(For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.)

"Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." --Acts 8:14-17.

The story of Simon Magus is here briefly interrupted by the arrival of Peter and John from Jerusalem. The twelve, having heard at Jerusalem that the Samaritans had received the Word of God, had sent Peter and John to them. Why? And why had not those who had believed and been baptized received the Holy Spirit according to the program of the "great commission" ([Mark 16:16,17](#)) and of Pentecost ([Acts 2:38](#))?

The answer to this question is again found in the relationship between the Jews and the Samaritans. As we have seen, the schism between Jerusalem and Samaria must be healed before Christ can reign. Israel and Judah, the ten tribes and the two, must be reunited ([Ezek. 37:15-19](#)) for Christ is to reign over *all twelve tribes*. The apostles recognized this, for had not our Lord promised them twelve thrones in the kingdom? (Matt. 19:28). Nor was it enough that the two factions should be brought together. It was the ten tribes which had apostatized and had made Samaria their capital city and had set up their own temple at Mt. Gerizim. They must now renounce all this and recognize Jerusalem as the seat of authority, for there Christ and the twelve must reign.

Meantime this fact is also impressed upon the Samaritan believers, for though these Samaritans had believed and been baptized, they did not receive the Holy Spirit until two apostles had come from Jerusalem and had prayed for them and laid their hands upon them.

Two apostles were enough for this, for it is written: *"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established"* (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; II Cor. 13:1) and Peter and John, with Philip, made three witnesses. Indeed our Lord had specified that any two of the apostles could act officially for Him in His absence:

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

"Again I say unto you, That if TWO of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.

"For where TWO OR THREE are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:18-20).³⁸

Thus the believers at Samaria recognized the authority of the twelve at Jerusalem and, had the kingdom been accepted, would have become one nation with the Jews. As it is, the restoration of the United Kingdom of Israel under Messiah awaits a future day.

SIMON'S GRIEVOUS SIN

"And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money,

"Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.

"But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

"Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.

"For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

"Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

³⁸ For further light on this question see the author's book entitled: YOUR FAITH IN GOD'S WORD--*Is It Superstitious or Intelligent?*

"And they, when they had testified and preached the Word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." --Acts 8:18-25.

It is from this base act of Simon's that the word *simony* is derived. He sought to deal in sacred things for financial gain. He actually wished to buy *and sell* the gift of the Holy Spirit! Peter's utter disgust with such unspeakable wickedness is seen in his retort: "*Thy money perish with thee!*"

It had been demonstrated again and again, as the kingdom was proclaimed, that those who believed with their hearts and were baptized were saved, but it had also been demonstrated that those who did not believe with their hearts, whether baptized or not, remained lost (See [Mark 16:16](#)). Though intellectually convinced of the truth, this sorcerer had to hear Peter say: "*Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.*"

Perceiving that Simon was bound by sin and in the gall of bitterness, Peter now called upon him to repent, but even here the sorcerer showed himself a reprobate, merely requesting Peter to pray that he might escape the judgment for his sin. What a contrast there is between this wicked sorcerer and David, the man after God's own heart! Unlike Simon, David was concerned first of all with the disgrace he had brought upon God's name by his sin. Pleading for forgiveness, the Psalmist cried:

"For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest" (Psa. 51:3,4).

There is no record that Peter even responded to Simon's request. What we gather from the story is rather the apostle's utter contempt for one so base and wicked.

SIMON MAGUS AND ISRAEL

In Simon, the Samaritan sorcerer, we have an-other type of Israel, for while Israel despised the Samaritans as apostates and would, of course, have had nothing but contempt for a Samaritan *sorcerer*, the favored nation herself was even then apostatizing and, though called to be God's prophet to the nations, was fast becoming a *false* prophet. Furthermore:

1. Israel's leaders, like Simon Magus, were intellectually convinced that Jesus was the Christ (See [John 8:28](#); [Acts 2:22](#); [4:14,16](#); etc.).

2. Israel's rulers, like Simon Magus, wanted to be considered great. They were determined to retain their influence and power over the people of Israel.

3. Like Simon Magus, they sought to strengthen their hold upon the people by illegitimate means, using their wealth and power to intimidate the masses.

4. They had neither part nor lot in the rich blessings promised to Israel.

5. They were called upon to repent.

6. They did not truly repent, though they did repent in the sense that Simon Magus did.

7. They remained "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

THE LESSON FOR US

But here again there is an important lesson for us.

If it was wicked of Simon Magus, an ungodly sorcerer, to seek to dispense the powers of Pentecost for gain, is it not infinitely more wicked of men of God to dispense the gospel of the grace of God for gain. Yet this is done on every hand. The Holy Spirit did not speak for naught when He warned against dealing in the things of God for personal profit ([Tit. 1:7,11](#); etc.). If it is true that "the love of money" is a "root" which is "all evil" ([I Tim. 6:10](#)) then those who have been called to minister in the things of God should be doubly aware lest this love takes root in their hearts.

How insidiously it works! The young pastor, when called into the ministry, did not mean to be untrue to his commission or adulterate the message committed to him. It all happened so subtly. He loved his people. He wanted them to love him and rejoiced to see that they *did*. He got a taste of more money and better living. It would now be difficult to disappoint or hurt them. He receives further light on the Word. But will *they* receive it? Oh, well, he need not preach *everything* he knows. He finds, upon indirect inquiry, that they would *not* be very pleased to know what he believes. He maintains a discreet silence to please them. It troubles him as he remembers that Paul said: "*If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*" ([Gal. 1:10](#)) but gradually he has fallen into a form of simony and now it becomes more and more difficult to take an open stand for the truth. It pleases him that the people *do* like him and show it by taking care of him so generously, but he becomes more and more hardened in his sin. He loses the sensitiveness he once had to the light God gave from His precious Word. Indeed, the light he once had is gradually withdrawn until he finds himself at first a friendly opponent and then a bitter enemy of those who would faithfully proclaim the whole counsel of God.

Yes, the sin of simony is subtle in its working and is more generally indulged in than is commonly supposed, nor are pastors alone guilty of it. We do not mean that faithful men are never loved by their people or generously provided for by them, but we do mean that the *love* of money, of popularity, or of power is a great temptation to unfaithfulness. Hence the many exhortations, especially in the

pastoral epistles, to carry out faithfully the commission entrusted to us, without regard to financial return.

“They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

“For the love of money is [a] root of all evil (See R.V.): which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

“But thou, O man of God, flee these things...” (I Tim. 6:9-11)

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust...” (I Tim. 6:20).

“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

“That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (II Tim. 1:8, 13, 14.)

“ LET A MAN SO ACCOUNT OF US, AS OF THE MINISTERS OF CHRIST, AND STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD.

“MOREOVER IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS, THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL” (I Cor. 4:1,2).

Chapter XIII - Acts 8:26-40

PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN PRINCE

A SPECIAL ERRAND FOR PHILIP

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

"And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship,

"Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

"Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

"And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

"And he said, How can I, except some man should guide Me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him." --Acts 8:26-31.

The outstanding figure in the great evangelistic campaign in Samaria is now sent to the desert³⁹ and apparently not even told why.

Obedience has its reward, however, and arriving at his destination Philip is further instructed to approach the chariot of one who proves to be a powerful and respected *prince--"an eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasure."*

A HUNGERING SOUL

The simplicity and sincerity of this great Ethiopian stand out in refreshing contrast to the hypocrisy and wickedness of Simon the sorcerer.

In the light of Acts 11:19 and 15:14 it appears that the eunuch was a proselyte to Judaism. He had come all the way to Jerusalem to worship.

The eunuch's visit to Jerusalem should have proved a great spiritual blessing to him. It will be recalled that Solomon, in his dedication of the temple, had prayed for such:

³⁹ Verse 26 should probably read, "*an* angel of the Lord." There is no article in the original. Some have supposed, however, that since angels are spirits (Heb. 1:14) "the Spirit" of Ver. 29 refers to the same angel. We reject this view, for while angels are *described* as spirits, they would, in such cases as this, no doubt be *designated* by their distinctive appellation, *angel* (*messenger*).

"Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of Thy people Israel, but is come from a far country for Thy great name's sake, and Thy mighty hand, and Thy stretched out arm; if they come and pray in this house;

"Then hear Thou from the heavens, even from Thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to Thee for; that all people of the earth may know Thy name, and fear Thee, as doth Thy people Israel, and may know that this house which I have built is called by Thy name" (II Chron. 6:32,33).

Thus did Solomon pray, and in a passage very near to that which the eunuch prince was now reading there was a specific promise which might well have thrilled his heart:

"Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord hath utterly separated me from His people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.

"For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant;

"Even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.

"Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant;

"Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:3-7).

As to this particular eunuch, we are not left without light as to his spiritual condition.

1. He had gone to Jerusalem to *worship*, not merely to attend a religious feast, as is so often said of the Jews.

2. His sincerity in this is evidenced by the fact that here, on the way home, we find him absorbed in the writings of Isaiah, still deeply interested in the things of God.

3. Even his Bible reading was more than a formality, for he read as *he journeyed*.

4. He was in earnest search of more light, for he continued reading though there was much he did not understand.

ISRAEL'S BANKRUPTCY

All this spoke well of the eunuch but it was a poor testimony to the spiritual condition of Israel and her leaders.

Jerusalem's great temple, meant to be a house of prayer for all nations, had long since become a "den of thieves." Israel's spiritual leaders, who should now have been heralding the good news of Messiah to the nations, were the thieves. They had closed the door to those who would have entered into the kingdom and had taken away the key ([Matt. 23:13](#); [Luke 11:52](#)).

The eunuch might have received help from the "little flock" of Messiah followers, but Israel's "wicked husbandmen" had driven them from Jerusalem by "great persecution" and the apostles were doubtless in hiding (Acts 8:1,2; 9:1).

Yes, God had said to Abraham: "*And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" (Gen. 28:18) and had promised that "*The Gentiles [should] come to [Israel's] light, and kings to the brightness of [her] rising*" (Isa. 60:3) but here the favored nation could not even help this one man who had already recognized Jehovah as the true God! The eunuch returns from Jerusalem, not rejoicing over light and blessing found among the people of God, but still searching, searching for the truth. Pathetic sight! Returning from "the banquetting house" still hungry and thirsty! It reminds us of two significant passages in John's gospel:

John 6:4,5: "And the Passover, A FEAST OF THE JEWS, was nigh.

"When Jesus then lifted up His eyes, and saw a great company come unto Him, he saith unto Philip, WHENCE SHALL WE BUY BREAD, THAT THESE MAY EAT?"

John 7:37: "IN THE LAST DAY, THAT GREAT DAY OF THE FEAST, JESUS STOOD AND CRIED, SAYING, IF ANY MAN THIRST, LET HIM COME UNTO ME, AND DRINK."

But the eunuch's earnest search for truth was not labor lost. When we study the Word with patience and faith, God is always near to help. He will not leave in darkness those who sincerely seek for light. In this case He had already called Philip from Samaria to give the needed assistance.

PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH

It should be carefully noted that Philip introduced himself to the Ethiopian prince with the question: "*Understandest thou what thou readest?*" The question of *believing* had to come later (Ver. 37) for how can one believe a declaration, the meaning of which he does not understand? This point is frequently overlooked by earnest Christians. They say: "I don't understand it, but I believe it," when they mean: "I don't understand *how it can be*, but I believe it" or, "I cannot comprehend it, but I believe that it is true." And there is a difference. Take, for example, the

matter of the angel speaking to Philip in this passage. We may not understand how an angel can converse with a man, but we believe he did, simply because the Book says so. But we could not believe this passage if we did not even understand the meaning of it.

It is of utmost importance that we *understand* what the Scriptures teach so that we may *believe* what God has said,⁴⁰ for "*faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*" (Rom. 10:17). The type of "faith" which some advocate today is sheer superstition, which dispenses entirely with the need for searching or studying the Scriptures. But the faith which the Scriptures themselves call for is always based on an intelligent understanding of what is said. How repeatedly the Spirit emphasizes this!

Mark 6:34: "And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: AND HE BEGAN TO TEACH THEM MANY THINGS."

Eph. 1:17,18: "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND. REVELATION IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM:

"THE EYES OF YOUR UNDERSTANDING BEING ENLIGHTENED; THAT YE MAY KNOW what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

Col. 1:9,10, "For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire THAT YE MIGHT BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL IN ALL WISDOM AND SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING;

"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD."

Col. 2:1-3, "For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

"That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of THE FULL ASSURANCE OF UNDERSTANDING, to THE [FULL KNOWLEDGE] OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD, AND OF THE FATHER, AND OF CHRIST;

"IN WHOM ARE HID ALL THE TREASURES OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE."

But there is a further lesson here. To Philip's question: "*Understandest thou what thou readest?*" the eunuch replied: "*How can I, except some man should*

⁴⁰ See the author's booklet entitled: YOUR FAITH IN GOD'S WORD--*Is It Superstitious or Intelligent?*

guide me?" and with that he "desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him."

God could, to be sure, have revealed the good news of Messiah to this prince without human instrumentality, but He seldom does this. He uses *men* to communicate the gospel to each other. How supremely important, then, that we who have been sent to proclaim God's message to the lost have ourselves an intelligent understanding of the Word and especially of the gospel of the grace of God! It is not for naught that the Spirit inspired Paul to write:

"STUDY TO SHOW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH" (II Tim. 2:15).

If it is necessary to understand what God has said in order to *believe* it, how much more so in order to *teach* it!

Many who are very zealous to win souls for Christ will nevertheless stand before God ashamed, with their workmanship failing of His approval, when "*every man's work shall be made manliest ... and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is*" (I Cor. 3:13).

Philip dealt with the Ethiopian in a way exactly fitting to the dispensation in which he lived, but if we were to deal with souls today in exactly the same way we should most assuredly suffer loss at the judgment seat of Christ. In Philip's day God was still dealing with Israel as a nation and the kingdom rights of Christ were being proclaimed. But not long after that Israel lost her favored position and the kingdom was held in abeyance while God ushered in the dispensation of grace.

PHILIP PREACHING JESUS TO THE EUNUCH

"The place of the Scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth:

"In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth.

"And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?

"Then Philip opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." --Acts 8:32-35.

The passage from which the Ethiopian eunuch read was what we now know as the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. It was probably the Septuagint, the Greek translation of it, that he had in his possession, for Luke's record of the story quotes from the Septuagint almost word for word, and this was the universal language of

the day. This was all providential, for Philip, himself doubtless a Grecian,⁴¹ could thus converse freely with the eunuch in discussing this Scripture.

To gain an understanding of this passage it was necessary for the Ethiopian prince to start from the very beginning: "*Of whom speaketh the prophet this?*" Alas, his visit to Jerusalem had left him with even this question--the most important of all unanswered, for the religious leaders there would not believe, hence could not tell him, that Christ was the theme of the prophetic Scriptures. Indeed, until this present day apostate Israel refuses to see Christ in Isaiah 53, contending that the prophet in this passage describes Hezekiah's sufferings, or perhaps Jeremiah's or his own or Israel's. But where Israel's leaders had failed, God had sent Philip to instruct the Ethiopian in his search for the truth.

"THEN PHILIP OPENED HIS MOUTH, AND BEGAN AT THE SAME SCRIPTURE, AND PREACHED UNTO HIM JESUS."

Yes, Jesus is the theme of Isaiah 53. He is the key to all the Word of God. One can look anywhere and find Him, for every page of it has a vital relation to Him.

During our Lord's earthly ministry He said to the Jews:

"[Ye] search the Scriptures.; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: AND THEY ARE THEY WHICH TESTIFY OF ME" (John 5:39).

And later, after His resurrection, as He walked with two bewildered disciples:

"BEGINNING AT MOSES AND ALL THE PROPHETS, HE EXPOUNDED UNTO THEM IN ALL THE SCRIPTURES THE THINGS CONCERNING HIMSELF" (Luke 24:27).

An thus Philip, finding the eunuch's scroll open at Isaiah 53, "*began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.*"

But here we must be careful lest we assume more than is written. It has been said, for example, that "Nowhere is the gospel more clearly presented than in Isaiah 53," and on this premise it has been further contended that Philip preached to the eunuch the very same message which God sends to the lost today.

But if the gospel of the grace of God is presented so clearly in Isaiah 53, what could Paul have meant when he said:

"For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus;

"Who gave Himself a ransom for all, TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME.

⁴¹ His name and the circumstances connected with his appointment as deacon indicate that he was probably a Grecian--a Greek-speaking Jew.

"WHEREUNTO I AM ORDAINED A PREACHER, AND AN APOSTLE, (I SPEAK THE TRUTH IN CHRIST, AND LIE NOT;) A TEACHER OF THE GENTILES IN FAITH AND VERITY" (I Tim. 2:5-7).

And if the gospel of the grace of God is so clearly presented in Isaiah 53, what could Paul have meant by "*the faith which should afterward be revealed?*" (Gal. 3:23).

Furthermore, if the gospel of the grace of God was already being preached by Philip under the twelve apostles, what need was there of *another* apostle and what validity was there to Paul's claims in such passages as the following:

"FOR THIS CAUSE I PAUL, THE PRISONER OF JESUS CHRIST FOR YOU GENTILES,

"IF YE HAVE HEARD OF THE DISPENSATION OF THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH IS GIVEN ME TO YOU-WARD:

"HOW THAT BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY . . ." (Eph. 3:1-3).

Indeed, if Isaiah 53 contains the gospel of the grace of God, why was not this glorious message the very *theme* of prophetic utterance?

Those who have supposed that the gospel of the grace of God is found in Isaiah 53 and that this is what Philip preached to the eunuch, have failed to notice two things: the *scope* and the *tone* of Isaiah's prophecy.

As to the *scope* of the prophecy, it must be noted that Isaiah speaks strictly as a Hebrew prophet. He does not speak of Christ dying for the world, but of His dying for Israel. The 6th verse says: "*All WE [not "all men"] like sheep have gone astray... and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of US all.*" The thoughtful student of Scripture will therefore immediately inquire: To whom does the "*all we*" and the "*us all*" refer? This question is plainly answered in Verse 8, where the prophet goes on to say: "*For the transgression of MY PEOPLE was He stricken.*"

Thus Isaiah, as a Hebrew prophet, spoke of Messiah's death for his (Isaiah's) people and it must not be forgotten that the eunuch had joined himself as a proselyte to this people.

All this is not to deny that we Gentiles too were lost when God found *us*, or that Christ died for *us* too. It is simply that this had not yet been made known. Nor did Philip expound Romans, Galatians or Ephesians to the eunuch, but the Old Testament Scriptures, in the light that had thus far been given.

The *tone* of Isaiah's prophecy, too, deserves careful notice. It is by no means the joyous proclamation that Christ should die for sinners and that they might find salvation through faith in His finished work. There is rather a tone of

disappointment and wonder that *He* should have to suffer for *their* sins though, indeed, the prophet declares that God will reward Him and that He shall yet see the glorious results of His humble submission.

An illustration here may help to make this distinction clear. A troublesome character in some congregation, let us say, has committed a wrong which he has managed to "pin" on some innocent, upright member. The pastor of the church knows Who is the guilty one, but the falsely accused member makes an agreement with the pastor that he, the innocent one, shall bear the penalty for the wrong, with a view to touching the guilty one's heart and teaching him a much-needed lesson. Meantime the pastor seeks to bring the guilty man to conviction, calling upon him to acknowledge the sin of having caused an innocent and upright man to suffer in his place.

This illustration, of course, has its limitations but it may serve to illustrate *how* Christ and His crucifixion were being preached at that time.

Some suppose that substitution--which indeed is taught in Isaiah 53--is the very acme of Christian truth, while in fact it is but the very beginning. There was substitution, to be sure, in the above illustration, but did the pastor go to the guilty one and say, "I have good news for you. An innocent man has suffered in your stead?" Many an innocent man has suffered for a guilty one, but do people generally *rejoice* in this? No indeed. And neither were the twelve nor Philip yet proclaiming the cross in this manner. There was as yet no boasting about the cross, as in Gal. 6:14. God was rather calling upon His people to repent of their wicked deed and to be baptized, acknowledging Jesus as their Messiah (Read carefully [Acts 2:23, 32,36,38; 3:13-15, 19-21; 4:10-12; 5:30,31](#) and cf. [John 1:31](#)).

Those who have not quite taken in this important fact should reflect that the Scriptures clearly teach that the nation Israel will be saved only when she acknowledges her sin against Christ; when, condemned by her guilt and touched by His gentle submission, she breaks down in contrite confession and humbly acknowledges Him as her Messiah.

"... And they shall look upon [or "unto"] Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first born.

"In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem . . ." (Zech. 12:10,11).

"And one shall say unto Him, What are these wounds in Thine hands? Then He shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends" (Zech. 13:6).

"And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one" (Zech. 14:9).

This, then, is God's purpose in the cross as revealed in Old Testament prophecy and it must not be confused with "the mystery," that deeper, more glorious purpose "hid from ages and from generations" but made known in due time through Paul (Col. 1:26).⁴²

Not until the chief of sinners was saved and sent forth with *the gospel of the grace of God* did the world hear what is properly called "*the preaching of the cross,*" i.e., as *good news*. *Not until Paul did God offer salvation through faith in Christ's shed blood.*

Thus in expounding Isaiah 53, Philip called upon the eunuch, not to trust in Christ's shed blood (though we *now* know he was saved *through* that blood) but to acknowledge the lately crucified One as "the Christ, the Son of God" (See [Matt. 16:16](#); [John 1:49](#); [11:27](#); [20:30,31](#); etc.). If verse 37 belongs in the record⁴³ this fact is further borne out.

As we know, the proclamation of Christ's kingdom rights has since been interrupted by "the dispensation of the grace of God" and the cross is now seen in a fuller, more glorious light. Now God sends salvation and blessing to the Gentiles entirely apart from Israel and her covenant promises, *solely through the merits of the crucified, risen, exalted Lord.*

"IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE" (Eph. 1:7):

THE EUNUCH BAPTIZED

"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?"

"And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

"And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

"And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

"But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea." --Acts 8:36-40,

Many sincere Christians who hold to baptism by immersion as a public confession of faith in Christ go for support to this passage of Scripture. Most of

⁴² A further discussion of this rich subject will be found in the author's book: *The Two-fold Purpose of God.*

⁴³ Some texts and translations omit.

them freely acknowledge that John's "*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*" (Mark 1:4) has no place in the dispensation of the grace of God. Some even go as far as to acknowledge that the baptism at Pentecost (when the Body of Christ is supposed to have begun) was also "*for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38) and therefore has no place in God's program for today. Reluctant, however, to give up the practice altogether, they point to such cases as the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, Lydia and the Philippian jailor, contending that in these we have examples of water baptism as God would have us practice it today--merely to signify publicly that we have been buried with Christ. But these cases do not prove all that our immersionist friends seem to think they do. We will deal with them in order as we proceed with our studies in Acts.

WAS HIS BAPTISM OPTIONAL?

From the above passage it is argued that the Ethiopian eunuch was not *commanded* to be baptized. *He* had asked to be baptized and was told that if he truly believed he might. This is the basis upon which some have argued that water baptism today is not compulsory but *permissible*, and that the matter should be left to the individual conscience, that believers should be baptized if they "feel led," etc. But this passage by no means teaches these things.

First, it must be remembered that this incident took place before Paul was even converted. At that time there had as yet been no hint of any change from the Pentecostal program or from the instructions of our Lord that "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16).

Secondly, as we have already pointed out, many texts and translations omit Verse 37 and it is debatable whether it belongs to the record, but even if it is in the original, it does not prove that water baptism was not required for salvation at that time. If this writer should say to some unsaved person: "You too *may* believe and be saved," would that imply that he could be saved *without* believing? Would it not also be true that he *must believe* to be saved? The words "*If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest,*" simply indicate that if the eunuch did not truly believe there would be no point in baptizing him, as the latter part of Mark 16:16 makes clear. As far as the record of Scripture is concerned, water baptism was still required for salvation at that time and Philip merely pointed out to the Ethiopian prince that if he truly believed, it was his privilege to avail himself of the means⁴⁴ of salvation.

WAS HIS BAPTISM A PROOF OF IMMERSION?

Immersionists make much of the fact that Philip and the eunuch went *down into* the water and came *up out of* the water. This is taken as a clear implication that the eunuch was *immersed*. But if the phrases "down into" and "up out of" prove that the

⁴⁴ We do not use the term *means* as Lutherans and Roman Catholics do in their doctrine of baptismal regeneration. We hold simply that when God required water baptism for salvation it was necessary to submit to that rite to be saved, even though the baptism *in itself* accomplished nothing.

eunuch was immersed, they also prove that Philip himself was immersed at the same time, for the passage reads:

"... and they went down BOTH into the water, BOTH PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH "

This does not prove that anyone was immersed. The passage does not read "down *under*," but "down *into*," nor was the eunuch baptized by going down into the water at all.

The simple facts are that they were in a hot country and did not wear shoes on their feet as we do, but sandals or nothing. Water naturally seeks the lowest level, hence it would be necessary for Philip and the eunuch to step *down* from the chariot and to walk *down* from the road to the brook or pool beside it. In their circumstances it would be perfectly natural to walk right down *into the water*, and *having done this*, we read that "he [Philip] baptized him [the eunuch]." Thus Philip baptized the eunuch *after* they had gone down "into the water." He baptized him with the water they had gone down into. Nor is there one word to indicate that Philip baptized the eunuch by putting him *under* the water.

Even when our Baptist friends use this passage to prove only that there was *enough* water here to immerse the eunuch they err, for the passage indicates no such thing. If the brook or pool were but ankle-deep they could still go down into it.

The whole unfounded immersionist argument comes from a failure to recognize the distinctive character of Paul's message and ministry, and from a misunderstanding of those wonderful passages in which he assures believers today that they have been buried with Christ in baptism ([Rom. 6:4](#); [Col. 2:12](#)). Unable to associate these passages with anything higher than *water* baptism, they suppose that an actual *burial* in *water* is referred to, but this "watery grave" theory is as unscriptural as it is inappropriate and crude, for neither in the Scriptures nor in common experience are men buried in water.

WAS HIS BAPTISM A PUBLIC TESTIMONY?

It is also taught from the account of the eunuch's baptism that since (as it is supposed) baptism was then no longer required for salvation, it became simply a public testimony to faith in Christ.

It is true, to be sure, that much we do testifies to what we are. Going to church or to a dance is a testimony. Staggering down the street intoxicated is a testimony. Holding a rosary, bowing one's head and repeating "Hail Marys" is a testimony. But the real question at issue is this: Was water baptism given to members of the Body of Christ as a testimony? Was that its great purpose? The baptism of the Ethiopian, we feel, should give ample proof that it was not.

Philip and the Ethiopian were in the desert and there is no hint of the presence of a single witness to the transaction. It has been argued, of course, that so prominent a man as Ethiopia's chief treasurer *must have had* many attendants with him. Granted! We *think* so, too, but surely we are not to base our theology on a "must have" or a "think so"!

While it does seem probable that others were present at the baptism of the Ethiopian, the Scriptures do not give so much as a hint that one single witness was present. *Why?* If his baptism were *meant to be* a public testimony would not the Holy Spirit have taken special care to mention the witnesses? When Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises at midnight in the Philippian prison we read that "*the prisoners heard them*" (Acts 16:25). That was a real and effective testimony. And that was the Scriptural way, "*for with the MOUTH confession is made*" (Rom. 10:10) first to God, "unto salvation," and then to man.

And this is common sense, too. If water baptism were meant to be a public testimony it should be repeated again and again, for one cannot tell by looking at his neighbor whether or not he has been baptized.

Suppose a man, in this dispensation of grace, is baptized with water, goes to some far off place and lives a careless, inconsistent life; what is his baptism worth? Nothing, of course. Now suppose, having been baptized, he should go to some far off place and live a godly, consistent Christian life. What is his baptism worth now? This question should be seriously considered and courageously answered. The answer, of course, is also *nothing*, for it was his godly life, not his baptism, that bore the real testimony to those about him. How many "baptized converts" there are who cannot even give a word of testimony for their Lord among the ungodly!

To be sure, the baptism of believers by water in this age *is* a testimony--a *bad* one. It is a reflection on the finished work of Christ. It is a confession of a lack of appreciation of the believer's position in *Christ--"accepted in the beloved One," "complete in Him," crucified, buried, raised and seated at God's right hand in the heavenlies, and there blessed with all spiritual blessings IN CHRIST* (Eph. 1:3,6; 2:1-6; Col. 2:10-13). Adding to God's program of grace what was once required for salvation is always a bad testimony.

But the truths of Ephesians and Colossians were not yet made known when Philip baptized the eunuch. At this time Christ was still being proclaimed as Israel's Messiah, the Son of God, at whose feet Israel and the nations were to bow. By his baptism the eunuch confessed Christ as such and acknowledged his own need of cleansing (See [Mark 1:4](#); [John 1:31](#); [Mark 16:16](#); etc.).

THE SIGNS FOLLOWING

Those who would make this incident a pattern for our day should not overlook the miracle with which the story closes, for no sooner is the eunuch baptized than the Spirit catches Philip away to another place. This is not in harmony with God's program for today, but it does coincide with the "great commission" to the eleven,

where we find that miraculous signs were to follow those who believed and were baptized. It is not without significance that wherever we read of water baptism in the Book of Acts we find some miracle taking place in the near context.

But the eunuch's acceptance of God's message for that day, his confession of sin and his acknowledgement of Christ as the Son of God, had brought to him the light and peace he sought and *"he went on his way rejoicing!"* Philip's humble talk with him had accomplished more than the discourses of Jerusalem's ablest religious leaders.